Skill Challenge Handbook







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Author: Alexander Augunas Cover Artist: Brett Neufeld Cover Design: Alexander Augunas Interior Art: Jacob Blackmon, Brett Neufeld Editing: Robert N. Emerson

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About Everyman Gaming, LLC

Everyman Gaming began as the blog of Alexander Augunas in January 2014, where he wrote about Pathfinder Roleplaying Game tips, tricks, and techniques for both players and GMs. In May of 2014, Alex began talks with the Know Direction Network about bringing his blog to their site under the name *Guidance*. At the same time, Alex transformed Everyman Gaming into the company it is today so he could begin selfpublishing his works. In 2016, he teamed up with Rogue Genius Games to release *Ultimate Occult* and has remained with them since.

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I don't think I've ever made it a big secret that I absolutely adore skill-based characters in roleplaying games. To me, there's something immensely satisfying about playing a character who's just good at doing things, whether that "thing" is popping open a lock with Disable Device, convincing a potential ally to support you with Diplomacy, or spotting a hidden treasure with Perception. While combat is the name of the game, skills are really how players interact with and ultimately manipulate the game world that their characters live and breathe in.

The importance of skills as a medium with which the characters experience the game world is ultimately why it has always puzzled me why nearly all iterations of the world's most popular roleplaying game have played fast and loose with skills. As written, the rules generally assume that you run into a problem, you make a check or two, and the problem goes away. The game doesn't give GMs any guidance for how to make multi-round events out of skills, and as a result being good at skills is often seen as a footnote in class design. Sure, players acknowledge when a class is good at skills, but its rarely the reason why they pick the character class because the rules don't support the relevance of skillfulness. As a result campaigns where skills are relevant often need a fair amount of GM intervention and interpretation, and without an organized system those attempt can swing wildly in terms of their playability and memorability.

Side stepping over to this book, the *Skill CHALLENGE HANDBOOK*, the idea for the *Skill CHALLENGE HANDBOOK* first arose when I started working on the first adventure that I've ever written specifically for publication. I had a very firm idea of how I wanted skillful characters to interact with the adventure, but it quickly became apparent that the rules didn't perfectly support what I wanted to do, so I started writing and designing new rules to create the feel that I wanted for that adventure. But eventually, I came to the realization that I was not only using up far too much space in the adventure explaining to the GM how to run these skill-based events, but that the rules had a serious lack of a proper skill system designed to challenge PCs. So I put the adventure, titled *A Fox'sWEDDING*, on hold and immediately began drafting the *Skill CHALLENGE HANDBOOK*.

I am absolutely biased, but whenever I look at the *SKILL CHAILENGED HANDBOOK*, I see this big hole in our hobby close up. Many of the ideas in this book aren't new or original—they are inspired by a multitude of fantastic products, such as issue #8-00 of the game's organized play program, or *PATHEINDER ROLEPLAYING GAME: ULTIMATE INTRIGUE.* Like many Everyman Gaming products, however, where the *SKILL CHAILENGE HANDBOOK* shines brightest is in its ability to take different disparate rules systems and weave them together into a singularity that is far greater than the sum of its parts. I look forward to hearing of the many adventures that fans of this book embark on—with the *SKILL CHAILENGE HANDBOOK*, you are only limited by your bravado and imagination.

Navigating This Book

The *Skill Challenge Handbook* is split into five sections, each describing a specific type of skill challenge. A skill challenge is essentially a full skill-based encounter, possessing similar qualities to combat encounters. Skill challenges progress in cycles, involve checks to earn completion, and are ultimately cleared when a requisite amount of completion is earned.

In addition to standard skill challenges, four specialized subtypes of skill challenges are also presented within the *Skill CHALLENGE HANDBOOK*: chases, contests, influence challenges, and verbal duels. Although these specialized skill challenges use many of the same terminology and flow as standard skill challenges, they all include enough specialized terminology and rules elements unique to that type of skill challenge that they deserve to be recognized independently.

The four sections that appear in the *SKILL CHALLENGE HANDBOOK*, as well as a brief description of that section's content, are as follows.

Skill Challenges: This section details skill challenges as they are generally presented. Included within are rules regarding how cycles advance throughout the skill challenge, different types of completion methods that can be used to determine when a skill challenge is cleared, and a plethora of sample skill challenges ranging from CR 1 all the way up to CR 13. Additionally, advice for how to adjudicate the use of class features and spells is presented, as is a detailed system of rules for designing your own skill challenges for use in your home games.

Chase Challenges: The second section in the *SKIL CHALLENGE HANDBOOK* presents chase challenges, which offer a specialized version of the standard skill challenge rules that are based around movement—specifically pursuing or fleeing—as the primary action that characters take during the skill challenge. The chase rules presented here can be used for short-distance chases that span minutes and miles, or long-distance chases that span hours or days and take place across large swaths of terrain. Several sample skill challenges are provided in this section, as are a detailed set of rules for building your own chase challenges.

Contests: This section introduces the concept of contests, specialized skill challenges that represent the act of playing a game or competing directly with other individuals to win. This section describes how to play games such as baseball or badminton, as well as how to participate in contests like pig wrestling and skipping rope. Unlike other skill challenges in this section, contests rely on opposed roles between characters, rather than hard skill DCs that characters must meet. As a result, contests lack rules for designing them that are as codified as standard skill challenges, but this section does include helpful advice for translating your favorite games and competitions to the skill challenge format.

Influence Challenges: This section introduces the concept of influence challenges, which are specialized skill challenges that use multiple stat blocks that revolve around interacting with and ultimately swaying the attitudes of specific target NPCs. Influence challenges possess one stat block for every target NPC active during the skill challenge, plus a smaller stat block that summarizes the setting where

—Alexander Augunas, Everyman Gaming LLC

the skill challenge is taking place, as well as and events that take place during the skill challenge. Influence contests follow similar rules regarding their creation as standard skill challenges, although stat blocks for each target NPC must be made, rather than making a single stat block for a single event.

Verbal Duels: The final type of skill challenge covered in the *Skill Challenge Handbook* are verbal duels, which represent two individuals competing head-to-head in a contest of linguistic skill and acumen. Verbal duels have the least complex stat blocks of any type of skill challenge as a result of their mechanics—essentially, characters pick skills to use and make opposed skill checks with those skills until a victor has been decided.

Skill Challenge Glossary

One of the draws of the skill challenge system is the fact that similar terminology is used throughout the Skill Challenge Handbook to provide a common ground for GMs and players. Additionally, although the specifics of terms change between different types of skill challenges, the overall meaning and purpose of that term does not change. For example, even though verbal duels and influence challenges have different time intervals from contests, the term "frequency" refers to the amount of time one cycle represents across all skill challenges that make use of that term.

Clearing a Skill Challenge: To clear a skill challenge is synonymous with beating or winning it.

Completion: A skill challenge's completion is the medium by which characters track their progress towards clearing the skill challenge. Most skill challenges use movement, progress, or successes as their completion method, but contests have a unique completion method (points). In all skill challenges, a "skill check to earn completion" is synonymous with "a skill check to earn movement," or any similar, specific type of completion. For instance, in a contest, "skill checks made to earn completion" are skill checks made to earn points. Likewise, in influence challenges "influence checks" are skill checks made to earn completion in the form of progress or successes that ultimately sway the target NPC.

Contestant: Any character actively participating in a contest by making skill checks to earn completion or opposing the opposition from making such checks is known as a contestant. The term "character" and "contestant" are used interchangeably in the contest rules.

Cycle: Much as how rounds represent one turn's worth of actions per character over a specific interval of time (six seconds per round), cycles represent one turn's worth of actions per character over a specific interval of time in a skill challenge. The interval of time represented by a skill challenge differs drastically from skill challenge to skill challenge, and it is usually described by the skill challenge's frequency. Most skill challenges have an interval of 1 minute, but hours, days, or even weeks or months are likewise possible.

Duelist: Any character who is participating in a verbal duel by making skill checks to earn completion is known as a duelist.

Special Thanks

The *Skill Challenge Handbook* stands on the shoulders of giants, and it would not be possible with the hard work of the individuals from which this tome draws inspiration. We thank John Compton and the authors of *PATHEINDER ROLEPLAYING GAME: ULTIMATE INTRIGUE* especially, as well as Thurston Hillman for his stubborn and much-appreciated insistence that not every game needs to be spent mostly in combat.

In addition, we'd also like to thank Greg LaRose of Amora Game, as well as his play testers, for their hard work and dedication in testing all of the intricacies of the *SKIL CHALLENGE HANDBOOK*. Although we like to imagine that the experience was enjoyable, it is hard, commendable work to playtest a product like the Skill Challenge Handbook to a polish, and the Skill Challenge Handbook would not be half the tome it is without your help.

The terms "character" and "duelist" are used interchangeably in the verbal duel rules.

Influence Check: In an influence challenge, the term "influence check" refers to any skill check made to sway a target NPC. Because influence challenges use completion to determine when a target NPC is swayed, the term "influence check" is synonymous with "skill check to earn completion."

Opposition: This is a general term for a character or group of characters whose goals are directly opposed to those of a second party—usually the PCs. For instance, if the PCs are running from a king's guard during a chase, the PCs would consider the king's guard their opposition, while the king's guard would consider the PCs their opposition. "Opposition" is sometimes used synonymously with "opponent" or "character."

Primary Skills: In most skill challenges, a primary skill is a skill that can always be used to earn completion in that skill challenge. In a contest, all "scoring skills" are considered primary skills, while in a verbal duel all skills assigned to tactics are "primary skills."

Secondary Skills: Secondary skills are all skills for a given skill challenge that aren't primary skills, meaning they might not be usable to earn completion in a given skill challenge. Typically, most skill challenges note in their description whether secondary skills are allowed, and in some skill challenges secondary skills aren't allowed at all, such as contests or verbal duels. That having been said, what can or cannot be used as a secondary skill is entirely in the realm of GM fiat. Even in skill challenges that do not normally allow secondary skills, the GM can allow characters to use other skills to earn completion anyway.

Target NPC: In an influence challenge, a target NPC is any nonplayer character that can be swayed with successful influence checks, and whose influence is paramount towards clearing the skill challenge. For instance, the PCs might be able to sway the butler of a high-ranking noblewoman, but if swaying him doesn't bring the PCs any closer to clearing the influence challenge, then he's not a target NPC. It takes more than a strong arm and an arsenal of spells and weapons to be an adventurer. While adventuring, characters will often stumble upon challenging situations that cannot be solved quickly through combat, situations that require prolonged effort in order to solve. Such challenges always have a specific goal in mind and require dedication (and sometimes teamwork) in order to be overcome.

Skill challenges are a special type of noncombat encounter that require the use of player abilities (specifically skills) to accomplish objectives. Though often distinct from combat encounters, skill challenges can be interwoven with combat encounters to add variety and a sense of purpose or urgency to the combat. Like a creature, a skill challenge has a Challenge Rating that denotes its difficulty in comparison to the party's Average Party Level, and lists the amount of XP that the party receives should they defeat the encounter.

Note that not every obstacle that the PCs face that requires a skill check is a skill challenge. When an obstacle requires only a single skill check, such as an Acrobatics check to jump across a chasm or a Diplomacy check to adjust the attitude of an NPC, it is not a skill challenge. Furthermore, not all obstacles that require multiple skill checks are skill challenges. For instance, a character that fails a Reflex save against a pit trap and falls 10 feet down into the pit does not necessarily enter a skill challenge. (Though she might at the GM's decision, depending upon the hazards that await her at the pit's bottom.)

Running a Skill Challenge

Like combat, skill challenges are cyclical; every character acts in turn in a regular cycle. The amount of time that each cycle of actions takes is determined by the skill challenge's frequency (if the frequency is listed as standard, each cycle of actions takes 1 round). Skill challenges follow this sequence: 1. When the skill challenge begins, all characters roll initiative.

- 2. If the skill challenge has the surprise start special quality, a surprise cycle occurs. Determine which characters are aware of the skill challenge. These characters can act during the surprise cycle. If all the characters are aware of the skill challenge, proceed with normal rounds. See the surprise start optional element on page 15 for more information.
- 3. After the surprise cycle (if any), all characters are ready to begin with the first cycle of the skill challenge.
- 4. Characters act in initiative order (highest to lowest).
- 5. When everyone has had a turn, the next cycle begins with the character with the highest initiative, and steps 4 and 5 repeat until the skill challenge ends (either because the characters succeeded or failed).

The Skill Challenge Cycle

Each cycle during a skill challenge represents a specific amount of time that varies from skill challenge to skill challenge—this is listed in the skill challenge's frequency. A cycle normally allows each character involved in the skill challenge to act.

Each cycle's activity begins with the character with the highest initiative result and then proceeds in order. When a character's turn comes up in the initiative sequence, that character performs her entire cycle's worth of actions, though some exceptions exist. Each cycle, a character has her choice of one cycle action or two half-cycle actions.

When the rules refer to a "full cycle", they usually mean a span of time from a particular initiative count in one cycle to the same initiative count in the next cycle. Effects that last a certain number of cycles end just before the same initiative count they began on.

Initiative

At the start of a skill challenge, each participant makes an initiative check. An initiative check is a Dexterity check. Each character applies her Dexterity modifier to the roll, as well as other modifiers from feats, spells, and other effects. Characters act in order, counting down from the highest result to the lowest. In every round that follows, the characters act in the same order (unless a character takes an action that results in her initiative changing).

If two or more participants have the same initiative check result, the combatants with the higher initiative modifier acts first. If there is still a tie, the tied characters roll to determine which of them goes before the other.

Flat-Footed: At the start of a skill challenge, characters who have not taken their first regular turn in the initiative order are flat-footed. A flat-footed character cannot use her Dexterity bonus to AC (if any) while flat-footed. Some abilities allow characters to avoid being caught flat-footed, such as the uncanny dodge barbarian class feature.

Inaction: Characters retain their initiative result for the duration of the skill challenge, even if they cannot take actions (such as from falling unconscious or becoming paralyzed).

Surprise

Skill challenges with the surprise start special quality have the potential for characters to become surprised, causing a surprise cycle to occur (see below). When a skill challenge with the surprise start special quality starts, if a character is not aware of her opponents and they are aware of her, she is surprised.

Sometimes all the participants on a side are aware of their opponents, sometimes none are, and sometimes only some of them are. Sometimes a few participants on each side are aware and the other participants on each side are unaware.

Determining awareness may call for Perception checks, Sense Motive checks, or other checks.

The Surprise Cycle: If some but not all of the participants are aware of their opponents, a surprise cycle happens before regular cycles begin. In initiative order (highest to lowest), participants who started the skill challenge aware of their opponents each take a half-cycle action during the surprise cycle. If no one or everyone is surprised, no surprise cycle occurs.

Unaware Participants: Skill challenge participants who are unaware at the start of a skill challenge don't get to act in the surprise cycle. Unaware participants are flat-footed because they have not acted yet, so they lose any Dexterity bonus to AC.

Completion Methods

The goal of every skill challenge is to clear it by performing a number of specific tasks relevant to the challenge. Completion represents the overall effort required to successfully clear a skill challenge, and is determined based upon the skill challenge's CR. Each skill challenge lists one of three basic methods used to track completion earned towards clearing it—movement, progress, or successes. This section summarizes these three completion methods and the statistics that determine how completion is earned during a skill challenge, then details how to use them.

Movement

Movement-based skill challenges require participants to advance to a specific place in order to clear them. Movementbased skill challenges measure completion in squares, an abstraction that represents the amount of distance covered by a character moving at a speed of 10 feet per six seconds. As a result, the distance represented by a square is determined by the skill challenge's frequency, and Table: Square Distance by Frequency lists the amount of distance represented by a square during skill challenges with common frequency counts.

During a movement-based skill challenge, a character can advance a number of squares up to her speed divided by 10 as a half-cycle action. Effects that modify a character's speed are applied before her speed is divided by 10.

A character can move backwards during a movement-based skill challenge if she wishes, using the appropriate action to subtract a number of squares from the amount of squares that she has advanced. A character can move backwards as often as she likes, but she cannot move further backward than where she started at the beginning of the skill challenge.

Movement-based skill challenges are cleared when a character has advanced the number of squares listed in the skill challenge's completion entry.

Hustling: Characters can run as a cycle action. When a character hustles, she advances a number of squares equal to her speed divided by 5. A character loses her Dexterity bonus to AC during any cycle that she hustles unless she has the Run feat.

Each character participating in the skill challenge can hustle for a number of rounds equal to 1 + the character's Constitution modifier. These rounds don't need to be consecutive. After that, the character must make a DC 10 Constitution check to continue hustling—this counts as a Constitution check made to continue running for the purpose of determining the character's bonus on her Constitution check. Characters must check again

Table: Square Distance by FrequencySkill Challenge FrequencySquare Size

1 round	10 feet
1 minute	100 feet
10 minutes	1,000 feet
1 hour	6,000 feet
8 hours	48,000 feet

each round in which they continue to hustle, and the DC of this check increases by 1 for each check made. When a character fails this check, she stops hustling and advances a number of squares equal to her speed divided by 10 that round, as if she had only used a half-cycle action to move instead of a cycle action. A character who has hustled to this limit cannot hustle for the rest of the skill challenge, and must rest for at least 1 minute (10 rounds) before she can hustle or use the run action again.

Mounts and Vehicles: Riding a mount during a movementbased skill challenge allows the rider to use the mount's speed in place of her own when determining the number of squares that she advances. A mounted character must make a Ride check whenever she uses a half-cycle or cycle action to advance any



number of squares—the DC for this check is up to the GM based upon the difficulty of riding a mount during the skill challenge and other factors, but the DC should always be between that of an easy skill challenge and a difficult skill challenge appropriate to the skill challenge's CR (see Table: Skill Challenge DCs by CR on page 28). If she fails this check, the character still advances normally, but the number of squares she advances is reduced by half and she can take no other actions during her turn. If she fails this check by 10 or more, the character does not advance any squares that round and her turn ends.

Driving a vehicle in a skill challenge functions in the same way as riding a mount and confers the same benefits, except drivers must make checks using a skill listed under the vehicle's propulsion whenever they use a half-cycle or cycle action to advance any number of squares. This skill check assumes that the character is using the reverse, turn, and keep it going driving actions to participate in the skill challenge. Increasing or decreasing her vehicle's speed using the accelerate or decelerate driving actions is a half-cycle action.

Squares and Targeting: Since squares represent distance moved during a movement-based skill challenge, characters that have advanced different numbers of squares effectively have swaths of distance between them. This distance can make creatures ineligible targets for spells and abilities. When determining if two or more participants within a skill challenge are within range of one another for any purpose, first determine the number of squares between the two characters, then multiply that number by the amount of distance represented by the square. To determine the amount of distance represented by a square, convert the skill challenge's frequency to rounds and multiply this amount by 10 feet. For instance, a skill challenge with a frequency of 2 minutes converts to 20 rounds, which multiplies to 200 feet. Table: Square Distance by Frequency can be used to quickly determine the distance of a square during skill challenges with common frequencies.

Obstacles: Movement-based skill challenges are peppered with obstacles—things that either hinder or outright obstruct the participant's ability to advance towards clearing the skill challenge. Movement-based skill challenges have a number of obstacles based upon their CR, which are generally designed to impede or outright halt progress towards completing the skill challenge unless they are overcome. Obstacles are explained in-depth on page 16.

Progress

Progress-based skill challenges require participants to slowly work their way towards a larger goal, typically rewarding skillful expertise over mere proficiency. Progress-based skill challenges measure completion in progress, an abstraction that represents how far along towards their goal that the characters are.

During a progress-based skill challenge, a character can attempt to earn progress as a half-cycle action by attempting a skill check using one of the skills listed as one of the skill challenge's primary skills. Each primary skill lists a DC for skill checks using that skill as well as the general difficulty of the skill check. Whenever a character succeeds on a skill check to earn progress, the amount of progress earned is based upon the character's proficiency with the skill she used. If she has either 10 ranks in the skill, Skill Focus in the skill, or both 5 ranks in the skill and the skill as a class skill, a successful check causes her to earn progress equal to 1d12 + her ability score modifier with the skill's associated ability score (Dexterity for Acrobatics, Intelligence for Spellcraft, and so on). If she has either 5 ranks in the skill or the skill as a class skill (but not both), a successful checks causes her to earn progress equal to 1d8 + her ability score modifier with the skill's associated ability score. Otherwise, a successful check causes her to earn progress equal to 1d4 + her ability score modifier with the skill's associated ability score. In addition to these base amounts, for every 5 by which a character's skill check result to earn progress exceeds its DC, the amount of progress the character earns increases by 1.

Progress-based skill challenges are cleared when a character has earned the amount of progress listed in the skill challenge's completion entry.

Automatic Successes and Failures: When a character makes a skill check to earn progress and gets a natural 20 (the d20 shows 20), she succeeds regardless of the skill check's DC, and has scored a "threat," meaning the success might be a critical success (or a "crit"). To determine if its a critical success, the character immediately makes an attempt to "confirm" the critical success—another skill check with all the same modifiers as the skill check she just made. If the confirmation roll also results in a success against the skill check's DC, the original success is a critical success. (The confirmation roll just needs to beat the skill check's DC to cause a critical success, it does not need to come up 20 again.) If the confirmation roll does not beat the skill check's DC, then the success is just a regular success.

A critical success means that the character rolls her progress twice, with all her usual bonuses based, and adds the rolls together. When determining the amount of additional progress gained for beating a skill check's DC by increments of 5, use the original roll's result for both progress rolls.

When a character makes a skill check to earn progress and get a natural 1 (the d20 shows 1), she fails her skill check regardless of the skill check's DC.

Secondary Skills: With the GM's permission, characters can use skills other than those listed as primary skills to attempt to earn progress during a progress-based skill challenge. Skill checks made with skills that are not listed as primary skills are considered secondary skills, and use the skill check DC listed as the skill challenge's secondary skills DC.

When a character succeeds on a skill check to earn progress with a secondary skill, reduce the amount of progress that the character earns by one die step (d12 to d8, d8 to d4, and d4 to d3, respectively). Otherwise, calculate the amount of progress earned normally. A secondary skill check can earn progress as if it were a primary skill if the skill is used in a way that is thematically appropriate to the skill challenge, as determined by the GM.





Successes

Success-based skill challenges require participants to accrue a specific number of successful skill checks adequately—so long as the task is completed adequately, expertise isn't rewarded over inexperience. Success-based skill challenges measure completion simply by counting the number of times that characters succeed on skill checks to clear the skill challenge.

During a success-based skill challenge, a character can attempt to earn successes by attempting a skill check using one of the skills listed as one of the skill challenge's primary skills. Each primary skill lists a DC for skill checks using that skill as well as the general difficulty of the skill check. Whenever a character succeeds on a skill check to earn successes, she earns 1 success.

Success-based skill challenges are cleared when a character has earned the number of successes in the skill challenge's completion entry.

Automatic Successes and Failures: When a character makes a skill check to earn a success and gets a natural 20 (the d20 shows 20), she succeeds regardless of the skill check's DC, and has scored a "threat," meaning the success might be a critical success (or a "crit"). To determine if its a critical success, the character immediately makes an attempt to "confirm" the critical success—another skill check with all the same modifiers as the skill check she just made. If the confirmation roll also results in a success against the skill check's DC, the original success is a critical success. (The confirmation roll just needs to beat the skill check's DC to cause a critical success, it does not need to come up 20 again.) If the confirmation roll does not beat the skill check's DC, then the success is just a regular success.

A critical success means that the character earns two successes towards clearing the skill challenge instead of one.

When a character makes a skill check to earn a success and get a natural 1 (the d20 shows 1), she fails her skill check regardless of the skill check's DC.

Secondary Skills: With the GM's permission, characters can use skills other than those listed as primary skills to attempt to earn a success during a success-based skill challenge. Skill checks made with skills that are not listed as primary skills are considered secondary skills, and use the skill check DC listed as the skill challenge's secondary skills DC.

Special Actions

This section discusses all of the various actions that you can perform during a skill challenge other than attempting to earn completion.

Aid Another

In a skill challenge, a character can help an ally earn completion towards earning completion or clearing an obstacle. In order to assist her ally, the character makes a DC 10 skill check using any of the skill challenge's primary skills as a half-cycle action. If successful, her ally gains a +2 bonus

on its next skill check made with any primary skill to earn completion or clear an obstacle. Multiple characters can aid the same ally, and similar bonuses stack.

A character cannot use aid another to assist an ally and use a half-cycle action to attempt to earn completion or clear an obstacle during the same cycle.

Secondary Skills: With the GM's permission, characters can use skills other than those listed as primary skills to attempt to aid an ally. Likewise, if the GM allows a character to use a secondary skill to earn completion or clear an obstacle, the character applies all bonuses from successful aid another attempts to her secondary skill check result, as if she had attempts to earn progress or clear an obstacle with a primary skill. GMs should generally lean towards permissiveness when deciding which secondary skills are appropriate for using with the aid another action, forbidding only the use of outlandish skills that cannot be applied reasonably to the skill challenge.

Create Advantage

During a movement-based skill challenge, a character can attempt to gain an advantage as a half-cycle action by attempting a skill check using one of the skills listed as one of the skill challenge's primary skills. Each primary skill lists a DC for skill checks using that skill as well as the general difficulty of the skill check. Some obstacles may add or remove skills to and from this list based upon new circumstances introduced by the obstacle, such as a change in environment or weather. Whenever a character succeeds on a skill check to gain an advantage, she immediately advances 1 square, plus 1 additional square for every 5 that her skill check's result beat the DC by.

A character cannot advance more squares using an advantage than the number indicated by the skill challenge's advantage special quality. Making a skill check to gain an advantage counts as making a skill check to earn completion for all purposes and effects.

Discovery

During a skill challenge, its generally assumed that the characters have some general knowledge about the skill challenge and the skills applicable to completing it. For example, characters might know that using a Perform (comedy) skill might allow them to earn completion towards

> clearing the babysitting skill challenge because its common knowledge that children like jokes and comedy. However, sometimes skill challenges require knowledge that isn't obvious or intuitive, or is even concealed from them. In such situations, the PCs can attempt discovery checks to learn more information

At the beginning of the skill challenge, each P C can attempt a relevant Knowledge check to recognize some aspect of the skill challenge as a discovery check as a free action. Characters must choose whether to try and learn about the skill challenge's skills or completion prior to making a skill challenge. A discovery check's DC is always equal to 15 + the skill challenge's CR. The Knowledge check needed to make a discovery check is determined by the GM, but it should always relate to the situation in a logical way. For example, in the aforementioned babysitting skill challenge, it makes sense that characters might be able to glean information regarding how they can occupy a child's attention using Knowledge (local).

about the skill challenge.

Before attempting a discovery check, a character chooses whether to learn about the skill challenge's skills or completion. When a PC chooses to attempt a discovery check, the GM should tell that PC the possible skills that she can use to make her discovery check (though not the DCs), and let her pick which to attempt. If the character is successful, she gains one piece of information about the skill challenge of her choice, plus one additional piece of information for every 5 by which she beats her discovery check's DC. The information that a character learns from a successful discovery check is based upon her choice of information. If she chose skills, she learns one primary skill that can be used to earn completion during the skill challenge, starting with the skill with the lowest DC. She doesn't learn the skill's DC on a successful discovery check, but she does learn its relative difficulty (easy, average, challenging, difficult, or very difficult). If she chose completion, she can learn the skill challenge's completion method (but not the amount of completion needed to clear the skill challenge) or one of the skill challenge's special qualities that she was previously unaware of.

If the skill challenge has obstacles, a character can choose to learn about an obstacle that she is aware of instead of the skill challenge's skills or completion. If her discovery check succeeds, she learns the obstacle's type, plus one of the following: one bypass skill (as if she were learning about one of a skill challenge's primary skills), one special quality (as if she were learning about one of a skill challenge's special qualities), or the obstacle's effect. For every 5 by which the character's discovery check beats the skill challenge's DC, she learns one additional piece of information from the list provided above.

Characters can attempt to glean additional information about a skill challenge while actively participating in a skill challenge as a half-cycle action. Characters can also freely share information they have discovered about a skill challenge with other characters, provided they are capable of conveying, receiving, and understanding such information.

At the GM's decision, skills other than Knowledge may be applicable. For instance, characters might be able to steal information using Sleight of Hand, search for it using Perception, or intuit it from bystanders using Sense Motive.

Discovery checks provide significantly different information during an influence challenge (see page 54).

Use an Ability, Class Feature, Feat, or Spell

A near innumerable number of abilities, class features, feats, and spells exist in the PATHFINDER ROLEPLAYING GAME, many of which were designed to handle niche situations that could ultimately become the focus of a skill challenge. During a skill challenge, a character can generally use its abilities (such as using a class feature or casting a spell) in the same amount of time that she could during combat or in other noncombat situations. Abilities with temporary effects count only if they last for the cycle's entirety, based upon its frequency. Likewise, they can continue to linger for multiple cycles if they possess sufficient duration. For instance, an invisibility spell cast by a 3rd level caster does not grant the caster a bonus on Stealth checks made to earn completion to clear a skill challenge with a frequency of 10 minutes because the spell's duration doesn't last the entire amount of time that it takes the caster to make her skill challenge (in this case, 10 minutes). In contrast, an invisibility spell cast by a 10th level caster in the same scenario would receive the normal benefit of invisibility when making her Stealth check, but only for 1 cycle as the spell will expire at the end of the 10 minutes it takes to make the skill check.

Applying Outlier Abilities to Skill Challenges

Oftentimes an ability (such as a class feature, feat, racial trait, or spell) will produce an effect that is thematically appropriate for a skill challenge, but its effects either won't be applicable to the skill challenge (i.e. they do not bolster skill checks) or their effects imply that the character could use the effect to automatically clear the skill challenge. In such situations, the GM can allow the ability to grant the character using the ability (as well as any allies that could potentially benefit from its effects) up to a +10 bonus on applicable skill checks made to attempt to earn completion towards clearing the skill challenge. Alternatively, the GM can allow a character to roll 1d20 + the character's Hit Dice, base attack bonus, caster level, or class level (whichever is most applicable to the ability used) + the character's ability score modifier in a relevant ability score. If the ability is exceptionally applicable to the situation, the character might also be allowed up to a +4 bonus to the result.

For instance, in a skill challenge where a bard and sorcerer must sneak into a prison, the bard might ask his GM if he can cast silence to help them move undetected. The GM determines that *silence* is well-suited to the skill challenge, specifically Stealth checks. Because silence can include both the bard and the sorcerer in its area, the GM grants both the bard and the sorcerer a +10 circumstance bonus on Stealth checks as a result of *silence's* effects. Later, the bard and the sorcerer must make their way across a crowded courtyard of guards. Instead of sneaking past them, the sorcerer might ask her GM if she can cast dimension door to teleport the pair directly across undetected. The GM rules that dimension door could certainly do this, but instead of allowing dimension door to automatically complete that leg of the skill challenge, the GM asks the sorcerer to roll 1d20 and add her caster level and Charisma modifier, as well as a +4 bonus because of how effective dimension door is in that situation. She then allows the sorcerer to count her result as a primary skill check to determine how much completion (if any) the sorcerer earns from using dimension door in this manner.

Using abilities, class features, feats, or spells during a skill challenge counts against a character's daily uses per day of those abilities, as well as their duration. A character must be able to benefit from an ability for a full cycle in order for it to grant her a bonus on any skill checks she makes to gain completion. For instance, a barbarian who uses her rage class ability during a skill challenge with a frequency of 1 minute must be able to rage for 10 rounds in order to gain any benefit on skill checks to earn completion from her rage, and uses 10 rounds of her rage class ability in the process.

The action needed to use an ability depends upon the skill challenge's frequency, as described below. For information regarding how to incorporate abilities with problematic

effects into a skill challenge, see the Applying Outlier Abilities to Skill Challenges sidebar on page 11.

Free Actions: Characters can use as many free action abilities as they like during their turn. However, the GM can enforce reasonable limits to the number of free actions abilities that characters can use during their turn in a skill challenge.

Swift/Immediate Actions: Characters can use one swift action ability during their turn. Using an immediate action on a character's turn is the same as using a swift action and counts as her swift action for that turn. A character cannot use another immediate action or a swift action until after her next turn if she has used an immediate action when it is not currently her turn (effectively, using an immediate action before a character's turn is equivalent to using her swift action for the coming turn). A character also cannot use an immediate action if she is flat-footed.

Move/Standard Actions: Characters can use one move action ability or one standard action ability as a halfcycle action if the skill challenge's frequency is 1 minute or less, or two move action or standard action abilities in any combination as a half-cycle action if the skill challenge's frequency is 10 minutes or more. Using a half-cycle action to use a standard action ability during a skill challenge with a frequency of 1 round prevents a character from using any other half-cycle actions during her turn, with the exception of half-cycle actions taken to advance squares of movement during a movement-based skill challenge and half-cycle actions taken to use move action abilities.

Full-Round Actions: Characters can use one full-round ability as a cycle action if the skill challenge's frequency is 1 minute or less, or one full-round action as a half-cycle action if the skill challenge's frequency is 10 minutes or more.

1 Round or Longer: Characters can use abilities that require 1 or more rounds using the number of cycle actions needed to perform the action, rounded up to the nearest half-cycle. For instance, if a character attempts to cast divination, a spell with a 10 minute casting time during a skill challenge with a frequency of 1 minute, the spell would take 10 cycle actions to complete because one cycle is equivalent to 1 minute in the skill challenge.

Elements of a Skill Challenge

All skill challenges, regardless of completion method, have the following elements: CR, type, goal, primary skills, secondary skills, frequency, completion, benefit, and penalty. Some skill challenges might also include optional elements, such as demerits or thresholds. These characteristics are described below and are presented in the order in which they appear on a skill challenge's stat block.

Туре

Most skill challenges are general, meaning that no special rules govern them as a group. Others belong to a specific group with unique rules governing how they are run. Listed below are several different types of skill challenges that are detailed elsewhere in the *SKILL CHALLENGES HANDBOOK*.

Chases: A chase skill challenge is a movement-based skill challenge in which opposing characters compete to be the first to complete the skill challenge. Chase skill challenges are further divided into two subtypes—pursuits and races. In a pursuit, one or more participants attempts to apprehend or slay a second group, whose ultimate goal is to evade their pursuers. In a race, participants attempt to be the first to reach the end of the skill challenge. Chase skill challenges are detailed starting on page 30.

Contests: A contest skill challenge is one where opposing characters attempt to beat one another in a specific activity. Contest skill challenges are detailed starting on page 36.

Influence: An influence skill challenge is one where participants attempt to successfully sway an individual's emotions, opinions, or actions through direct interaction. Influence skill challenges are detailed starting on page 54.

Verbal Duel: A verbal duel skill challenge is one where two characters attack one another with ideas and rhetoric to win a debate. Verbal duel skill challenges are detailed starting on page 64.

Goal

Each skill challenge has a goal that describes what its participants are attempting to accomplish and why. A skill challenge's goal has no mechanical effect on the skill challenge, but it should reflect the skill challenge's themes and elements (including its optional elements).

Primary Skills

Skill challenges have specific lists of skills that are the most viable at earning completion or gaining advantages, based upon their themes. These skills are known as primary skills.

Each primary skill has a listed difficulty from among the following: easy, average, challenging, or difficult. A primary skill's DC is determined by its difficulty in relation to its CR, as shown on Table: Skill Challenge DC by CR on page 28.

Secondary Skills

Whenever the GM allows a character to attempt to earn completion or gain an advantage using a skill that isn't listed among the skill challenge's primary skills, her skill check's DC uses the difficulty and DC listed under the skill challenge's list of secondary skills instead.

As with primary skills, the secondary skills entry has a listed difficulty. The difficulty of a skill challenge's secondary skill DC should always be at least one step more difficult than the highest difficulty among its primary skills, typically chosen from among the following: average, challenging, difficult, or very difficult. A secondary skill's DC is determined by its difficulty in relation to its CR, as shown on Table: Skill Challenge DC by CR on page 28.

Frequency

The amount of time represented by one cycle varies from



skill challenge to skill challenge based upon theme, and a skill challenge's frequency notes the amount of time that each cycle represents. Cycles can be measured in one of 5 specific time intervals: 1 round, 1 minute, 10 minutes, 1 hour, or 8 hours.

A skill challenge's frequency limits which abilities and effects are applicable to the skill challenge. Each cycle that passes reduces the duration by the amount of time indicated by its frequency. For instance, each effect active on a character who is participating in a skill challenge with a frequency of 10 minutes would have its duration reduced every cycle by 10 minutes. As a general rule, an ability or effect cannot have a meaningful impact upon a skill challenge if its duration is less than the skill challenge's frequency, for it is unable to last for the entire cycle.

Languages (Optional Element)

When skill challenges involve oral or written comprehension, such as talking to people or reading ancient texts, a character must often be able to speak or read a specific language in order to earn completion towards clearing the skill challenge. Language elements note any languages that a character must possess in order to attempt to earn completion during the skill challenge. Note that this doesn't impact a character's ability to use the aid another action to assist an ally, though your ineptitude with the indicated languages may prevent you from using certain skills to attempt to aid another, as determined by the GM.

Languages listed under this element sometimes list specific skills that require knowledge of each language to make checks. For instance, Common (Knowledge [arcana]) would indicate that a character must be able to speak Common in order to make Knowledge (arcana) checks during the skill challenge. If "read only" is listed next to the language's name, characters need only to know the indicated language when attempting skill checks that involve reading. Spells like comprehend languages can allow characters to make checks using the indicated skill, provided the effect's duration is sufficient enough to last for the entire cycle (see Frequency on page 11). Likewise, if "spoken only" is listed next to the language's name, characters need only to know the indicated language when attempting skill checks that involve communicating with others. Spells like tongues can allow characters to make checks using the indicated skill, provided the effect's duration is sufficient enough to last for the entire cycle (see Use an Ability, Class Feature, Feat, or Spell on page 10).

Skill Bonus (Optional Element)

Circumstances surrounding where a skill challenge takes place and what task characters are expected to complete can sometimes confer a bonus upon specific courses of actions, usually in the form of a bonus on certain skill checks. When attempting a primary skill check to earn completion or gain an advantage with such a skill, you gain the indicated bonus. Sometimes the word "untrained" will be listed next to such a bonus. This notes that the indicated skill is a trained skill that can be used untrained to earn completion or gain an advantage thanks to the nature of the skill challenge.

Clearing Skill Challenges as a Group

Unless they possess a special quality that demands otherwise, skill challenges generally assume that allies work together to clear any skill challenges that they participate in together. Generally, this means that allied characters pool any completion that they earn together to determine when the group clears the skill challenge. As a result, the term "character" as it appears in the skill challenge rules is synonymous with "group of characters" for the purpose of running a skill challenge with several exceptions, which mostly occur during movementbased skill challenges.

In a movement-based skill challenge, a group cannot earn squares of movement unless every member of the group uses the same action to earn squares (either a half-cycle action or a cycle action). When its members use actions collaboratively to earn squares, treat the group as a single character with a speed equal to the movement speed of the slowest member of the group for the purpose of determining the number of squares that the group advances. If the group hustles, treat the group as a single character with a Constitution modifier equal to the lowest Constitution modifier among those possessed by the group's members for the purpose of determining how long the group can hustle and its bonus on Constitution checks should it attempt to continue hustling beyond that amount.

In situations where groups cannot perform an action without acting collaboratively (such as when attempting to each squares in a movement-based skill challenge), the GM may rule that certain abilities and effects cannot benefit the group unless all members of the group are benefiting from a similar ability. For instance, a group that must cross a chasm during a movementbased skill challenge could not use a *fly* spell to fly over the chasm unless every member of the group is capable of flight.

Time Pressure (Optional Element)

Skill challenges with a time pressure element allow characters a limited amount of time to complete them. The number listed by the element is the number of cycles that participants have to earn enough completion to finish the skill challenge. There are no easy rules for designing time pressures because each skill challenge is a unique entity unto itself. However, keeping the following guidelines in mind will help assure that your time pressures create ample tension without being unfun.

A skill challenge's time pressure should always be sufficient enough for characters to complete the skill challenge even with a limited number of failed attempts to earn completion. As a general rule, a good time pressure is strict enough that it looms over characters' heads, adding to the encounter's tension, while also being relaxed enough that characters have a reasonable chance to successfully complete the skill challenge with at least a 25% margin of error (meaning that they should be able to fail roughly 1 in 4 skill attempts to earn completion and skill be successful in the skill challenge).

Completion

All skill challenges list their completion method—movement, progress, or successes—and the amount of completion needed to clear the skill challenge. Earning completion is discussed in detail on page 05.

Determining the amount of completion needed to clear a skill challenge follows a standardized formula that is determined by the skill challenge's completion method, as described below. These values are also listed on Table: Completion, Obstacles, & Thresholds by CR on page 29.

Movement: The minimum number of squares needed to clear a movement-based skill challenge is equal to 2 + 1/2 of the skill challenge's CR (minimum 2). Longer movement-based skill challenges often have a number of squares equal to ten times this amount, while exceptionally long skill challenges have twenty times this amount instead. That being said, movement-based skill challenges typically use obstacles to challenge participants rather than movement itself, so as a result there is no maximum to the number of squares that a character might need to clear a movement-based skill challenge, though increasing the number of squares needed to clear a skill challenge too far beyond this amount runs the risk of creating an encounter that is a chore that the PCs must slog through rather than a fun, memorable encounter.

Progress: The amount of progress needed to clear a progress-based skill challenge is equal to 3 x the skill challenge's CR (minimum 3).

Successes: The number of successes needed to clear a success-based skill challenge is equal to 2 + 1/3 of the skill challenge's CR (minimum 2).

Backlash (Optional Element)

A backlash element is a specific effect that triggers whenever a character fails a skill check to earn completion or gain an advantage by 5 or more. Backlash effects are generally comparable to spells with a spell level equal to 1 + 1/3 of the skill challenge's CR, though the GM can increase this effective spell level by 1 for especially dangerous backlashes.

Unless noted otherwise, backlashes occur each time a character fails a skill check to earn completion or gain an advantage. Some backlashes allow a saving throw to negate their effects. The saving throw DC against a backlash is always equal to 10 + the backlash's CR. Likewise, if a backlash is required to make an attack roll, its attack bonus is always equal to 1-1/2 times its CR (minimum +0). A backlash's attack bonus and saving throw DC (if any) are always noted in its description in the skill challenge's stat block.

Demerits (Optional Element)

For skill challenges with a demerit element, the quality of the benefit gained from completing the skill challenge deteriorates based upon the number of times characters participating in the skill challenge failed a skill check made to earn completion or gain an advantage. Likewise, the penalty for failing such skill challenges intensifies based upon such failures. Whenever a character fails a skill check to earn completion or gain an advantage during a skill challenge with a demerits element, she gains 1 demerit. The number listed denotes the maximum number of demerits that a character can earn during the skill challenge, with more demerits generally resulting in worse results. Generally, most skill challenges allow up to 3 demerits, though they can allow more barring GM approval.

Failures Allowed (Optional Element)

When a skill challenge allows characters a limited number of attempts to earn completion, they often possess a failures allowed element. Skill challenges with the failures allowed optional element track the total number of failed skill checks that characters make during the skill challenge. When her total number of failures equals the number listed by the element, the character automatically fails the skill challenge.

Most skill challenges with this element allow a number of failures equal to 2 + 1/3 of the skill challenge's CR (minimum 3), though this number can be adjusted to suit the theme and needs of the skill challenge.

SQ (Optional Element)

Skill challenges can possess numerous special qualities specific qualities that use standard rules that are referenced (but not repeated) in skill challenge stat blocks. These qualities are listed below.

Advantage: Movement-based skill challenges allow characters to make primary skill checks in order to gain an advantage, as described on page 10. This special quality notes the maximum number of advantages that a character can gain during a single cycle.

Critical Fumble: Whenever a character rolls a natural 1 (the d20 shows 1), she fails regardless of her skill check's result and has "fumbled," meaning the failure might be a critical failure. To determine if its a critical failure, the character immediately makes an attempt to "confirm" the critical fumble—another skill check with all the same modifiers as the skill check she just made. If the confirmation roll also results in a failure against the skill check's DC, the original failure is a critical failure. (The confirmation roll just needs to fail to equal or exceed the skill check's DC to cause a critical fumble, it does not need to come up 1 again.) If the confirmation roll beats the skill check's DC, then the failure is a regular failure.

A critical failure means that the character loses completion towards clearing the skill challenge. The amount of completion lost depends upon the skill challenge's completion method, as described below.

Movement: Reduce the number of squares that the character has advanced by 1/4 of the number of squares needed to clear the skill challenge.

Progress: Reduce the amount of progress that the character has earned by 1/4 of the amount of progress needed to clear the skill challenge.



Successes: Reduce the number of successes that the character has earned by 1/4 of the number needed to clear the skill challenge.

Decipherable: Sometimes when skill challenges include the languages optional element, they allow skilled linguists to attempt skill checks to decipher the required language even if they aren't able to read or speak that language. During a skill challenge with the decipherable special quality, a character who is trained in Linguistics can attempt a Linguistics check against the skill challenge's secondary skills DC as a half-cycle action. If the character is successful, she counts as being able to speak and read one language of her choice that is applicable to the skill challenge for 1d4 cycles, plus 1 additional cycle for every 5 by which her result exceeded the DC.

If the skill challenge also has the failures allowed special quality, failing this Linguistics check by 5 or more counts as a failure for the purpose of determining the number of failed skill checks that the character is allowed to make before she fails the skill challenge.

Skill challenges must have the languages optional element in order to possess this special quality. A skill challenge cannot have both the decipherable special quality and the specific skills special quality simultaneously.

Imbued: The area where the skill challenge takes place is imbued with one or more spells, whose effects linger for the duration of the skill challenge. The spells imbued in the area are listed in the entry along with their caster levels and save DCs (if any). Imbued spells have no duration; their effects are permanent, though a successful *dispel magic* attempt (or a similar effect) can suppress an imbued spell for 1d4 cycles. Most imbued spells use the minimum caster level and ability score required to cast the spell to determine their effects, but the GM can use more powerful magic if necessary.

Individual Completion: Allied characters participating in a skill challenge with the individual completion special quality do not pool their completion together to determine when they have cleared the skill challenge—each character must track his or her own completion and advantages separately. Usually a skill challenge with the individual completion special quality is cleared for all allied characters if any one of those allies successfully clears the skill challenge. If multiple characters must clear the skill challenge, the number needed is noted in parenthesis.

If the skill challenge also has the demerits or failures allowed optional elements, characters also track their demerits and failures separately.

Limited Completion: The nature of some skill challenges prevents multiple allied characters from attempting to earn completion or advantages at the same time or assisting the same character. Skill challenges with the limited completion special quality only allow a limited number of characters to make skill checks to earn completion or bypass an obstacle—these characters are known as primary participants. Likewise, they might restrict the number of allies who can act as assistants to a primary participant using the aid another action.

Specific Completion: Although most skill challenges allow some flexibility in regards to the skills that can be used to clear

them, skill challenges with the specific completion special quality require successes with one or more specific skills in order to complete them. The required skills are always primary skills for that skill challenge, and use the same skill DC listed under the skill challenge's primary skills. The entry typically notes which skill checks are required to clear the skill challenge and amount of completion that must be earned using those skill challenge's specific completion special quality still counts towards clearing that skill challenge as normal. For instance, if a skill challenge that requires 4 successes to clear it has the special completion (Knowledge [arcana] 2) special quality, the character must successfully make 4 skill checks to clear the skill challenge, at least two of which must be Knowledge (arcana) checks.

Skill challenges must have either progress or successes as their completion method in order to possess this special quality.

Specific Skills: Although most skill challenges allow enough flexibility that characters can use their skills creatively during skill challenges with GM permission, such tactics are not appropriate for every skill challenge. A skill challenge with the specific skills special quality does not allow skill checks to be made with skills other than those listed as primary skills. As a result, the skill challenge also doesn't have a secondary skills entry.

Surprise Start: Perceptive characters sometimes gain the ability to act during a skill challenge before the skill challenge officially begins. Skill challenges with the surprise start special quality allow characters to attempt a skill check to act in the



surprise round. Typically, Perception checks are made for this purpose, but other skills can be applicable in some situations (such as Knowledge [engineering] to notice that the ceiling is collapsing before a race to escape a cavern, or a Sense Motive check to realize that an opponent is readying to attack).

The special quality notes the difficulty and skill check DC for this perception check in parenthesis. The difficulty and DC of the skill check to act in a skill challenge's surprise round is determined in the same manner as the difficulty and skill check DC of a skill challenge's primary skills.

Trap-Like: Skill challenges with the trap-like special quality act similarly to traps towards characters who are participating in them, and characters who receive special bonuses against traps receive those bonuses while attempting to clear the skill challenge. For the purpose of determining any effects that characters possess, attacks made by the skill challenge count as attacks made by a trap, and skill checks made to earn completion to clear the skill challenge count as skill checks made to disarm a trap.

If the skill challenge has the surprise start special quality, a character with the trap spotter rogue talent or a similar ability counts Perception checks made to notice a trap-like obstacle or act in a surprise round against a trap-like skill challenge as if they were Perception checks made to notice a trap.

Variable Difficulty: Although most skill challenges have static difficulties, others include aspects that make their challenge more random. Instead of having static skill DCs for attempting to earn completion or bypass an obstacle, skill challenges with the variable difficulty special quality list a numeric bonus. Whenever a character attempts a skill check to earn completion or bypass an obstacle, the GM rolls an opposed skill check and adds the indicated bonus, using the result as the skill check's DC.

Typically, the skill bonuses for a skill challenge with the variable difficulty special trait are equal to the appropriate skill check DC for each skill based upon its difficulty and the skill challenge's CR - 10. Use Table: Completion & Challenge Intervals by CR on page 28 to determine the appropriate DCs for each skill check used in the skill challenge. This special quality may apply to all skill DCs included in the skill challenge or just to the skill DCs of several specific skills.

Special: Some skill challenges have miscellaneous qualities that produce special effects, such as drowning or ability damage. Saving throws are typically equal to 10 + the skill challenge's CR.

Obstacles

Rather than require characters to make skill checks to earn squares of movement, movement-based skill challenges use obstacles as the primary hindrance towards completing the skill challenge. In many ways, obstacles function like shorter skill challenges that characters must bypass in order to successfully complete the skill challenge. Only movement-based skill challenges have the obstacles optional element.

Each obstacle is associated with a specific square count, such as "5 Squares" or "12 Squares." When a character's total number of squares earned equals the lowest number listed by the obstacle's square count, the obstacle's effects immediately trigger. Characters are considered to have moved a number of squares equal to the obstacle's count when it takes effect, and the obstacle may interrupt any remaining movement they have left, preventing them from moving the entire distance allowed by their action. If a character begins her turn with a number of squares earned that is listed in an obstacle's square count, she must attempt a new skill check to bypass the obstacle again. If she fails, the obstacle's effects immediately trigger again.

For example, Kyr'shin starts his cycle at 5 squares, and an obstacle with a count of 10 Squares lays before him. If he uses the hustle action to move six squares, the obstacle at the 10 Squares count takes effect before he advances to the 11th square. If the obstacle prevents Kyr'shin from moving (such as by knocking him prone or causing him to fall asleep), his total number of squares earned remains at 10—the 11th square is effectively lost.

Movement-based skill challenges list obstacles in ascending order based upon their square count. Since squares are accumulated, this means that obstacles are listed in chronological order-the first obstacle is encountered first, the second is encountered second, and so on. When an obstacle lists a single, specific number as its square count (such as "5 Squares"), the obstacle takes effect when a character's square total equals the listed number of squares. If a plus sign (+) accompanies the obstacle's square count (such as "5+ Squares"), the obstacle takes effect when a character's square total equals the listed number of squares, and continues to take effect at the start of that character's cycle for the rest of the skill challenge. If a range of numbers accompanies the obstacle's square count (such as "5–10 Squares"), the obstacle takes effect when a character's square total equals the lower of the two square counts, and continues to take effect at the start of that character's cycle until the character's number of squares earned exceeds the higher of the two square counters.

Movement-based skill challenges typically have a number of obstacles equal to 2 + 1/2 of the skill challenge's CR (minimum 2), as shown on Table: Completion, Obstacles, & Thresholds by CR on page 29. These obstacles are typically spread out at regular intervals throughout the skill challenge, though the GM has the final say regarding where thresholds occur.

In many ways, obstacles act like small-scale skill challenges in their own right. Like skill challenges, obstacles have elements that govern how characters interact with and overcome them. All obstacles have the following elements: squares, type, notice, primary skills, secondary skills, and effect. Some obstacles also include optional elements, such as completion or time pressure. These characteristics are described below and are presented in the order in which they appear on a skill challenge's stat block.

Squares: Obstacles are organized by their square count in ascending order. A brief description of the obstacle accompanies its square count.

Type: Three types of obstacles exist—hazards, obstructions, and perils.

Hazards: A hazard obstacle places a passive, hindering

condition upon a character upon reaching its square count. Environmental effects such as terrain or weather are often classified as hazards, and they commonly create areas of difficult terrain or impart negative conditions upon characters. Hazards do not prevent characters from moving past them unless specifically noted otherwise by their effects.

Obstructions: An obstruction obstacle is a structure that actively prevents characters from advancing past the obstacle's square count. Characters cannot earn squares of movement beyond the amount listed by the obstacle's square count without first successfully bypassing the obstacle.

Perils: A peril obstacle actively attacks characters when they reach its square count by making attack rolls and forcing characters to make saving throws to avoid its effects. Unless a peril affects a creature with a condition that prevents it from acting (such as by paralyzing it or knocking it unconscious), perils do not prevent characters from moving past them.

Notice: Characters who fail to notice an upcoming obstacle are significantly more likely to succumb to it. The first time a character's square count becomes equal to an obstacle's square count, determine whether the character notices the obstacle by attempting a skill check with the skill noted in the obstacle's notice entry. Like a skill challenge's primary skill, an obstacle's notice DC is determined by based upon the difficulty of the skill check and the CR of the skill challenge. (Use Table: Completion & Challenge Intervals by CR on page 28 to determine the appropriate skill check DC for an obstacle's notice DC.)

Making a skill check to attempt to notice an obstacle does not require an action. If the check is successful, the character notices the obstacle and can attempt a skill check to bypass it normally. If the check fails, the character is unaware of the obstacle and cannot attempt to bypass it. Furthermore, an unaware character is flat-footed against any attacks made by the obstacle.

Most obstacles require a successful Perception check to notice, but others might allow other skills, such as using Knowledge (engineering) to recognize that a building has a weak foundation or Sense Motive to recognize that a slumbering monster might wake up.

Bypass Skills: Characters who notice obstacles are able to attempt to bypass them by making skill checks. An obstacle's bypass skills note which skills can be used to bypass the obstacle, as well as the difficulty and skill check DC for those skills. Each bypass skill's DC is determined by its difficulty in relation to its CR, as shown on Table: Skill Challenge DC by CR on page 28.

Characters do not need to spend an action to attempt to overcome an obstacle—doing so is part of the action used to attempt to earn squares towards clearing the skill challenge. A character may be required to make multiple checks to bypass an obstacle if its square count is listed as a range, such as "1+ Squares."

Secondary Skills: Whenever the GM allows a character to attempt to bypass an obstacle using a skill that isn't listed among the obstacle's bypass skills, her skill check's DC uses the difficulty and DC listed under the obstacle's list of secondary skills instead. As with bypass skills, the secondary skills entry has a listed difficulty. The difficulty of an obstacle's secondary skill DC should always be at least one step more difficult than the highest difficulty among its bypass skills, typically chosen from among the following: average, challenging, difficult, or very difficult. A secondary skill's DC is determined by its difficulty in relation to its CR, as shown on Table: Skill Challenge DC by CR on page 28.

Special Qualities (Optional Element): Obstacles can possess a variety of special qualities that alter how characters bypass them. This functions exactly like the special qualities optional element for skill challenges, except any special qualities chosen affect the obstacle rather than the entire skill challenge. With the exception of special qualities that impact initiative (such as the surprise start special quality), obstacles can generally possess any special quality that a skill challenge can possess. Special qualities that alter a skill challenge's primary skills instead interact with an obstacle's bypass skills, and special qualities that interact with skill checks made to earn completion instead interact with skill checks made to bypass the obstacle.

The following special quality is unique to obstacles. Other unique special qualities may exist.

Creature: The obstacle is a living creature who is posed to attack characters that disturb it. The obstacle notes a specific type of creature with a CR equal to the skill challenge's CR - 1. Whenever a character disturbs the creature by failing a bypass check, it attacks the creature using one of its attacks or abilities (see the creature's stat block for its attack bonus and damage). The creature entry notes the creature's tactics when disturbed.

Creature obstacles are further divided into two types of obstacles: mobile creatures and stationary creatures. A mobile creature joins the skill challenge when disturbed, no longer acting as an obstacle. Mobile creatures typically pursue the nearest creature when disturbed and attack that creature, as well as any creature whose square count is equal to their square count. Stationary creatures remain at their listed square count and do not join the skill challenge, though they continue to attack any creature that fails to bypass them. Creature obstacles can only trigger on a specific square count; they cannot list a plus sign (such as "5+ Squares") or a range of numbers (such as "5–10 Squares") as their square count.

Limited Occurrence: Some obstacles cannot pose a constant threat to multiple characters, and are relevant for only a limited number of times as a result. This entry notes the number of times that the obstacle can be encountered; once a number of characters have reached the square count noted by the obstacle, it cannot be encountered again for the rest of the skill challenge.

Unavoidable: Despite anyone's best efforts, some obstacles cannot be avoided. An obstacle with this quality cannot be bypassed, although a successful skill check made to bypass the obstacle often reduces the effects created by the obstacle, as noted in its effect. If no notation is made, the obstacle cannot be avoided—it immediately triggers as soon as a character's square count equals the obstacle's square count. An obstacle with this quality does not list any bypass skills or secondary skills.

Effect: The effect of an obstacle is what happens to those

who fail to bypass it. This often takes the form of either difficult terrain, damage, or a spell effect, but some obstacles have special effects. Many obstacles make attack rolls or forces saving throws to avoid them. Occasionally an obstacle uses both of these options, or neither.

Attack Obstacles: These obstacles involve both melee attacks (such as rocks falling from ceilings or sharp blades that emerge from walls) and ranged attacks (such as flinging darts, arrows, and spears). Whenever a character fails a bypass check to bypass an attack obstacle, it attacks them using the listed attack bonus. An attack obstacle's attack bonus is equal to 1-1/2 times the skill challenge's CR (minimum +0). When dealing damage, an attack obstacle deals whatever damage that the weapon or object used to make the attack normally deals, and its Strength bonus for the purpose of determining its damage bonus is equal to half the skill challenge's CR (minimum +0).

Some attack obstacles include additional effects that are tied to a successful attack, such as bleed damage, poison, or free combat maneuver attempts. These additional effects are also noted in the obstacle's effects entry.

Blockade Obstacles: These obstacles are objects that bar a character's passage through the skill challenge. Only obstruction obstacles have this type of effect, and they always list the material that the blockade is made from, its hardness, its hit points, and the number of successful bypass checks needed to bypass the obstacle. The number of checks needed can range from a minimum of 1 up to a maximum equal to the maximum number of thresholds allowed by the skill challenge based on its CR, as described on Table: Completion, Obstacles, & Thresholds By CR on page 29.

Difficult Terrain Obstacles: These obstacles create difficult that hinders characters' ability to earn squares towards completing the skill challenge. Whenever a character fails a bypass check to bypass a difficult terrain obstacle, the character's movement speed is reduced by half for the purpose of determining the number of squares it can advance during the skill challenge. A character is only considered to be in difficult terrain while her number of squares earned is listed in the obstacle's square count.

Hazard Obstacle: The obstacle is a hazard (such as a thunderstorm or an avalanche) that triggers when the PCs reach the indicated square count. The type of hazard acting as an obstacle is noted first, followed by the consequences that occur whenever a character fails a bypass check to bypass the hazard.

Magical Obstacles: These obstacles produce the effects of one or more spells, which are noted in the effect. If the spell in a magical device obstacle makes an attack roll, its attack bonus is equal to 1-1/2 times the skill challenge's CR. If the spell in a magical device obstacle allows a saving throw, its save DC is 10 + the spell's level + half of the skill challenge's CR. If the effect produce has no spell level, the obstacle's save DC is 10 + the skill challenge's CR instead.

Pits: These obstacles are holes (covered or not) that characters can fall into causing them to take damage. Pit obstacles follow all of the usual rules associated with pit traps,

as described in the traps section of Chapter 13 in PATHFINDER ROLEPLAYING GAME: CORE RULEBOOK.

Spell Obstacles: These obstacles are created by spells (such as *wall of iron* or *stinking cloud*) and produce the spell's effects. Like a spell obstacle that allows a saving throw, its save DC is 10 + the spell's level + half of the skill challenge's CR.

Special: Some obstacles have miscellaneous features that produce special effects, such as drowning for swept down river or ability damage for poison. Saving throws and damage are noted in the effect's description, and either use the appropriate effect for the effect produced (such as a poison's DC if a specific poison is mentioned) or 10 + the skill challenge's CR.

Thresholds (Optional Element)

Progress-based and success-based skill challenges with the thresholds optional element have specific events that occur at key intervals as the challenge nears completion. These intervals can provide key information to participants, create effects that hinder a character's ability to participate in the skill challenges, and similar complications. Only progress-based and successbased skill challenges can have the thresholds optional element.

Each obstacle is associated with a specific completion count, such as "3 Progress" or "1 Success". When a character's total amount of completion equals the threshold's completion count, the threshold takes effect. Thresholds only take effect the first time each character reaches the indicated threshold count unless noted otherwise.

For example, Kyr'shin starts his cycle at 10 Progress, and a threshold with a count of 15 Progress lays before him. If he earns 9 progress after succeeding on a skill check to earn completion, the threshold at the 15 Progress count takes effect.

Skill challenges list thresholds in ascending order based upon their completion count. Since completion is accumulated, this means that thresholds are listed in chronological order—the first threshold triggers first, the second triggers second, and so on. Thresholds only list specific numbers as their square count (such as "5 Progress"), they do not list ranges in the way obstacles do.

Thresholds list the effect that takes place when the threshold is reached or the information gained immediately after their square count. When a threshold produces an effect, use the rules for determining the effects of obstacles to determine how the threshold functions. (See page 16 for more information regarding obstacles).

Skill challenges with the threshold optional element typically have a number of thresholds equal to 2 + 1/2 of the skill challenge's CR (minimum 2), as shown on Table: Completion, Obstacles, & Thresholds by CR on page 29. These thresholds are typically spread out in intervals of 3 or 5 for progress-based skill challenges or 2 or 5 for success-based skill challenges, with the final threshold always occurring at completion count that equals the skill challenge's total amount of progress or number of successes needed to clear the skill challenge, though the GM has the final say regarding where thresholds occur.



Skill Challenge Stat Block

Skill challenges are organized into stat blocks, similar to creatures. This is where all of the information needed to run a skill challenge can be found. A skill challenge stat block is organized as follows. Note that in cases where a line in a skill challenge stat block has no value, that line is omitted.

Name and CR: The skill challenge's name is presented first, along with its Challenge Rating (CR). A skill challenge's CR is a numerical indication of what the Average Party Level (APL) of a group of characters should be before they attempt the skill challenge.

XP: Listed here are the total experience points that the PCs earn for clearing the skill challenge.

Type: Skill challenges come in several varieties. The types of skill challenges introduced in the *Skill CHALLENGE HANDBOOK* are general, chase, contest, and influence. General skill challenges are described in the rules above, while chase skill challenges are described starting on page 30, contest skill challenges on page 36, influence skill challenges on page 64.

Goal: This is a brief description of what the PCs are trying to accomplish during the skill challenge.

Primary Skills: This lists the skills that the PCs can use to earn completion during the skill challenge is noted here, as well as the difficulty and skill check DC associated with each skill.

Secondary Skills: This lists the difficulty and skill DC of all skill checks that are attempted to earn completion that are not primary skills. The GM is the final arbiter of which skills can be used to earn completion during the skill challenge.

Frequency: This lists the amount of time that passes between each cycle during the skill challenge.

Circumstance Bonus (Optional Element): Some skill challenges provide special bonuses to certain skills, which are noted in this entry.

Languages (Optional Element): If the skill challenge has this optional element, this notes any languages that the PCs must be able to understand in order to earn completion during the skill challenge. Some skill challenges with the languages optional element only require characters to understand the listed languages when making specific skill checks, while others don't require complete fluency. Such exceptions are also noted in this entry.

Time Pressure (Optional Element): This lists the number of cycles that the PCs have to finish the skill challenge. If they fail to clear it in the listed number of skill challenges, they automatically fail the skill challenge.

Completion: The ultimate goal of every skill challenge is to complete it, and this outlines the skill challenge's completion method (movement, progress, or successes) and the amount of completion needed to successfully clear it.

Backlash (Optional Element): This entry notes any negative effects that the PCs take when they fail to earn completion towards clearing a skill challenge or gaining an advantage by 5 or more.

Demerits (Optional Element): This entry notes the number of demerits that the PCs can accrue during the skill

challenge. A demerit is accrued anytime that a character fails a skill check to earn completion.

Failures Allowed: This entry notes the total number of failures that the PCs can make during the skill challenge before they automatically fail it.

SQ: This entry notes any special qualities or rules that the skill challenge has.

Benefit: This is the reward or boon that the PCs gain for completing the skill challenge.

Penalty: This is the consequence that the PCs incur should they fail to complete the skill challenge.

Obstacles: In a movement-based skill challenge, this lists the obstacles that the PCs must overcome in order to successfully clear the skill challenge.

Thresholds (Optional Element): In a progress-based or success-based skill challenge, this notes any thresholds that occur as the skill challenge progresses.

Sample Skill Challenges

The following skill challenges were designing using the rules described above.

CR 1

BABYSITTING

XP 400

Goal The PCs are watching the three children of two affluent nobles while they attend an annual gala. By ensuring the safety of the children, the PCs hope to earn a favor from the nobles.

SKILLS

Primary Skills Acrobatics (average, DC 16), Diplomacy (challenging, DC 18), Intimidate (average DC 16), Perception (difficult, DC 21), Perform (any) (easy, DC 11), Profession (cook or midwife) (average, DC 16), Sense Motive (difficult, DC 21), Sleight of Hand (average, DC 16).
Secondary Skills Difficult, DC 21

Frequency 1 hour

- COMPLETION
- Successes Needed 2

Demerits 3

- **SQ** limited completion (3 primary participants, 2 assistants per primary participant)
- **Benefit** If the PCs succeed with no demerits, the nobles gladly give them the favor they asked for, and their Relationship Score with the PCs increases by 1. If the PCs succeed with 1 demerit, the nobles offer to give the PCs the favor they requested in exchange for 2d6 x 10 gp. If the PCs succeed with 2 demerits, the nobles offer to give the PCs the favor they requested in exchange for 2d12 x 10 gp. If the PCs gain 3 demerits but would otherwise succeed, the success instead counts as a failure with no demerits (see below). For more information regarding Relationship Scores, see the Relationship section in *ULTIMATE CHARISMA*.
- **Penalty** If the PCs fail to the gain the requisite number of successes but have no demerits, the nobles offer to give the PCs the favor they requested in exchange for 2d12 x 10 gp. If the PCs fail to the gain the requisite number of successes and have 1 demerit,

they decline to give the PCs the favor they requested. If the PCs fail to the gain the requisite number of successes and have 2 demerits, they decline to give the PCs the favor they requested, and their Relationship Score with the PCs is reduced by 1. If the PCs fail to the gain the requisite number of successes and have 3 demerits, they decline to give the PCs the favor they requested and their relationship score with the PCs is reduced by 2.

MISSING WIZARD

CR 2

XP 600

Goal The PCs must research the personal study of a missing town sage to search for clues regarding his disappearance. **SKILLS**

- Primary Skills Knowledge (local) (easy, DC 13), Knowledge (nature) (easy, DC 13), Perception (challenging, DC 20), Sense Motive (challenging, DC 20)
 Secondary Skills (difficult, DC 23)
 Frequency 8 hours
- Languages Common (read only)
- Time Pressure 7 days

COMPLETION

Progress 6



- **SQ** limited completion (1 primary participant, any number of assistants).
- **Benefit** The PCs can use the information gleaned from the sage's notes to determine where he has headed and follow him there.
- **Failure** If the PCs fail to discover where the sage has gone within a week's time, he has suffered a gruesome fate at the hands of the bandit leader—if he isn't dead, he's certainly unable to offer them much assistance for a time, if ever.

THRESHOLD

- **1 Progress** At low tide, a hidden entrance to underground caverns becomes visible beneath the town's docks. According to a number of local legends, pirates hid their booty in the caves.
- **3 Progress** The flower seller in the town square is the local priest's illegitimate daughter. Given the priest's vow of chastity, if this knowledge became public, he could lose respect among the townsfolk and likely his position as the town's priest.
- **6 Progress** The leader of the bandits in the woods outside town claims to be the deposed lord of the neighboring barony, and wants to raise an army to take back his title and lands. The sage's notes indicate that he was planning on seeking out this bandit lord and using his records to prove the veracity of the claim.

Powering the Runestone

XP 800

Goal The PCs must reactivate a failed runestone in order to defend the village from an eldritch horror.

CR 3

CR 4

SKILLS

Primary Skills Knowledge (arcana) (easy, DC 14), Spellcraft (easy, DC 14), Use Magic Device (average, DC 19)

Frequency 1 round

Time Pressure 1 minute

COMPLETION

- Successes 3
- **Backlash** Failing a skill check to earn a success by 5 or more causes the runestone to lash out with eldritch power, dealing 1d8+1 points of force damage and causes all participants to become stunned for 1 round. A DC 13 Will save negates the stunned condition, but not the damage.
- SQ imbued spell (dimensional anchor CL 15th), specific skills
- **Benefit** The PCs reactivate the runestone, causing all inhabitants within the village to gain the benefits of a *protection from evil* spell against the eldritch horror preparing to attack it.
- **Penalty** Once the PCs begin to reactivate the runestone, its power surges in the air around them. If the PCs fail to reactivate the runestone after 1 minute, a blast of destructive energies wreck the PCs. Each PC takes 2d8+3 points of damage as if affected as if by *color spray* (DC 11 negates).

CROSSING THE BRIDGE XP 1,200

Goal The PCs must make their way across the chasm's bridge without damaging the bridge's integrity or risk falling.

SKILLS

Primary Skills Acrobatics (easy, DC 15) Frequency 1 round

COMPLETION

Movement 10

Backlash Failure causes the bridge to take 1d4 points of damage, ignoring its hardness. The bridge has 20 hit points. If the bridge takes 10 points of damage, all squares on the bridge count as difficult terrain for the purpose of determining the number of squares that characters advance, and the DC of all skill checks made to bypass the bridge's obstacles increases by 2. If the bridge takes 20 points of damage, it is destroyed. Characters on the bridge when it is destroyed fall 80 feet to the bottom of the chasm (8d6 falling damage) unless they succeed on a DC 20 Reflex save to hang on to the splintering bridge. Characters with a square count of 1 to 2 side have their square count set to 2 and can only advanced backwards, while characters on the 9 to 10 side have their square count set to 8 and can only advanced forwards. Characters with 3 to 7 squares have a 50% chance to end up on either side. Once the bridge is destroyed, Climb (challenging, DC 22) replaces all other primary skills for the skill challenge's obstacles for characters hanging on to the bridge.

SQ advantage (any), individual completion, specific skills

- Benefit If all PCs successfully cross the bridge, they can continue on their adventure unhindered.
- **Penalty** If the bridge is destroyed, the PCs must reroute their course and attempt to find a new path across the chasm. They may need to spend additional time finding any party members who fell from the bridge.

OBSTACLES

- **1 Square+** The bridge sways irregularly in the unchecked breeze, threatening to topple the PCs over.
 - Type hazard; Notice Survival (easy, DC 15)
 - Bypass Skills Acrobatics (easy, DC 15)
 - SQ specific skills
 - Effect difficult terrain and target falls prone; DC 20 Reflex avoids the prone condition
- 5 Squares The bridge's planks are unstable, and threaten to give out under the PCs as they make their way across.
 - Type peril; Notice Craft (carpentry) (easy, DC 15), Knowledge (engineering) (easy, DC 15), Perception (average, DC 20), Profession (architect) (easy, DC 15)
 - Bypass Skills Craft (carpentry) (average, DC 20), Knowledge (engineering) (average, DC 20); Secondary Skills (challenging, DC 22)
 - SQ individual completion, trap-like
 - Effect 80-ft.-deep pit (8d6 damage); DC 20 Reflex avoids; multiple targets (all targets with a square count of 1)
- 10 Squares The bridge's planks are unstable, and threaten to give out under the PCs as they make their way across.
 - Type peril; Notice Craft (carpentry) (easy, DC 15), Knowledge (engineering) (easy, DC 15), Perception (average, DC 20), Profession (architect) (easy, DC 15)

Bypass Skills Craft (carpentry) (average, DC 20), Knowledge (engineering) (average, DC 20); Secondary Skills (challenging, DC 25)

SQ individual completion, trap-like

Effect 80-ft.-deep pit (8d6 damage); DC 20 Reflex avoids; multiple targets (all targets with a square count of 1)

A MEAL FIT FOR A DRAGON CR 5

XP 1,600

Goal The PCs must successfully cook a succulent meal for a dragon in order to gain his assistance and avoid being eaten. SKILLS

- Primary Skills Perception (difficult, DC 26), Profession (cook) (average, DC 21)
- Secondary Skills Very difficult, DC 28

Frequency 10 minutes

COMPLETION

Successes 4

Demerits 3

- SQ limited completion (1 primary participant, any number of assistants)
- Benefit If the PCs succeed with no demerits, the dragon is delighted with the quality of his meal, improving his attitude towards the PCs to helpful. If the PCs succeed with 1 demerit, the dragon is impressed with the quality of his meal, improving his starting attitude towards the PCs to friendly. If the PCs succeed with 2 demerits, the dragon finds his meal passable, making him indifferent to the PCs and only willing to help them in exchange for a 500 gp tithe per PC. If the PCs gain 3 demerits but would otherwise succeed, the success instead counts as a failure with no demerits (see below).
- **Penalty** If the PCs fail to the gain the requisite number of successes but have no demerits, the dragon finds his meal passable but is unimpressed, making him indifferent and only willing to help the PCs in exchange for a 750 gp tithe per PC. If the PCs fail with 1 demerit, the dragon is displeased with his meal, making him unfriendly and only willing to help the PCs in exchange for a 1,000 gp tithe per PC. If the PCs fail with 2 demerits, the dragon is disgusted by his meal, making him unfriendly and unwilling to help the PCs. If the PCs fail with 3 demerits, the dragon is disgusted and insulted by his meal, making him hostile and unwilling to help the PCs.

CRACKING THE SPELLBOOK XP 2,400 Goal The PCs must search the arcane library of a vanished

wizard in order to learn of any wards that the spellcaster might have placed upon his spellbook before he disappeared. SKILLS

CR 6

Primary Skills Knowledge (arcana) (easy, DC 18), Knowledge (planes) (easy, DC 18), Knowledge (religion) (easy, DC 18), Spellcraft (average, DC 23) Frequency 8 hours

Languages Common (read only)

Skill Bonus Knowledge (arcana) +4, Knowledge (planes) +4, Knowledge (religion) +4

COMPLETION Progress 18

- **SQ** limited completion (1 primary participant, any number of assistants), specific skills
- **Benefit** The PCs are able to bypass the spellbook's wards and defenses, allowing them to glean arcane knowledge from it and catch a rare glimpse at the vanished wizard's musings and experiments.
- **Failure** If the PCs fail to discover the methods to bypass the wizard's defenses, they must either find a way to remove the wards or risk opening the book and facing the wrath of watever spells he placed upon his most private of treasures.

THRESHOLD

- **5 Progress** The wizard's spellbook is warded with a unique *symbol* spell of his own design. He wanted anyone brazen enough to try and learn from his works to suffer greatly for their arrogance.
- **10 Progress** After several failed experiences left his book singed and his library badly burned, the wizard decided a more subtle approach was in order. He began devising a way to make sure that anyone who read from his book without his permission would be unable to read anything ever again.
- **15 Progress** The wizard devised a nefarious spell gylph (as per *rune of warding*) that acted similarly to *symbol of sleep* (DC 20, CL 10th), except those who fell asleep from the glyph's influence also permanently lost the ability to read and write, as *bestow curse*. This knowledge allows characters with the trapfinding class feature or the ability to disarm magical traps the ability to use Disable Device to earn progress to complete the skill challenge as if it were a primary skill.
- **18 Progress** The wizard designed a bypass mechanic for his spellbook's trap so he wouldn't need to be bothered with constantly disarming and rearming the trap. The glyph does not trigger for anyone who opens the spellbook while wearing a signet ring with the wizard's insignia upon it.

AN AUDIENCE WITH THE KING

CR 7

Goal The PCs must convince the king's majordomo to hold an audience with them.

SKILLS

XP 3,200

Primary Skills Bluff (average, DC 24), Diplomacy (average, DC 24), Intimidate (challenging, DC 26), Knowledge (history) (average, DC 24), Knowledge (nobility) (easy, DC 19), Profession (barrister) (challenging, DC 26)

Secondary Skills Difficult, DC 29

Frequency 1 round COMPLETION

Successes 5

Demerits 3

Benefit If the PCs succeed with no demerits, the majordomo permits them an audience with the king immediately, and

the king's starting attitude with the PCs is friendly. If the PCs succeed with 1 demerit, the majordomo permits them an audience with the king immediately, and the king's starting attitude with the PCs is indifferent. If the PCs succeed with 2 demerits, the majordomo permits them an audience with the king in 2d6 hours, and the king's starting attitude is indifferent. If the PCs gain 3 demerits but would otherwise succeed, the success instead counts as a failure with no demerits (see below).

Penalty If the PCs fail with no demerits, the majordomo permits them an audience with the king in 1d3 days, and the king's starting attitude is indifferent. If the PCs fail with 1 demerit, the majordomo permits them an audience with the king in 1d6 days, and the king's starting attitude is indifferent. If the PCs fail with 2 demerits, the majordomo permits them an audience with the king in 2d4 days, and the king's starting attitude is unfriendly. If the PCs fail with 3 demerits, the majordomo does not permit the PCs an audience with the king, and the king's starting attitude is unfriendly.

LIVING MAZE

CR 8

XP 4,800

Goal The PCs must navigate through a living maze that seeks to entrap them within its confines.

SKILLS

Primary Skills Knowledge (arcana) (difficult, DC 30), Knowledge (geography) (difficult, DC 32), Knowledge (planes) (difficult, DC 30), Survival (challenging, DC 29) Frequency 10 minutes

COMPLETION

Movement 18

- **Backlash** Failure causing the PCs to lose 1d4 squares of movement as the maze twists and contorts around them, making them helplessly lost.
- **SQ** advantage (3), critical fumble, imbued (*dimensional anchor*, CL 25th), specific skills; The walls of the maze can detect flying creatures and adjust their height accordingly. As a result, characters cannot earn squares to clear the skill challenge by using a fly speed.

OBSTACLES

- **1 Square**+ The maze that the PCs are traversing is alive, and must be outwitted at every turn..
 - *Type* hazard; *Notice* Knowledge (arcana) (challenging, DC 27), Knowledge (geography) (average, DC 25), Perception (difficult, DC 30)
 - Bypass Skills Knowledge (arcana) (challenging, DC 27), Knowledge (geography) (average, DC 25), Perception (difficult, DC 30); Secondary Skills very difficult, DC 32 SQ critical fumble
 - *Effect* Failure indicates that the character does not earn any squares towards clearing the skill challenge this cycle.
- 10 Squares The maze rips an interdimensional hole in itself to whisk the PCs back to the beginning of the maze.
 - *Type* peril; *Notice* Knowledge (arcana) (challenging, DC 27), Perception (difficult, DC 30), Spellcraft (average, DC 25)
 - Bypass Skills Knowledge (arcana) (challenging, DC 27), Knowledge (geography) (average, DC 25), Perception (difficult, DC 30); Secondary Skills very difficult, DC 32 SQ limited occurrence (1)
 - *Effect* Spell (*plane shift*, CL 12th); DC 16 Will avoids; multiple targets (all targets with a square count of 10); characters that fail their saving throw have their square count reduced to 0.
- **15 Squares** The maze creates stone guardians to attempt to stop the PCs from advancing any further.
 - *Type* peril; *Notice* Knowledge (arcana) (challenging, DC 27), Perception (difficult, DC 30), Spellcraft (average, DC 25) *SQ* limited occurrence (1), unavoidable
 - *Effect* Creature (1 huge earth elemental; *PATHFINDER ROLEPLAYING GAME: BESTIARY 1*) The elemental automatically succeeds on all skill checks to bypass obstacles and gain advantage, and attempts to knock the PCs unconscious so it can drag them back to square count 0.
- **18 Squares** The maze seals its exit with a massive stone wall. Type obstruction; *Notice* Knowledge (arcana) (challenging,

DC 27), Perception (difficult, DC 30), Spellcraft (average, DC 25)

Bypass Skills Climb (average, DC 25); Secondary Skills challenging, DC 27

Effect Blockade (hardness 8, 90 hp, 2 successes to bypass)

STAYING THE COURSE CR 9

XP 6,400

Goal The PCs must fight to keep their ship on-course during a deadly storm.

SKILLS

Primary Skills Acrobatics (difficult, DC 32), Climb (difficult, DC 32), Profession (sailor) (challenging, DC 29), Survival (difficult, DC 32), Swim (very difficult, DC 34)

Frequency 10 minutes COMPLETION

Successes 6

- SQ specific skills, surprise start (Knowledge [geography] [average, DC 27], Knowledge [nature] [challenging, DC 29], Profession [sailor] [average, DC 27], Survival [average, DC 27])
- **Benefit** The PCs weather the storm and can continue sailing without impediment.
- **Failure** The PCs survive the storm, but their ship is battered or worse, based upon their success at the skill challenge's threshold intervals (see below).

THRESHOLDS

- 1 Cycle At the end of the first cycle, wind speeds increase to moderate (20 mph) and it begins to rain. On subsequent cycles, a PC must succeed on a DC 16 Acrobatics or Climb check to move across the slick, gusty deck in order to attempt a skill check to earn successes.
- 2 Cycles At the end of the second cycle, the wind speeds increase to strong (30 mph and the rain picks up into a full thunderstorm, forcing every PC to attempt an Acrobatics or Climb check each cycle, even if they don't attempt to earn successes. Failing this check once causes the character to fall prone (standing up requires a successful Acrobatics or Climb check during the next cycle), while failing a check while already prone causes the character to get swept overboard (Reflex DC 18 negates). A character who is swept overboard takes 4d6 points of bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage each round as they are ground against the ship's hull and must hold their breath as if they were submerged. An overboard character can attempt a Climb check to climb back onto the ship (DC 30). A PC can toss an overboard character a rope as a full-cycle action to grant it a +5 bonus to climb back onboard; this bonus increases to +10 if the rope is knotted. This is in addition to the events described by the 1 cycle threshold.
- **3 Cycles** At the start of the third round, lightning crashes in the sky above the PCs' vessel. Each round, there is a 25% chance that a lightning bolt will strike the ship. Determine randomly whether the lightning strikes a PC or the ship. Each bolt deals 10d6 points of electricity damage; a PC can



attempt a DC 18 Reflex save to reduce the damage by half, but the ship takes half damage from the bolt as well on a successful save. Lightning bolts ignore the ship's hardness and cause it to catch fire; each additional time the ship catches fire beyond the first increases the amount of fire damage that the ship burns for by 1d6. This is in addition to the events described by the 1 and 2 cycle thresholds.

4 Cycles+ Each additional cycle beyond the 3rd, the weather fluctuates between the conditions described by the 1, 2, and 3 cycle thresholds (determine randomly).

CRUSHING CEILING

CR 10

XP 9,600

Goal The PCs must discover a way to escape the chamber before they are crushed by the room's slowly descending ceiling.

Setting A 20-foot by 20-foot sealed chamber with a 50-foot high ceiling. The walls, floor, and ceiling are 20-foot by 20foot slabs of stone (hardness 8, 1,800 hp), and when the skill challenge begins the ceiling-slab begins descending towards the ground at a rate of 5 feet per round. The ceiling slab weighs 1.5 tons (3,000 pounds).

SKILLS

Primary Skills Disable Device (average, 29), Knowledge (engineering) (easy, 24), Perception (average, 29)
Secondary Skills Very difficult, DC 36

Frequency 1 round Time Pressure 10 cycles

COMPLETION

Successes Needed 7

- **Backlash** If a PC fails a skill check by 5 or more, reduce the skill challenge's time pressure by 1 cycle.
- **Benefit** If the PCs succeed before the time pressure concludes, they find a secret door that enables them to escape the room.
- **SQ** surprise start (Knowledge [engineering] [challenging, DC 31], Perception [difficult, 34]), Characters with bonuses on skill checks made to locate secret doors gain those bonuses on skill checks made to earn completion in the skill challenge. If targeted by effects, all walls, floors, and ceilings in the room have hardness 8 and 1,800 hp with a saving throw bonus of +18 on all saves (they are 20-foot thick slabs of stone).
- **Penalty** If the PCs fail to gain 5 successes before the time pressure ends, the slab makes a grapple attempt against all creatures within the room, attempting to pin any creature that it has not already grappled. The stab has a CMB of +22 (base atk +10, size +4 Strength +8), a CMD of 32, and the constrict (10d6+8) special ability. Any creature pinned by the slab must hold its breath to avoid suffocation. Creatures that are not pinned can continue to make skill checks to attempt to find the hidden door,

accruing successes towards escaping the room. Succeeding at the skill challenge after the time pressure has completed still counts as a failure for the purpose of determining the amount of XP earned from the challenge, however. A character cannot escape from the room if she is grappled or pinned, even after the challenge has been completed

PROSECUTION

CR 11

XP 12,800

Goal The PCs must take on the role of prosecutors in a trial in order to prevent an enemy from acquitting herself.

SKILLS

Primary Opposed Skills Bluff (Sense Motive; difficult, +18), Diplomacy (Bluff, challenging +15), Profession (barrister) (Profession [barrister]; average, +13), Knowledge (history) (Bluff, challenging +15), Knowledge (local) (Bluff, challenging +15), Sense Motive (Bluff; challenging, +15)

Frequency 10 minutes

COMPLETION

Successes 7

Backlash If a PC fails an opposed skill check by 10 or more, they earn an additional demerit as they accidentally provide a sound argument for their opponent's release.

Demerits 4

- **SQ** limited completion (1 primary participant, no assistants), specific skills
- **Benefit** If the PCs succeed with no demerits, their enemy is jailed and receives the maximum possible sentence, as appropriate for her crimes. For each demerit they receive, their enemy is jailed, but her sentence decreases in severity as appropriate, such as going from life to 25 years, then from 25 years to 10 years, then from 10 years to 1 year as appropriate. If the PCs gain 4 demerits but would otherwise succeed, the success instead counts as a failure with no demerits (see below).
- **Penalty** If the PCs with no demerits, their enemy is left off with minimal sentencing, as they were unable to produce sound enough evidence to incarcerate her. For each demerit they receive, the attitude of the townsfolk worsens by one step (minimum hostile) as they become increasingly angered by the PC's incompetence and question whether or not their opponent was even guilty to begin with. If the PCs fail with 4 demerits, the townsfolk become quickly convinced that they are the true perpetrators of their opponent's crimes and seek to either imprison them or run them out of town. This attitude adjustment lasts a minimum of 1d12 years or until the PCs can clear their names.

HISTORY LESSON – WAR COLLEGE

XP 19,200

Goal The PCs must discover the hidden history of the war college if they are to properly defend it against a hobgoblin invasion.

SKILLS

Primary Skills Knowledge (engineering) (average, DC 32), Knowledge (history) (average, DC 32), Profession (soldier) (average, DC 32)

Frequency 8 hours

Languages Common (read only)

Skill Bonus Knowledge (engineering) +4, Knowledge (history) +4, Profession (soldier) +4; can attempt Knowledge (engineering) and Profession (soldier) checks untrained.

Time Pressure 7 days

COMPLETION

Progress 32

- **SQ** limited completion (1 primary participant, any number of assistants), specific skills
- **Benefit** The PCs are able to discover the weakest parts of the college's defenses, increasing the building's Defense by +4 during the upcoming assault.
- **Failure** The college's defenses are woefully inadequate for the war to come. If the PCs do not complete the skill challenge, the college gains no bonus to its Defense against the upcoming assault. If they fail to earn at least 20 progress, their utter lack of preparation causes the college to take a -2 penalty to its Defense.

THRESHOLD

- **5 Progress** Master Vazal at the Hammer and Anvil believes that red hair is a blessing from the Lord of Battles, and frequently offers discounts on masterwork and enchanted weapons to ginger-headed warriors.
- **10 Progress** When a local duke was slain in the Battle of a Hundred Blades, his legendary shield, Bladesplitter, was never recovered. It is believed that the hobgoblins' war chief took it as a trophy.
- **20 Progress** Detailed blueprints illustrate the strengths and weaknesses of the war college. All border fronts on the northern frontier were built with similar defenses.
- **30 Progress** Scouting reports mention a shield matching Bladesplitter's description in the hands of a hobgoblin warlord gathering an army in the nearby hills. Its rumored that this new war chief is either the descendant of the shield's previous hobgoblin master or that she defeated the aging warlord in battle.
- **32 Progress** A secret postern gate in the southeast wall of the war college provides access to the guard barracks. The college fell to the war goblin horde during the last war, and there is evidence that the hobgoblins might attempt the same trick again in the near future.

AGAINST THE AVALANCHECR 13XP 25,600Goal The PCs must push their way up to a mountain shrine

while an avalanche cascades around them.

SKILLS

CR 12

Primary Skills Acrobatics (average, DC 33), Knowledge (geography) (challenging, DC 35), Perception (difficult,

Frequency 1 round COMPLETION

Movement 100

- **SQ** specific skills, surprise start (Knowledge [geography] [easy, DC 28], Perception [easy, DC 28], Knowledge [nature] [easy, DC 28], Survival [easy, DC 28])
- **Benefit** The PCs reach the mountain shrine and are able to continue unimpeded.
- **Penalty** The PCs are unable to reach the mountain shrine, and must find a way to circumvent the jinushigami.

OBSTACLES

- 1 Square+ Sensing the presence of intruders, a jingushigami that has made the mountain its ward triggers an avalanche. *Type* hazard; *Notice* Knowledge (geography) (easy, DC 28), Perception (easy, DC 28), Knowledge (nature) (easy, DC 28), Survival (easy, DC 28)
 - *Bypass Skills* Acrobatics (average, DC 33), Knowledge (geography) (challenging, DC 35), Perception (difficult, DC 38), Knowledge (nature) (challenging, DC 35), Survival (easy, DC 28)
 - Effect hazard; The obstacle acts as a CR 7 avalanche (see the mountainous terrain section of Chapter 13 in *PATHEINDER ROLEPLAYING GAME: CORE RULEBOOK*). Characters with a square count of 1 or higher are in the slide zone, while characters who have a square count of 0 are in the bury zone. Failing to bypass the obstacle forces characters to attempt the DC 15 Reflex save to reduce or avoid the damage dealt by the avalanche, and such characters may become buried. Characters who aren't buried can dig out their allies as a full-cycle action if using only their hands, or a cycle action if using an appropriate tool, such as a pick, crowbar, or shovel. A buried character can also spend a half-cycle action to free herself with a DC 25 Strength check.
- **10 Squares** The jingushigami uses its *control plants* spell-like ability to temporarily command a number of plant creatures in the area to impede the PCs.
 - *Type* peril; *Notice* Knowledge (nature) (easy, DC 28), Spellcraft (easy, DC 28)
 - SQ limited occurrence (3)
 - *Bypass Skills* Acrobatics (average, DC 33), Knowledge (nature) (average, DC 33), Perception (challenging, DC 35), Survival (challenging, DC 35)
 - *Effect* Spell (*entangle*; CL 13th, Reflex DC 19)
- **45 Squares+** Frustrated by their advances, the jinushigami uses its manipulate terrain ability to make the mountain more difficult to traverse.
 - *Type* hazard; *Notice* Knowledge (nature) (easy, DC 28) *SQ* unavoidable
 - *Effect* The skill challenge's frequency increases to 10 minutes for the remainder of the skill challenge. In addition, characters using Survival to gain an advantage take a -10 penalty on their skill checks.

- **65 Squares+** Desperate to keep the PCs from reaching the top of the mountain, the jinushigami uses its merge with ward ability to help guide the avalanche.
 - Type hazard; Notice Knowledge (nature) (easy, DC 28)
 - SQ unavoidable
 - *Effect* The Reflex DC to reduce or avoid being buried by the avalanche (see square count 1) increases to DC 21.
- **85 Squares** Enraged, the jinushigami uses its *earthquake* spell-like ability to attempt to halt the PCs' progress.
 - *Type* peril; *Notice* Knowledge (nature) (easy, DC 28), Spellcraft (easy, DC 28)
 - *Bypass Skills* Acrobatics (average, DC 33), Knowledge (nature) (average, DC 33), Perception (challenging, DC 35), Survival (challenging, DC 35)
 - SQ limited occurrence (3)
 - Effect Spell (earthquake; CL 28th, Reflex DC 19)
- **99 Squares** Mere feet away from the shrine, the jinushigami emerges to confront the PCs.
 - Type obstacle; Notice Sense Motive (easy, DC 28)
 - *Bypass Skills* Bluff (difficult, DC 38), Diplomacy (challenging, DC 35), Intimidate (very difficult, DC 40), Knowledge (history) (challenging, DC 35), Knowledge (local) (challenging, DC 35), or Knowledge (planes) (challenging, DC 35).
 - *SQ* creature (one jinushigami), limited completion (1 primary participant, any number of assistants), limited occurrence (1)
 - *Effect* Blockade (see *PATHFINDER ROLEPLAYING GAME: BESTLARY 3*); the kami begins as unfriendly, but does not attack the PCs unless its attitude becomes hostile. Each successful skill check made with a bypass skill increases the kami's attitude by one step, while each failure by 5 or more reduces the kami's attitude by one step. If the PCs manage to increase the kami's starting attitude to friendly, it allows them passage into the shrine and apologizes for the trouble it caused them.

Designing Skill Challenges

Use the following steps to design a skill challenge.

Determine the Challenge's Purpose

Before you design anything mechanical about your skill challenge, you must first determine its purpose—what exactly are the players trying to accomplish in the skill challenge? What do they gain if they succeed, and what happens when they fail? These questions correspond directly to the skill challenge's type, goal, completion method, frequency, benefit, and penalty, and ultimately help set the overall theme of the skill challenge. Note that while it helps to determine each of these three elements before designing the skill challenge's mechanics, they ultimately impact the skill challenge's mechanics very little, and therefore can be set aside until later in the skill challenge's design or adjusted to suit new skill encounters at a later time.

Each aspect of the skill challenge that is decided during this



Type: The skill challenge's type notes whether the skill challenge follows the general skill challenge rules, such as those noted above, or uses an alternate subset of rules, such as the chase rules or influence rules.

Goal: The skill challenge's goal is the objective that its participants are attempting to accomplish.

Completion Method: The three types of completion method are movement, progress, and successes. Movementbased skill challenges involve characters trekking from one area to another, progress-based skill challenges reward expertise over proficiency, and success-based skill challenges only concern themselves with the number of successes accrued. Each completion method is explained in-depth on page 07.

Frequency: A skill challenge's frequency is the amount of real time that each cycle of the skill challenge takes. Skill challenges always have one of the following frequencies: 1 round, 1 minute, 10 minutes, 1 hour, or 8 hours. Frequency is explained in-depth on page 12.

Benefit: The benefit is the reward or boon that the participants will earn by completing the skill challenge.

Penalty: The penalty is the consequence that the participants will suffer should they fail to complete the skill challenge.

Determine Base Challenge Rating

Second, determine the base Challenge Rating (CR) of the skill challenge. A skill challenge's CR should always equal the party's Average Party Level (APL), as skill challenges possess a difficulty mechanic that allows GMs to determine how challenging a skill challenge is by posing a number of skill challenges that characters of various APLs can meet with varying degrees of difficulty.

Determine Skills and Skill DCs

After determining the skill challenge's CR, next determine which skills are primary skills for the skill challenge, as well as how difficult it is to earn completion using primary skills and secondary skills. Table: Skill Challenge DCs by CR on page 28 provides five skill DCs per CR that fall into one of five categories: easy, average, challenging, difficult, or very difficult. Primary skills should always have a difficulty that ranges between easy to difficult, while secondary skills should always have a difficulty that is one step higher than the difficulty of the most difficult primary skill. For instance, if the most difficult primary skill is challenging, than the secondary skill DC should be difficult.

Determine Completion

Third, you must determine the amount of completion that characters must accrue in order to clear the skill challenge. Each type of skill challenge uses a specific formula to determine the amount of progress, squares, or successes that must be accrued to clear it, as described below. These values are listed by CR on Table: Completion, Obstacles, & Thresholds by CR on page 29.

Movement: The number of squares needed to clear a movement-based skill challenge varies, but it is never less than 2 + 1/2 of the skill challenge's CR (minimum 2). Typically, the number of squares in a movement-based skill challenge are determined by the top speed of the characters participating in the skill challenge and the number of obstacles in the skill challenge (see the obstacles section on page 16). A good benchmark to shoot for when designing a movement-based skill challenge is having a number of squares between each obstacle equal to 3 cycles worth of movement from a an average character. In most cases, this is 30 feet, or 9 squares per obstacle. However, GMs should use as few or as many squares as they need to create the skill challenge that best suits their campaign.

Determining Obstacles: Rather than require skill checks to earn completion, movement-based skill challenges possess a number of obstacles that characters must bypass in order to progress in the skill challenge. Every movement-based skill challenge has a predetermined number of obstacles based upon its CR. The number of obstacles that a movement-based skill challenge has is typically equal to 2 + 1/3 of the skill challenge's CR (minimum 2), though GMs can add additional thresholds if they need to. Obstacles are explained in-depth on page 16.

Progress: The amount of progress needed to clear a progress-based skill challenge is equal to 3 x the skill challenge's CR (minimum 3).

Successes: The number of successes needed to clear a success-based skill challenge is equal to 2 + 1/2 of the skill challenge's CR (minimum 2).

Determine Skill Bonus

If characters attempting to clear the skill challenge gain any special bonuses on skill checks during the skill challenge, those bonuses (and the skills they apply to) are noted here. Typically, a skill challenge only offers a bonus if that bonus makes sense within the context of the adventure. For example, granting a the PCs a bonus on Knowledge checks during a skill challenge that takes place in a library makes sense, but granting the PCs a bonus on Knowledge checks during a skill challenge that takes place in a prison doesn't. In addition, this bonus may allow some skill checks to be performed untrained, as determined by the GM. Such allowances are also noted in this section.

Determine Optional Elements

Finally, determine whether the skill challenge has any optional elements after all other elements of the skill challenge are decided. This is also when the obstacles for a movementbased skill challenge is decided, despite obstacles being a core element for those kinds of skill challenges. There is no limit to the number of optional elements that can be added to a skill challenge, though some optional elements (especially specific kinds of special qualities) may not be compatible with one another, as noted in their descriptions.

Table: Skill Challenge DCs by CR

Base CR	Easy	Average	Challenging	Difficult	Very Difficult
1 or lower	11	16	18	21	23
2	13	18	20	23	25
3	14	19	21	24	26
4	15	20	22	25	27
5	16	21	23	26	28
6	18	23	25	28	30
7	19	24	26	29	31
8	20	25	27	30	32
9	22	27	29	32	34
10	24	29	31	34	36
11	26	31	33	36	38
12	27	32	34	37	39
13	28	33	35	38	40
14	30	35	37	40	42
15	31	36	38	41	43
16	33	38	40	43	45
17	34	39	41	44	46
18	36	41	43	46	48
19	38	43	45	48	50
20	40	45	47	50	52
21	42	47	49	52	54
22	44	49	51	54	56
23	46	51	53	56	58
24	48	53	55	58	60
25	50	55	57	60	62
26	52	57	59	62	64
27	54	59	61	64	66
28	56	61	63	66	68
29	58	63	65	68	70
30	60	65	67	70	72

Several of the more common optional elements that need special considerations needed when designing them are described below.

Backlashes: A backlash generally produces an effect that is equivalent to that of a spell with a spell level equal to 1 + 1/3 of the skill challenge's CR.

Demerits: Most skill challenges with the demerits optional element allow a maximum of three demerits, though GMs can increase the amount of demerits that characters can accrue.

Failures Allowed: Most skill challenges with the failures allowed optional element allow a number of failures equal to 2 + 1/3 of the skill challenge's CR (minimum 3), though GMs can increase the number of failures that characters can accrue before failing the skill challenge.

SQ: A skill challenge can include any number of special qualities, provided that all special qualities chosen are compatible with one another. A GM can even create her own special qualities for truly unique skill challenges, such as by using the 'special' special quality on page 14 or by creating entirely new special qualities that meet the needs of the scene

she wishes to set with her skill challenge.

When choosing which special qualities to give to a skill challenge, it is helpful to keep in mind the complexity of each special quality. Having several special qualities that each require a PC to make several attack rolls, skill checks, or saving throws might sound appealing, but doing so can slow down the otherwise fast-pace of the skill challenge mechanic, creating a sluggish atmosphere that quickly drains the participants' energy and enthusiasm. The exact number of special qualities that players will tolerate will vary from group to group, so it is often helpful to get a feel for your players and how comfortable they are with complexity before designing particularly complex skill challenges.

Thresholds: The number of thresholds that a skill challenge has is typically equal to 2 + 1/3 of the skill challenge's CR (minimum 2), though GMs can add additional thresholds if they need to. Thresholds are explained in-depth on page 18.

Running Skill Challenges Together

Just as you can combine multiple monsters together to create a



Table: Completion, Obstacles, & Thresholds by CR

CR	Progress	Squares (Minimum)	Successes	Obstacles & Thresholds
1 or lower	3	2	2	2
2	6	3	3	2
3	9	3	3	3
4	12	4	4	3
5	15	4	4	3
6	18	5	5	4
7	21	5	5	4
8	24	6	6	4
9	27	6	6	5
10	30	7	7	5
11	33	7	7	5
12	36	8	8	6
13	39	8	8	6
14	42	9	9	6
15	45	9	9	7
16	48	10	10	7
17	51	10	10	7
18	54	11	11	8
19	57	11	11	8
20	60	12	12	8
21	63	12	12	9
22	66	13	13	9
23	69	13	13	9
24	72	14	14	10
25	75	14	14	10
26	78	15	15	10
27	81	15	15	11
28	84	16	16	11
29	87	16	16	11
30	90	17	17	12

larger, multifaceted combat encounter, you can combine multiple skill challenges together into a large noncombat encounter. When combining two or more skill challenges together, use Table: High CR Equivalencies in Chapter 12 of the *PATHFINDER ROLEPLAYING CORE RULEBOOK* to determine the final CR of the encounter, treating each skill challenge as if it were a separate creature for this purpose. When combining skill challenges together, you can run each skill challenge concurrently or in a chain.

When running skill challenges concurrently, it is easier to manage the skill challenges if each uses the same frequency while it isn't impossible to have one skill challenge with a frequency of 1 round running side by side with a skill challenge with a frequency of 1 minute, this disconnect will often leave players incorrectly thinking that they should deal with the skill challenge with the lower frequency first, because that skill challenge appears to most "faster" during gameplay. Running skill challenges in a chain is much simpler than running them concurrently. Instead of trying to handle both skill challenges at the same time, the second skill challenge simply starts immediately after the first one ends. Both styles of skill challenge can be used to effectively set the stage for a larger noncombat encounter, however.

Skill challenges can also be run as part of combat encounters, in which characters must meet some sort of skillbased goal in addition to combating enemies. In most cases, only progress-based and success-based skill challenges can be run as part of combat encounters, although combat can occur as a result of any type of skill challenge (especially chases and movement-based skill challenges with the creatures special quality). In such skill challenges, the skill challenge's benefit typically gives the PCs some sort of advantage in the battle or weakens their opponents in some fashion.

Take note that some skill challenges will have a very awkward feeling if run together depending upon how they're presented. It might feel odd to have a skill challenge involving scaling a chasm happen at the same time as an influence challenge, but having a dancing contest in the middle of an influence challenge occurring at a gala feels natural. In either case, the GM should strive to provide an atmosphere that is conductive to all skill challenges occurring so that they feel logical and warranted.



Running down enemies or fleeing from powerful foes is a classic fantasy trope, whether one treks across hill and dale or darts between urban alleys and stalls. Chases are powerful transitional encounters that allow the GM an opportunity to create tension, provide exposition, and cause a relocation in scenery and setting.

Chases are a specific type of movement-based skill challenge in which one or more groups of characters compete against the PCs as rivals or enemies. Chases follow the same rules for running them as standard skill challenges (see page 06), but they have a slightly different list of elements and have additional special qualities not found in standard skill challenges. In addition, there are some special actions that are only applicable to chases. Unless otherwise noted, assume that chase challenges follow all of the standard rules associated with movement-based skill challenges, such as the sequence for which characters act during a cycle and how initiative is determined.

Running a Chase

Although chases follow the same rules for running them as standard skill challenges, one noteworthy difference exists the presence of opposition. In every chase, the PCs must contend with one or more rivals, be they an organized group, a lone individual, or some sort of force or object. Chase challenges are defined by the relation between the PCs and their opposition, specifically in regards to what they hope to accomplish during the skill challenge. Except where noted otherwise, the opposition follows the same rules as the PCs when determining how they act during a cycle in a chase.

Characters can participate in a chase for up to 8 hours each day without suffering any ill effects. After 8 hours of participation, characters that require sleep must rest for 8 hours because of the extreme exertion required to participate in a chase for such a long period of time. Characters can attempt to ignore this limitation by making a forced march (see Forced March, page 31).

Types of Chases

The goal of every chase is to clear it by completing a certain objective before the opposition completes their objective. A chase's type represents the relationship between the PCs and the opposition, and determines how those groups interact with one another. Each chase lists one of two basic types of chase—pursuits or races. This section summarizes these two types of chases, including the interactions between the chase's participants, then details how to use them.

Pursuit

Pursuits feature one character (either the PCs or their opposition) fleeing from the other character, who is attempting to either capture or terminate them. Characters who are fleeing are called quarries, while characters who are tracking down the quarries are called pursuers.

In a pursuit, the pursuers and the quarry have different conditions that determine when they successfully complete the chase. The quarries follow the standard rules for movement-based skill challenges—they clear the chase when they have advanced the number of squares listed in the chase's completion entry. Pursuers, however, have a different objective. They need to incapacitate or outright kill all quarries before they can advance the number of squares listed in the chase's completion entry. Acceptable methods of completing this requirement vary from chase to chase, but this typically requires rendering all quarries helpless or dead.

Race

Races pit the PCs and their opposition against one another as they compete to be the first character to reach a specific location or complete an objective. All characters participating in a race are called racers.

In a race, both sets of racers follow the standard rules for movement-based skill challenges—they clear the skill challenge when they have advanced the number of squares listed in the chase's completion entry. The main difference between races and standard movement-based skill challenges is that only the first group of racers to advance the number of squares listed in the chase's entry clears the chase—any other groups still participating in the chase automatically lose the skill challenge, even if they eventually reach the requisite square count.

Special Actions

In addition to the list of special actions that you can perform during a standard movement-based skill challenge, there are several special actions that you can take during a chase that are unique to this type of skill challenge. This section discusses all of the various actions that you can perform during a chase other than attempting to earn completion or using one of the special actions detailed in the standard skill challenge rules (see page 09).

Create a Disadvantage

During a chase, a character can attempt to create a disadvantage for the opposition as a half-cycle action. Creating a disadvantage follows this sequence:

- The character states how she wishes to create a disadvantage, such as by pushing a stall cart into the middle of the road or by cutting the ropes of a rope bridge.
- 2. The GM provides a list of at least two different rolls or checks that the character can use to create the stated

disadvantage. This can be an ability check, an attack roll, or a skill check. The GM specifies which abilities or skills are used to create the disadvantage, and she may also limit what type of attack rolls can be made to create the disadvantage (such as melee attack roll or ranged attack roll).

- 3. If the character still wishes to create the disadvantage, she chooses one of the options presented by the GM and spends her half-cycle action creating the disadvantage by rolling the required roll or check.
- 4. If the character succeeds on her roll or check, she creates a disadvantage. If the character fails on her roll or check, she does not create a disadvantage. Characters can gain additional bonuses or penalties from succeeding exceptionally well or doing exceptionally poorly on their attempts to create a disadvantage, as described below.

The standard DC to create a disadvantage using an attack roll or skill check is equal to 15 + the skill challenge's CR, while the standard DC to create a disadvantage using an ability check is 15 + 1/2 the skill challenge's CR. The GM can increase or decrease this DC by up to 5 to represent disadvantages that are easy to create and those that are more difficult to create. Whenever a character succeeds on a skill check to create a disadvantage, her disadvantage gains a square count equal to her current square count, her current square count +1, or her current square count -1 (her choice). If she chooses to place a disadvantage at a square count that she has not advanced to, she is subjected to that disadvantage herself when she attempts to advance to that square count.

Disadvantages are created at the GM's discretion. The GM may rule that a given square count is ill-suited for a particular type of disadvantage, or she may decide that a character cannot use the environment or resources at hand in order to create a meaningful disadvantage.

Characters can create two different types of disadvantages an augmentation or a hurdle. The types of disadvantages are described below.

Augmentation: An augmentation improves the difficulty of an existing obstacle (including a hurdle created by another character, see below) by increasing its bypass DC, improving its bonus on attack rolls, or increasing its save DC. A character can only attempt to augment an obstacle if her square count is within 1 square of the obstacle's square count, and if she is aware of the obstacle. Her skill check made to augment the obstacle also represents her attempts to bypass it herself; if her ability check, attack roll, or skill check fails, she is immediately affected by the obstacle's effects as if she was in its square count and failed to bypass it.

If her check succeeds, she chooses one of the following statistics: attack rolls, bypass DC, or save DC. She grants the obstacle a +2 bonus to the chosen statistic the next time that a character other than herself is attacked (if attack rolls are chosen), attempts to bypass the obstacle (if bypass DC is chosen), or attempts a saving throw against the obstacle's effects (if save DC is chosen). For every 5 by which her roll or check to create a disadvantage exceeds its DC, she either chooses an additional statistic to receive this benefit, increases the number of attack rolls, bypass checks, or saving throws that a chosen bonus applies against by 1, or increases the bonus granted to a previously chosen bonus receives by +1 (maximum +4 to any one statistic).

Hurdle: A hurdle creates a physical obstruction that hinders characters from being able to advance past the disadvantage's square count. Hurdles act as obstacles (see Obstacles, page 16), except they use the result of the ability check, attack roll, or skill check that created them as their bypass DC. The GM determines what type of obstacle is created based upon the character's overall goals in creating the obstacle and how they went about creating it. Typically, most characters create a hazard or an obstruction that is either a blockade obstacle or a difficult terrain obstacle generally, these are the simplest obstacles to create using whatever improvised tools and materials are at hand. Casting a spell to create an obstacle results in either a magic obstacle or a spell obstacle, although some specific spells create other types of obstacles (such as *wall of iron* creating an obstruction obstacle).

Characters may be able to set up more elaborate obstacles, given GM permission, if they take multiple actions to do so.

Forced March

During a chase, all participants can act for up to 8 hours each day without penalty. For every 8 hours of active participation that a character makes during a chase, she must rest for at least 8 hours (see below). A character can circumvent this requirement by making a forced march. For each consecutive hour she participates in a chase without race beyond 8 hours, each character must attempt a Constitution check (DC 10, +2 per extra hour of participation). If the check fails, the character takes 1d6 points of nonlethal damage. A character who takes any nonlethal damage from a forced march becomes fatigued, and eliminating the nonlethal damage also eliminates the fatigue. Characters who are immune to nonlethal damage automatically succeed on Constitution checks made to take additional cycles during the chase.

Obscure Trail

In a pursuit, a character who is participating as a quarry can sacrifice her ability to earn completion to make it more difficult for the pursuers to track her. When obscuring her trail, the quarry rolls a Stealth check and notes her square count when making this check. In order to advance beyond any square count in which she obscured her trail, the pursuers must succeed at a Survival check to follow the character's trail (see Track Quarry, page 32). If multiple characters in the same group use this action, one character (the primary obscurer) makes the Stealth check and the rest (the assistants) use the aid another action to attempt to assist her. Using Stealth during a chase to obscure one's trail is a half-cycle action.

Recovery

Chases (especially long-distance ones) are high-energy

activities, and characters participating in gruelingly long chases often find the need to rest at some point during the chase itself. This is especially true during long-distance chases, whose cycles represent 1 hour intervals of time. (For more information on long-distance chases and shortdistance chases, see the Frequency, below).

When a character rests, she elects to take no actions during the chase except to recuperate. She cannot take strenuous actions of any sort while resting, which includes actions made to gain an advantage, create a disadvantage, track, and earn completion among others. A character who rests for at least 1 minute regains the ability to use the run action during the skill challenge. A character who rests for at least 1 hour reduces any instances of the exhaustion condition that she has to fatigued. A character who rests for at least 8 hours heals ability damage and hit point damage, removes any instances of the fatigued condition that the character has, and allows her to prepare spells normally. A character who rests for at least 24 hours heals twice as many points of ability damage and hit point damage then if she had rested for only 8 hours. The amount of healing that characters receive from resting during a skill challenge is the same as if they had rested outside of a skill challenge (1 hp x character level and 1 point of ability damage for each damaged ability score).

Track Quarry

During a pursuit with a frequency of 1 minute or more, the pursuers must track their quarry in order to earn completion. At the GM's discretion, the pursuers in a chase with a frequency of 1 round may also need to track their quarry in order to earn completion if their square count is 10 or more squares behind the square count of their quarries.

The primary tracker is the character who makes all skill checks to track the quarries. Usually, the primary tracker makes Survival checks to track her quarry, but some abilities may allow other skills to be used instead, such as the perceptive tracking rogue talent. If the pursuers are comprised of multiple characters, other pursuers can assist the primary tracker using the aid another skill.

Tracking quarry is a half-cycle action, although a character can take a –5 penalty on her Survival check to attempt to track as a swift action instead. A character with the swift tracker ability (such as an 8th leveel ranger) can track her quarry as a swift action without taking this penalty on her Survival check. If the primary tracker fails to track her quarry, the pursuers spend the rest of the cycle trying to find their quarries' trail and cannot earn any completion during that cycle. If the primary tracker succeeds, the pursuers can earn completion as normal during that round during the skill challenge.

The base DC to track the quarry is either 5, 10, 15, or 20, depending on the type of ground dominate in the chase (very soft, soft, firm, or hard, respectively). If a primary tracker attempts to track quarries who are days ahead of her, this DC increases by 1 for every day beyond the quarries

that the pursuers are, but it decreases by 1 for every three members who travel together as quarries.

Opposition

The key feature of a chase encounter is the opposition—NPCs who directly interfere with the PCs' attempts to clear the skill challenge. In a pursuit, the opposition is either the characters fleeing from the PCs (assuming the PCs are the pursuers) or the characters attempting to capture or terminate them (assuming the PCs are the quarry). In a race, the opposition competes against the PCs in an attempt to beat them to the end of the race.

The opposition is never referenced in a chase's stat block, but nevertheless it is important for the GM to have stat blocks for the opposition to determine their skill check bonuses and special abilities. Generally speaking, an opposition whose APL is 1 less then that of the PCs reduces the chase's CR by 1, while an opposition whose APL is 1 more then that of the PCs increases the chase's CR by 1. If the PCs beat the opposition in the chase, they receive only the XP award for clearing the skill challenge—do not award them the XP awards associated with defeating the NPCs unless the PCs also managed to defeat those foes in a combat encounter.

Elements of a Chase

All chases, regardless of type, have the following elements: CR*, type, goal*, primary skills*, secondary skills*, frequency, completion (movement-only)*, benefit*, penalty*, and obstacles*. Some chases might also include optional elements, such as demerits or special qualities. Elements marked with an asterisk (*) use the same rules as standard skill challenges, as described on page 12.

Type

Chase challenges are movement-based skill challenges in which opposing characters compete to be the first to complete the skill challenge. Chase skill challenges are further divided into two subtypes—pursuits and races. In a pursuit, one or more participants attempts to apprehend or slay a second group, whose ultimate goal is to evade their pursuers. In a race, participants attempt to be the first to reach the end of the skill challenge.

Frequency

The amount of time represented by one cycle varies from chase to chase based upon theme, and a chase's frequency notes the amount of time that each cycle represents. Cycles in a chase can be measured in one of four specific time intervals: 1 round, 1 minute, 10 minutes, or 1 hour. Cycles with a frequency of 1 hour are known as long-distance chases, while cycles with a frequency of 1 round, 1 minute, or 10 minutes are known as short-distance chases.

A chase's frequency limits which abilities and effects are applicable to the chase. Each cycle that passes reduces the duration by the amount of time indicated by its frequency. For instance, each effect active on a character who is participating



in a chase with a frequency of 10 minutes would have its duration reduced every cycle by 10 minutes. As a general rule, an ability or effect cannot have a meaningful impact upon a chase if its duration is less than the chase's frequency, for it is unable to last for the entire cycle.

SQ (Optional Element)

Chases can possess numerous special qualities—specific qualities that use standard rules that are referenced (but not repeated) in skill challenge stat blocks. All chases can possess any special quality available to a standard movement-based skill challenge (see SQ, page 16), and all chases have the advantage special quality. Additionally, the surprise start special quality functions differently in certain types of chases, as described below.

Surprise Start: Perceptive characters sometimes gain the ability to act during a chase before the chase officially begins. The surprise start special quality functions the same in chases as in standard movement-based skill challenges unless the chase is a pursuit. In a pursuit, the quarries automatically act during the surprise round, and any distance they move is increased as if every character acting in the surprise round succeeded on a skill check to gain an advantage, up to the value indicated in the chase's advantage entry.

The pursuers can attempt a skill check to act during the surprise round as normal.

Chase Stat Block

Chases are organized into stat blocks, almost identically to standard movement-based skill challenges. This is where all of the information needed to run a chase can be found. A chase stat block is organized as follows. Note that in cases where a line in a chase stat block has no value, that line is omitted.

Name and CR: The chase's name is presented first, along with its Challenge Rating (CR). A chase's CR is a numerical indication of what the Average Party Level (APL) of a group of characters should be before they attempt the skill challenge.

XP: Listed here are the total experience points that the PCs earn for clearing the chase.

Type: This line notes the type of chase that is being conducted: pursuit or race, as well as long-distance or short-distance.

Goal: This is a brief description of what the PCs and their opposition are trying to accomplish during the chase.

Primary Skills: This lists the skills that the PCs can use to gain an advantage during the chase, as well as the difficulty and skill check DC associated with each skill.

Secondary Skills: This lists the difficulty and skill DC of all skill checks that are attempted to gain an advantage that are not primary skills. The GM is the final arbiter of which skills can be used to gain an advantage during the chase.

Frequency: This lists the amount of time that passes between each cycle during the chase.

Circumstance Bonus (Optional Element): Some chases provide special bonuses to certain skills, which are noted in this entry.

Languages (Optional Element): If the chase has this optional element, this notes any languages that the PCs must be able to understand in order to gain an advantage during the chase. Some chases with the languages optional element only require characters to understand the listed languages when making specific skill checks, while others don't require complete fluency. Such exceptions are also noted in this entry.

Time Pressure (Optional Element): This lists the number of cycles that the PCs have to finish the chase. If they fail to clear it in the listed number of cycles, they automatically fail the chase.

Completion: The ultimate goal of every chase is to complete it, and this outlines the chase's completion method (movement) and the amount of completion needed to successfully clear it.

Backlash (Optional Element): This entry notes any negative effects that the PCs take when they fail to gain an advantage towards clearing a chase or gaining an advantage by 5 or more.

Demerits (Optional Element): This entry notes the number of demerits that the PCs can accrue during the chase. A demerit is accrued anytime that a character fails a skill check to gain an advantage.

Failures Allowed (Optional Element): This entry notes the total number of failures that the PCs can make during the chase before they automatically fail it.

SQ (Optional Element): This entry notes any special qualities or rules that the chase has.

Benefit: This is the reward or boon that the PCs gain for completing the chase.

Penalty: This is the consequence that the PCs incur should they fail to complete the chase.

Obstacles: This lists the obstacles that the PCs must overcome in order to successfully clear the chase.

Sample Chases

The following chases were designing using the rules described above.

APPREHEND THE TRAITORS

CR 5

XP 1,600

Chase (short-distance pursuit)

Goal The PCs have been accused of treason, and must flee the city before they are apprehended by the king's guard.

SKILLS

Primary Skills Acrobatics (average, DC 21), Bluff (challenging, DC 23), Climb (average, DC 21), Diplomacy (challenging, DC 23) Secondary Skills Difficult, DC 26

Frequency 1 round COMPLETION

Movement 60

SQ advantage 3, surprise start (Perception [difficult, DC 26], Sense Motive [difficult, DC 26])

Benefit The PCs manage to slip away from the king's guards.

Penalty The PCs fail to escape the king's guards. They are brought back to the castle and tossed into the dungeon to await their fate.

OBSTACLES

- 1 Square+ The guards call for the immediate arrest of the PCs, and their frantic demeanor makes the city's inhabitants suspicious of their actions and intentions.
 - Type hazard; Notice Sense Motive (easy, DC 16)
 - Bypass Skills Bluff (average, DC 21), Diplomacy (average, DC 21), Disguise (challenging, DC 23), Intimidate (average, DC 21); Secondary Skills Difficult, DC 26

SQ Language (Common)

- Effect difficult terrain; If the PCs fail their bypass check by 5 or more, the crowd recognizes their wanted status and prevents them from moving, causing them to be unable to earn squares towards clearing the skill challenge for that cycle.
- 30 Squares The PCs wander into a bazaar whose colorful tents create a dizzying maze roughly 100 square feet in size. Type obstruction; Notice Survival (easy, DC 16)
 - Bypass Skills Perception (difficult, DC 26), Sense Motive (difficult, DC 26), Survival (challenging, DC 23); Secondary Skills Very Difficult, DC 28
 - Effect blockade (cloth; hardness 0, 2,400 hp; 1 success); Every 10 hit points of damage that the PCs deal to the obstacle increases their opposition's maximum advantage during their next turn by 1, as the screams and shouts of the merchants whose wares the PCs are slashing through alert the guard to the PCs' presence.
- 45 Squares The guards have established a blockade to prevent the PCs from escaping.

Type obstruction; Notice Perception (easy, DC 16)

- Bypass Skills Acrobatics (difficult, DC 26), Climb (challenging, DC 23), Ride (difficult, DC 26), Stealth (difficult, DC 26); Secondary Skills Very Difficult, DC 28
- Effect blockade (wood; hardness 5, 10 hp; 1 success); At the each of each cycle, if any PC has a square count of 45, the guards manning the blockade attempt to arrest that PC by making a grapple check (CMB +10, CMD 26). If the guards succeed, the PC becomes grappled. Grappled PCs become pinned on subsequent rounds, then tied up.

RACE TO THE TOMB

CR 5

Chase (long-distance race)

Goal The PCs must race a rival gang of treasure hunters to an ancient tomb so they can claim its treasures for themselves.

SKILLS

XP 1,600

Primary Skills Climb (average, DC 21), Survival (average, DC 21), Swim (average, DC 21)

Secondary Skills Difficult, DC 26 Frequency 1 hour COMPLETION

Movement 12

SQ advantage 1

- **Benefit** The PCs reach the tomb first, giving them the opportunity to raid its treasures before their rivals.
- **Penalty** The PCs have reached the tomb too late, and will likely have to assault their foe's base of operations in order to find the treasure they seek.

OBSTACLES

Square 3 A massive thunderstorm is rolling into the valley where the tomb is hidden.

Type hazard; Notice Survival (average, DC 21)

- *Bypass Skills* Climb (difficult, DC 26), Knowledge (geography) (challenging, DC 23), Knowledge (nature) (difficult, DC 26), Survival (challenging, DC 23); *Secondary Skills* Very Difficult, DC 28
- *Effect* hazard (thunderstorm; On a failed bypass check, there is a 50% chance for the next 1d4 rounds that any attempt to earn squares that the character makes fails as a result of the driving winds and heavy rains. Additionally, each character must make a DC 15 Reflex save or take 6d6 points of electricity damage as they are struck by lightning.)
- **Square 6–8** The PCs must scale the side of a large mountain in order to reach the hidden tomb.
 - *Type* hazard; *Notice* Knowledge (geography) (easy, DC 16), Knowledge (nature) (easy, DC 16), or Survival (easy, DC 16)
 - Bypass Skills Acrobatics (challenging, DC 23), Climb (challenging, DC 23), Survival (difficult, DC 26); Secondary Skills Very Difficult, DC 28
 - SQ critical fumble (character loses 1d4 squares of movement, to a minimum square count of 5)
 - Effect difficult terrain
- **Square 9** The PCs have reached the entrance to the tomb, only to find it trapped.
 - *Type* peril; *Notice* Knowledge (engineering) (difficult, DC 26), Perception (challenging, DC 23)
 - Bypass Skills Disable Device (difficult, DC 26)
 - SQ trap-like
 - *Effect* Melee Atk dart +9 (1d4+2 plus poison); multiple targets (all characters with a square count of 9); wyvern poison—injury; *save* DC 17; *frequency* 1/round for 6 rounds; *effect* 1d4 Con damage; *cure* 2 consecutive saves.

Designing a Chase

As chase encounters essentially run like standard movementbased skill challenges, designing a chase is similar to designing a standard skill challenge. When designing a chase, you follow the same steps and guidelines as you would when designing a movement-based skill challenge with one exception—you must design NPCs to serve as the opposition. Tips and guidelines for designing appropriate NPCs for a chase are detailed below.

Determine Opposition

When your PCs are participating in a chase, you must design their opposition. You can design your PCs' opposition either before or after designing the skill challenge itself. Ideally, you'll want to assign NPCs to your skill challenge who stand a fair chance at winning, but who aren't so competent that the PCs stand little chance of defeating them.

Although having full stat blocks for the opposition can be helpful if your PCs get into a brawl with them (and could be necessary based upon the effects of the chase's obstacles), the most important part of designing good opposition for the PCs is determining their skill bonuses. When choosing the opposition's skill bonuses, the opposition should be able to succeed on most easy skill checks by rolling a 5 or higher and on most average skill checks by rolling a 10 or higher. The opposition should be able to succeed on at least one-fourth of challenging skill checks by rolling a 10 or higher, and should be able to succeed on at least one difficult skill check by rolling a 10 or higher. The best way to determine the minimum bonus needed to accomplish this is to reference Table: Skill Challenge DCs by CR on page 28 and subtract the minimum d20 result that you want to result in a success from the skill DC for the desired difficulty and use the remainder as the opposition's DC.

For instance, if your PCs are participating in a CR 5 chase (such as the ones on the previous page) and you want to create opposition for them, you would begin by consulting Table: Skill Challenge DCs by CR and listing the skill DCs for each skill check difficulty for that CR. In the case of CR 5 encounters, the target DCs are easy (DC 16), average (DC 21), challenging (DC 23), and difficult (DC 26). To determine an appropriate bonus for easy DCs, take the easy DC associated with the skill challenge's CR (in this example, DC 16) and subtract 5. The remainder, 11, represents a good target bonus for the opposition, while will allow them to reliably clear easy skill checks in the skill challenge. Continue this process for each remaining difficulty and desired result (rolling a 10 or higher on average DCs, rolling a 10 or higher on challenging DCs, and rolling a 10 or higher on difficult DCs). This will give you a good list of bonuses to build for when designing the NPCs, or you could simply note the target bonuses and the skills they apply to and use them that way.

Sometimes, you may not want a skill challenge that is fair for the PCs. For instance, when the PCs are being pursued by a more powerful foe or are attempting to beat a team of amateurs to a location before they can get themselves hurt or worse. In such instances, you should adjust the CR of the skill challenge accordingly, reducing the CR of the skill challenge by 1 if the opposition is weaker than the PCs or increasing the CR of the skill challenge if they are more powerful or skilled. This may also apply to a powerful opponent who is inconvenienced by the nature of the skill challenge (such as a massive troll lumbering after the PCs in a forest). In such instances it is acceptable, even encouraged, to give the opposition circumstantial bonuses or penalties that place them on more even footing with the PCs.




From carnival amusements to international competitions, many of life's greatest events revolve around humanity's need for competition, and few activities are more indicative of this desire than the myriad of contests that humanity indulges in. Contests often provide fun and interesting ways for characters to show off their skills outside of combat, but they just as easily can serve as major plot points that draw the PCs to certain locations.

Contests are a specific type of skill challenge in which one or more characters compete against one another in a structured game whose rules are predetermined and often standardized. Contests follow the same rules for running them as standard skill challenges (see page 06) but they have a different list of elements and special qualities, many of which are not found in standard skill challenges. In addition, there are some special actions that are only applicable to contests. Unless otherwise noted, assume that contests follow all of the standard rules associated with skill challenges, such as the sequence for which characters act during a cycle and how initiative is determined.

Running a Contest

Contests follow many of the same general rules as standard skill challenges and use similar terminology, but they possess a number of noteworthy differences that make them distinct. Characters participating in a contest act in turns on a regular cycle of actions, and the amount of time that each cycle of action tames is determined by the contest's frequency. Contests follow this sequence:

- 1. When the contest begins, all characters roll initiative.
- 2. During a standard skill challenge, all characters act in an order determined by their skill challenge's initiative quality, which is listed under the contest's initiative quality (see below).
- 3. When every character eligible to act during the cycle has had a turn, or when the round forcibly ends, the next cycle begins as described by the contest's initiative quality, until a side wins the skill challenge.

Unlike most skill challenges, contests do not have skill DCs that scale to match the abilities of its participants. Like chases, they feature opposition—rival characters who are also attempting to win the contest (see page 42). As a result, most skill checks made to earn completion in a contest are opposed by skill checks made by the opposition, meaning that contests are more defined by the relationship between the contestants' abilities than the arbitrary difficulty of the contest itself, as well as the unique array of rules that accompany each type of contest. In addition to the opposition, contests feature a unique completion method called points (see page 39).

Although characters can participate in a contest indefinitely, too much exertion (either physical or mental) is tiring. Each hour that a character participates in a contest without resting for at least 8 hours, she must attempt a Constitution check (DC 10, +1 for each previous check attempted). Failing this check causes her to become fatigued. If she is already fatigued, she becomes exhausted instead.

The Contest Cycle

Each cycle during a contest represents a specific amount of time that varies from contest to contest—this is listed in the contest's frequency. A cycle normally allows each character (or each team of characters) involved in the contest to act, but the order that characters act in during a cycle is determined by the contest's initiative quality (see below).

During her turn, a character makes an initial play as a full-cycle action. This is typically a skill check to earn completion (see Points, page 39), but the initial play can differ based upon the rules of the contest being played. Once a character makes this initial play, all other characters react to the initial play by making one or more play reactions. Each character participating in a contest can make a number of play reactions during each contestant's turn equal to the number of attacks of opportunity that they could normally make during a single round in combat. The reactions that can be made in response to the initial play of the contest vary from contest to contest. Actions that take half-cycle or cycle actions in one contest may be able to be performed as reactions during another contest, and reactions themselves can take as long as a cycle action or as little as a swift or immediate action to perform. They are an abstraction that represents other character's abilities to quickly react to the dynamic conditions of the contest.

When relevant, cycle actions, full cycle actions, and halfcycle action function the same in contests as they do in standard skill challenges (see the Running a Skill Challenge section on page 06).

Initiative Qualities

A contest's initiative quality determines how turns rotate during the skill challenge. Listed below are several common initiative qualities used by well-known contests.

Possession Initiative: Possession initiative is only used in contests where contestants are arranged in teams of 2 or more. In a contest with possession initiative, all characters on every team roll initiative normally, then determine which character on each team has the highest initiative result. These characters (those with the highest initiative results from each team) are then compared to determine the initiative order of the teams—the team of the character with the highest initiative is team 1, the team with the character with the second highest initiative is team 2, and so on. During the contest, team 1 starts with possession over the initiative count. Characters on team 1 act in sequential order from highest initiative to lowest initiative. When all contestants on team 1 have acted, the cycle ends and the next cycle begins, starting with the character on team 1 with the highest initiative. Team 1 continues to act to the exclusion of all other teams for as long as they have possession of initiative. Each contest with this initiative quality notes how possession is transferred between teams. When possession transfers to a different team, that team acts to the exclusion of all others, starting with the contestant on the team with the highest initiative, as described above. Typically, the last player to act on each team is recorded when possession transfers, and the next time that team gains possession initiative begins with the next player in the sequence, then proceeds as normal.

For example, if Kyr'shin and Dyne play baseball against Shira and Immodine, and Kyr'shin rolls a 12, Dyne a 14, Shira a 16, and Immodine an 11, first the characters with the highest initiative on each team are determined (Dyne and Shira). Since Shira has the higher initiative, her team becomes team 1, Dyne's team becomes team 2, and Shira's team gains possession of initiative. As a result, each cycle Shira takes the first term (Team 1, highest initiative), followed by Immodine (Team 1, second highest initiative). After Immodine takes her turn, the cycle ends, and the next cycle begins with Shira's turn. This continues until Dyne's team manages to strike out three members of Shira's team, at which point Team 2 gains possession of initiative), followed by Kyr'shin (Team 2, second highest initiative).

Rotational Initiative: Rotational initiative is only used in contests where contestants are arranged in teams of 2 or more. In a contest with rotational initiative, all characters on every team roll initiative normally, then determine which character on each team has the highest initiative result. These characters (those with the highest initiative results from each team) are then compared to determine the initiative order of the teams—the team of the character with the highest initiative is team 1, the team with the character with the second highest initiative is team 2, and so on.

During each cycle, turns cycle first between teams, then between characters based on their initiative result on that team. For instance, the characters on each team act first by order of team (team 1 goes first, team 2 goes second, and so on). Next, the characters on each team with the second highest initiative acts by order of team, and so on. When all contestants have acted, the cycle ends and the next cycle begins.

For example, if Kyr'shin and Dyne play badminton against Shira and Immodine, and Kyr'shin rolls a 12, Dyne a 14, Shira a 16, and Immodine an 11, first the characters with the highest initiative on each team are determined (Dyne and Shira). Since Shira has the higher initiative, her team becomes team 1 and Dyne's team becomes team 2. As a result, each cycle Shira takes the first term (Team 1, highest initiative), followed by Dyne (Team 2, highest initiative). Then Immodine takes her turn (Team 1, second highest initiative), then finally Kyr'shin acts (Team 2, second highest initiative). After Kyr'shin takes his turn, the cycle ends, and the next cycle begins with Shira's turn.

Standard Initiative: In a contest with standard initiative, all characters act in sequential order from highest initiative to lowest initiative. When all contestants have acted, the cycle ends and the next cycle begins.

For example, if Kyr'shin and Dyne play pig wrestling against Shira and Immodine, and Kyr'shin rolls a 12, Dyne a 14, Shira a 16, and Immodine an 11, first the characters with the highest initiative on each team are determined (Dyne and Shira). Since Shira has the higher initiative, she acts first, followed by Dyne, then Kyr'shin, and finally Immodine. After Immodine takes her turn, the cycle ends, and the next cycle begins with Shira's turn.

Types of Contests

At their core, all contests are essentially structured forms of childhood games that any character can participate in. As a result, contests come in myriad types with intricate, unique rules. A contest's type represents the general strategies needed to successfully win the game. This section summarizes ten of different contests. Rules discussing how to play different types of contests appear on the following pages.

Deterministic Strategy Contests

In a deterministic contest, individuals or teams of individuals use strategy to calculate plays. Deterministic strategy contests also possess one subtype: perfect or imperfect. In an imperfect deterministic strategy contest, one or more elements are left unobservable to each player, such as a contestant being disallowed from viewing her opponent's position or cards. In a perfect deterministic strategy contest, both players are permitted to observe all elements of the game. All deterministic contests lack random elements, such as dice rolls or shuffled cards. Deterministic strategy games rely on high-level planning skills, mastery of the game, and intelligence. Examples of imperfect deterministic strategy games include catapult and duplicate bridge, while examples of perfect deterministic strategy games include chess, go, and mancala.

Grapple Contests

In a grapple contest, individuals or teams of equal players take turns grappling one another with the intent of pinning their opponent to score points. Grapple contests are hands-on and focus on physical strength and strategy. Examples include all types of wrestling (such as arm wresting and thumb wrestling).

Invasion Contests

In an invasion contest, teams of equal players aim to attack an opponent's territory in order to score points. Invasion contests are fast-paced and focus on teamwork, keeping possession, scoring, and defending. Examples include basketball, football, handball, hockey, and rugby.

Judgement Contests

In a judgement contest, individuals or teams of equal players attempt to present their best work, be it a craft or a performance routine, to a panel of one or more judges, who grade them based upon the quality of their performance. Each judgment contest focuses on a specific topic and includes a number of judges ranging from one to four. Judges award points based upon the quality of each contestant's performance. Judgment contests are slowly paced and often stressful, and they emphasize quality over mere success. Examples include hide and seek, ice skating, pie making contests, singing competitions, and talent shows.

Momentum Contests

In a momentum skill contest, individuals or teams of equal players move their bodies to a specific pattern or rhythm determined by the contest to score points. Momentum games are fast-paced and focus on precise control of the contestant's body. Examples include dance offs, hopscotch, and skip rope.



Net/Wall Contests

In a net/wall contest, individuals or teams of equal players send an object towards a target area that the opponent is defending with the goal of making the object land in the target area while making it difficult for the opponent to return the object. Net/ wall contests always feature a structure (usually the titular net or wall) that divides the target area into scorable zones or that acts as a zone of transition between contestants. Examples include badminton, racquet ball, tennis, and volleyball.

Recollection Contests

In a recollection contest, individuals or teams of equal players attempt to remember or recall information to score points. Recollection contests also possess one subtype: memory or trivia. In a memory recollection contest, contestants are shown a specific image or given a specific sequence, wait several moments, then are asked to recall the information given to them to score points. In a trivia recollection contest, contestants are asked a question, then must provide the correct response to score points. When a contestant fails to answer correctly in a recollection contest, opponents are often able to "steal" those questions in order to score additional points. Recollection games emphasize learning, information recall, and memorization. Examples include memory and trivia.

Striking/Fielding Contests

In a striking/fielding contest, teams of equal players strike an object before running to a target area. Participants attempt

to prevent their opponents from scoring by retrieving the object and returning it to stop the play. Striking/fielding games are fast-paced and focus on accuracy, speed, and teamwork. Examples include baseball, cricket, foursquare, and softball.

Stochastic Strategy Contests

In a stochastic strategy contest, individuals or teams of individuals create and adapt strategies to calculate plays based upon random elements, such as shuffled cards or rolled dice. Stochastic strategy contests also possess one subtype: perfect or imperfect. In an imperfect stochastic strategy contest, one or more elements are left unobservable to each player, such as a contestant being disallowed from viewing her opponent's position or cards. In a perfect stochastic strategy contest, both players are permitted to observe all elements of the game. Stochastic strategy games rely heavily on chance and probability, but they also

involve high-level planning skills, mastery of the game, and intelligence. Examples of imperfect stochastic strategy games include blackjack, mahjonh, and poker, while examples of perfect stochastic strategy games include backgammon and yahtzee.

Target Contests

In a target contest, individuals or teams of equal players throw, slide, or strike an object with the goal of having the object land closest to or within a designated target to score points. Target contests also possess one subtype: opposed or unopposed. In an opposed target contest, opponents attempt to block contestants from scoring points. In an unopposed target contest, opponents are unable to block contestants. Target games are methodical and precise, and focus on accuracy, execution, scoring, and sometimes blocking. Examples of opposed target games included curling and shuffleboard, while examples of unopposed target games include archery, bowling, horseshoes, and golf.

Completion Methods

As with all skill challenges, the goal of a contest is to clear it by performing a number of specific tasks relevant to the challenge. All contests use the same completion method, which is different from those used by standard skill challenges. This section summarizes how completion is earned during a contest, then details how to use it.

Points

Point-based skill challenges (henceforth called contests) award points to contestants when specific objectives are accomplished. Contests measure completion in points, an abstraction that compares one team's success in the contest to that of their opposition (see page 42). Point-based completion is divided into two subcategories—accumulation and casualties. These subcategories describe the bases for determining how points are managed during the contest (see below).

All contests list a scoring event (the conditions under which points are earned or lost, as appropriate), as well as which skills are used to earn completion during the contest and the base DC for those checks. Note that in a contest, the base DC usually represents the difficulty of attempting to score. This is usually fairly easy, and contests typically don't have a base DC to score that is higher than DC 20 because the difficulty of a contest is derived not from the act of scoring, but the presence of the opposition. As a result, most skill checks to earn completion are opposed checks, but a skill check to earn completion that fails to beat the scoring event's base DC does not earn any points, even if the result is higher than the opposition's opposed roll.

Unlike most skill challenges, some contests require ability checks, melee attack rolls, or ranged attack rolls to score points instead of actual skill checks. For all purposes, ability checks and attack rolls count as skill checks when determining how they interact with all aspects of the contest, including any special qualities it has.

Automatic Successes and Failures: When a character makes a skill check to earn point and gets a natural 20 (the d20 shows 20), she succeeds regardless of the skill check's DC. Unlike other skill challenges, characters who get a natural 20 on a skill check to earn completion do not score a "threat" unless the skill challenge has the critical success optional element (see page 42).

Subcategories of Points-Based Completion

All skill challenges that use a points-based completion method are divided into one of the following subcategories, which determines how points are managed during the contest.

Accumulation: In a points-based accumulation contest, a team earns points when a scoring event occurs. Sample scoring events include landing an object into a specific target area (as in badminton), moving from one target area to another target area (as in baseball) or simply by beating an opponent at an opposed skill check (as in chess). Whenever a character succeeds on a skill check to earn completion, the number of points earned is listed in the skill challenge's scoring events entry. The winner of a points-based accumulation contest is either the first team to reach a specific point total or the team with the most points after all scoring intervals have ended.

Casualties: In a point-based casualties contest, a team loses points when a scoring event occurs. Sample scoring events usually involving losing game pieces (as in catapult or chess). Teams start with a specific number of points, and whenever a character succeeds on a skill check to earn completion, the number of points that the opposition loses is listed in the skill challenge's scoring events entry. The winner of a points-based casualty contest is the last team to have at least 1 point remaining.

Special Actions

In addition to the list of special actions that you can perform during a standard skill challenge, there are several special actions that you can take during a contest that are unique to this type of skill challenge. This section discusses all of the various actions that you can perform during a chase other than attempting to earn completion or using one of the special actions detailed in the standard skill challenge rules on page 09 (except create advantage, which cannot be used because it is exclusive to movement-based skill challenges).

Block

In contests with the block special quality (see SQ, page 44), characters can defend target areas and intercept catches, passes, and serves, defend positions, and prevent their opposition from completing contest objectives by physically blocking attempts at scoring. For example, in badminton, contestants block to protect their zones from being scored upon by the opposition's strikes using the block special action.

Whenever the opposition attempts a skill check to earn completion that can be blocked, a character can attempt to block that attempt by rolling an opposed skill check to earn completion. The skill used to make the block is noted in the contest's stat block under the block special quality. If the blocker's skill check exceeds that of the character attempting to earn completion, the skill check is blocked and the opposition suffers some consequence, as noted in the contest's description. Some contests include rules for a partial block, occurs when the blocker's opposed skill check fails by less than 5. Rules for partial blocks are noted in a "partial block" entry, under the skill challenge's special qualities.

Using the block special action is a play reaction that is made in response to an initial play or another play reaction. Multiple characters cannot attempt to block the same skill check unless the skill challenge also has the dogpile special quality. A character cannot attempt to block an opposed skill check if she is not within range of the creature, object, or location being targeted by the skill check to earn completion.

For example, in baseball, a batter is always considered "in range" of the baseball when she is at bat because the pitcher directly throws the ball to her location in an attempt to strike her out. If the batter successfully blocks the ball, however, a character playing 2nd base couldn't attempt to block the ball if it spun towards outfield because that character isn't within the location being targeted by the baseball.

Catch

In contests with the catch special quality (see SQ, page 44), characters can catch objects that are passed to them using the pass special action (see Pass, below). Catches only occur between members of the same team—if you are intercepting an opponent's pass, you are using the block special action (see page 40).

Whenever a character uses the catch special action, she attempts a skill check to earn completion at the same DC as the DC made to pass the object to her. If she succeeds, she catches the object and gains possession of it. If she fails, she misses the object and does not gain possession of it. In some skill challenges, failing to catch a pass has consequences for the contestants who failed to pass the ball, while in others the ball remains in its current zone, unpossessed. Any consequences incurred when a pass fails (either because of a failed skill check to pass or a failed skill check to catch) is noted in the skill challenge's description under its play rules.

Using the catch special ability is a play reaction that is made in response to an initial play or another play reaction, usually the pass or serve actions.

Fake Out

In contests with the fake out special quality (see SQ, page 44), characters can attempt to deceive their opposition into believing they will act differently then they actually act, making it more difficult for the opposition to react to their plays.

Whenever a character uses the fake out special action, she declares which action she will actually take (such as to block, pass, or score), then attempts a skill check opposed by a Sense Motive check made by each member of the opposition who could normally react to her designated special action. Any member of the opposition whose Sense Motive equals or exceeds the character's skill check is not affected by the fake out, while members of the opposition who fail the check take a -4 penalty on skill checks made to oppose the character's stated action, such as with the block special action.

Using the fake out action is a play reaction that is made in response to an initial play or another play reaction. If a character uses Bluff to perform a fake out, then any applicable bonuses that character has on checks made to feint in combat also apply on checks made to fake out the opposition. Unlike feinting, you don't take penalties for trying to fake out a nonhumanoid opponent or an opponent with animal intelligence. Bluff is generally used to fake out the opposition in most contests, but contests that involve movement can also use Acrobatics, while contests that involving climbing, flying, or swimming can use Climb, Fly, or Swim, respectively. Additionally, contests that involve objects that are used to score points (such as baseball) can also use Sleight of Hand.

Pass

In contests with the pass special quality (see SQ, page 44), characters can pass an object from one contestant to another, transferring position of that object from themselves to the intended target. For example, in baseball, characters in the outfield can pass the baseball to one another in order to strike out a batting player who is running from base to base.

When a character attempts to pass an object to another contestant, she designates a target to pass the object to and rolls a skill check to earn completion. The skill used, as well as its DC, is indicated in the contest's stat block. If her skill check is successful, the character passes that ball to the designated target, who becomes the catcher and must immediately attempt to catch the passed object (see Catch, above). If the character fails her skill check to earn completion, the pass fails, and if her check failed by 5 or more, the pass fails and she loses possession of the object (see Object Possession, page 41).

Using the pass special ability is either an initial play or a play reaction, based on the type of contest. If passing is a play reaction, it is made in response to an initial play or another play reaction, usually the serve or strike actions.

Push Self

During a contest, characters can attempt to push themselves beyond their limits using the push self special action. Using the push self special action doesn't require an action, but each character can only push herself a number of times per turn equal to 1 + her Constitution bonus (minimum 1).

When a character attempts to push herself beyond her limits, she makes a Constitution check (DC 10, +1 for each previous time she has previously used the push self special action during the skill challenge). If her check is successful, she gains one of the following benefits of her choice from the list below. If she fails this check, she takes 1d6 points of nonlethal damage that cannot be healed until the character rests for at least 8 hours. For every 5 by which she fails this check, she takes an additional 1d6 points of nonlethal damage. This damage cannot be reduced (such as by damage reduction) or redirected (such as by *shield other*) by any means. Creatures immune to nonlethal damage cannot use the push self special action during a contest.

Too much strain when pushing one's self can cause extreme physical and mental trauma. Whenever a character fails a Constitution check to push herself, she must make a saving throw against a DC equal to 15 + the total amount of nonlethal damage that she has taken from pushing herself during the contest. The type of saving throw she makes depends upon which skills are used to earn completion during the skill challenge. If a Charisma-, Intelligence-, or Wisdombased check or skill is used, she must make a Will save. If a Constitution-, Dexterity-, or Strength-based check or skill check is used, or an attack roll is used, she must make a Fortitude save. If she fails this saving throw, she takes 1 point of ability damage to the ability score that her skill check to earn completion is based on, plus 1 additional point of ability damage for every 5 by which her skill check fails.

For instance, if Kyr'shin plays baseball, a contest that uses a ranged attack to earn completion, and he attempts to push himself for a reaction and fails by 5, he would take 2d6 points of nonlethal damage. Assuming he takes average damage (7 points), he would then need to make a DC 22 Fortitude save or take 1 point of Dexterity damage, plus 1 point for every 5 that his saving throw failed by.

When a character successfully pushes herself during a contest, she gain one of the following benefits.

- » Add a +1d6 competence bonus to any one skill check made to earn completion during the contest.
- » Gain one additional play reaction during the turn.

Set

In contests with the set special quality (see SQ, page 44), characters can attempt to assist their teammates by setting up conditions for a more productive attempt at scoring. For example, in badminton, contestants can set the shuttlecock high into the air so their teammates can swiftly deliver the shuttlecock to one of the opposition's zones before they can react.

When a character makes a set, she rolls a skill check to earn completion. The skill used, as well as its DC, is indicated in the contest's stat block. If the character fails her skill check to earn completion, the set fails and she loses possession of the object (see Object Possession, page 41). If she succeeds, the next ally who attempts a strike as a play reaction to earn completion gains a +2 bonus on her skill check,

Using the set special ability is either an initial play or a play reaction, based on the type of contest. If setting is a play reaction, it is made in response to an initial play or another play reaction, usually the serve or pass actions.

Strike

In contests with the strike special quality (see SQ, page 44), characters can attempt to taking an object used to score points out of play by attempting to score. This is often done by hitting, throwing, or kicking an object. For example, in baseball, the batter strikes the ball into the outfield, while in badminton players strike the shuttlecock into each other's target area to attempt to score points.

When a character is in position to make a strike, she rolls

a skill check to earn completion. The skill used, as well as its DC, is indicated in the contest's stat block. If her skill check is successful, the strike earns points, as noted in the contest's completion. Most skill challenges with the strike special quality also have the block special quality (see page 39), and as a result opponents often use their reactions to attempt to prevent a character from successfully striking and subsequently earning a point. If the character fails her skill check to earn completion, the strike fails and she loses possession of the object (see Object Possession, page 41).

Using the strike special ability is either an initial play or a play reaction, based on the type of contest. If striking is a play reaction, it is made in response to an initial play or another play reaction, usually the serve or pass actions.

Fouls

A foul occurs whenever a character performs an inappropriate or unfair act during the course of the contest, as deemed by the contest's referee of judge. Examples include making illegal contact with another contestant, spouting profanities at the referee, or casting an illegal spell or spell-like ability during the contest to garner an advantage. Earning fouls might cause an individual contestant to lose points, be removed for one or more cycles, or lose the contest outright. Because penalties are typically earned as a result of player choice and roleplaying, the GM decides the consequences of earning a penalty during a contest.

Most contests forbid all unsportsmanlike behavior, which usually includes using spells to gain an advantage. The GM is the arbiter of which actions warrant a penalty, however.

Object Possession

Many contests include an object that is used to score points, such as a shuttlecock in badminton or a baseball in baseball. Control of such objects are paramount, and contests that involve object possession often have one or more of the contest special qualities described on page 43. Most contests that involve object possession use possession initiative as their initiative quality, with the teams acting based upon which team has possession of the scoring object (see page 36).

In a game with object possession, a team is considered to have possession of the object if at least one contestant on that team is in direct contact with it; in most contests, this requires the contestant to directly hold or wield the object. These objects often enter play using the serve special ability, and leave play using the strike special ability. When a possessed object successfully leaves play, points are accumulated or lost in favor of the person whose check caused the object to leave play. For instance, in badminton, a successful strike check causes the shuttlecock to leave play, which accumulates points for that contestant's, while in chess, a successful strike check causes a piece to be captured, which results in casualties to that contestant's opposition.

In some games, such as baseball, loosing possession of the scoring object doesn't automatically cause a team to gain or

lose points. In such games, possession of the scoring object can be reestablished as a reaction, provided that the character attempting to reestablished possession is in the same zone as the scoring object (see Zones, below).

Opposition

As with chases, one of the key features of a contest encounter is the opposition—NPCs who directly interfere with the PCs' attempts to clear the skill challenge. The opposition competes with the PCs to be the winners of the contest.

The opposition is never referenced in a contest's stat block, but nevertheless it is important for the GM to have stat blocks for the opposition to determine their skill check bonuses and special abilities. Unlike a chase, which have their own predetermined challenge ratings, contests determine their challenge rating based upon the opposition's CR (or average CR, if the opposition consists of multiple NPCs).

Plays and Reactions

Contests don't use the standard action economy, as seen in other types of skill challenges. Instead, they rely on a dynamic action system known as plays and reactions. In a contest, there are two general types of actions—initial plays and play reactions. Both types of actions are described below.

Initial Plays: An initial play sets up the scoring event for the contest—it establishes a team's attempt at earning points. An initial play is always a full cycle action. How this action is used is determined by the contest in question, but usually, this is some type of skill check to earn completion, as described by the contest's description. Likewise, initial plays vary in appearance from contest to contest. For example, in badminton and baseball, the initial play sends an object into play.

Play Reactions: Where initial plays are structured and well-defined, play reactions, the other type of contest action, are spurious and loosely-defined. Play reactions are similar to attacks of opportunity in combat—they occur as a direct response to another action (the initial play) and interrupt the normal flow of action during a turn. Each turn, a character can make one play reaction. Characters with the Combat Reflexes feat can make an additional number of play reactions per turn equal to their Dexterity modifier. In addition, characters can use the push self special action to make additional play reactions (see page 40).

After the initial play is made, all characters capable of making a play reaction decide whether or not to act in response to that initial play. All characters who choose to react roll an initiative check and resolve their play reactions in initiative order. Once this first 'round' of play reactions concludes, a second round begins, and all characters can choose whether or not to react in response to the circumstantial changes that resulted from the previous round of play reactions. This process continues until all characters participating in the skill challenge are unable to make any more play reactions, or until all characters decide to make no more play reactions in response to that turn's initial play.

Zones

Some contests, especially sports, are defined by how the contestant interacts with the physical space where the contest is being held. Rather than detail every square foot of the contest, important areas in a given contest are abstracted as zones. In contests that utilize zones, a zone represents a target location where play occurs during the contest. Contestants occupy positions within one or more zones, and can typically move from zone to zone as a play reaction. Depending upon the game being played, contestants occupy zones, target zones with strikes, and move from zone to zone to reach objectives. Each contest notes which zones it possesses and any specifics regarding those zones in its stat block.

Elements of a Contest

All contests, regardless of type, have the following elements: type, goal, scoring skills, scoring period, completion (points-only). Some contests might also include optional elements, such as demerits, zones, or special qualities. These characteristics are described below and are presented in the order in which they appear on a skill challenge's stat block.

Unlike other skill challenges, contests don't list their benefit or penalty because generally speaking, the benefit of clearing a contest is winning the activity while the penalty for failing to clear the contest is losing. Winning or losing may have additional benefits or consequences, at the GM's decision. Likewise, contests don't list CRs because the difficulty of the skill challenge is based on the competition that the contestants face. For all effects determined by CR, a contest's CR is equal to the CR of the creature with the highest CR that is participating in the skill challenge, excluding PCs or their allies.

All of the elements listed above use slightly different rules then those of a standard skill challenge—when running a contest, refer to the rules listed below rather than those found on page 12.

Type

Contest challenges are point-based skill challenges in which opposing characters attempt to beat one another in a specific activity. Contests come in ten varieties-deterministic strategy contests, grapple contests, invasion contests, judgment contests, momentum contests, net/wall contests, recollection contests, striking/fielding contests, stochastic strategy contests, and target contests. In a deterministic strategy contest, contestants use strategy to plan and predict their opponent's moves. In grapple contests, contestants attempt to render one another immobile by pinning each other in grapples. In invasion contests, contestants attempt to score points by invading their opponents' territory. In judgment contests, contestants compete to present their best work to one or more judges. In momentum contests, contestants move their bodies in accordance to a specific pattern or rhythm to score points. In net/wall contests, contestants attempt to strike objects into their opponent's territory, which is marked using a wall or net. In recollection



contests, contestants compete to be the first to remember or recall specific information. In striking/fielding contests, contestants strike objects before moving to a target area. In stochastic strategy contests, contestants create strategies while dealing with an element of probability or chance. In target contests, characters shoot, slide, strike, or throw an object towards a target.

Goal

Each contest has a goal that describes how its participants score points towards clearing the skill challenge. A contest's goal has no mechanical effect on the skill challenges—it simply reflects the activity that the contestants are doing.

Teams

Contests can be played alone or with friends and comrades, and a contest's teams element notes the different styles that the contest can be played in. If a contest lists "singles" as its team, it can be played one-against-one. If a contest lists "doubles" as its team, it can be played "two-against-two." Otherwise, the entry notes the number of active players on each team. If multiple entries are listed, the contestants choose from among the listed options before they play. At the GM's decision, different team numbers can be used, provided appropriate adjustments to the contest are made.

Initiative Quality

Not all contests determine contestant initiative in the same manner, and a contest's initiative quality provides a brief documentation regarding how turns are sequenced during play. Initiative qualities are discussed in-depth beginning on page 34.

Zones (Optional)

Skill challenges that include spatial terrain as a primary component use zones to abstract the area where the contest is held. Skill challenges with the zones element list the number of zones involved in the skill challenge and provide a general orientation regarding how they are used. Zones are detailed further on page 39.

Scoring Skills

Contests each list one skill that best represents the tasks that contestants must accomplish in order to earn completion. This skill is known as the contest's scoring skill.

Each scoring skill lists the skill DC that the character must roll in order to score a point. Unlike other skill challenges, a contest's skill DCs don't list a specific difficulty, and their DCs are not determined by Table: Skill Challenge DC by CR. Instead, the contest's scoring skill DC is determined by each specific skill challenge, and is generally DC 20 or less. Instead, most contests involve opposed skill checks between contestants as the primary factor in determining how difficult it is to earn completion during the contest. For instance, in baseball, it only requires a DC 18 ranged attack roll to hit a baseball, but the contestant at bat must also equal or exceed the pitcher's ranged attack roll in order to successfully hit the ball.

Frequency

The amount of time represented by one cycle varies from contest to contest based upon the contest's rules, and a contest's frequency notes the amount of time that each cycle represents. Cycles can be measured in one of 3 specific time intervals: 1 round, 1 minute, or 10 minutes.

A contest's frequency limits which abilities and effects are applicable to the contest. Each cycle that passes reduces the duration by the amount of time indicated by its frequency. For instance, each effect active on a character who is participating in a contest with a frequency of 10 minutes would have its duration reduced every cycle by 10 minutes. As a general rule, an ability or effect cannot have a meaningful impact upon a contest if its duration is less than the contest's frequency, for it is unable to last for the entire cycle.

Scoring Interval (Optional Element)

Skill challenges with a scoring interval element allow characters a limited amount of time to complete them. The number listed by the element is the number of cycles that contestants have to earn enough points before the contest ends. In contests with the scoring interval element, the winner is usually the contestant who has the most points at the end of the skill challenge. Each contest has its own, specific number of scoring rounds before the contest ends.

Completion

All contests list their completion method—points—as well as the contest's subcategory for completion—accumulation or casualties. Earning points is discussed in detail on page 39.

The amount of completion needed to clear a contest does not follow a standardized formula. Instead, it is determined by the nature of the activity that the contest represents. Some contests start the contestants with a specific number of points that they must whittle away from one another, while others offer constants the chance to score as many points as possible within a specific period of time. These intricacies are noted in the skill challenge's completion method and explained in full in the skill challenge's description entry.

Scoring Events

A skill challenge's scoring event element lists the different ways that points are accumulated or lost during the skill challenge.

SQ (Optional Element)

Skill challenges can possess numerous special qualities specific qualities that use standard rules that are referenced (but not repeated) in skill challenge stat blocks. These qualities are listed below.

Backlash: In a contest with the backlash special quality, a

mishap occurs whenever a character fails a skill check to earn completion. This mishap causes the character's team to lose a number of points, as noted in the special quality's entry.

Block: In a contest with the block special quality, characters can use the block special action to attempt to prevent their opposition from scoring points (see page 39 for more information regarding blocking).

Catch: In a contest with the catch special quality, characters can use the catch special action to attempt to catch an object that is being passed to them by another contestant (see page 40 for more information regarding catches).

Critical Fumble: Whenever a character rolls a natural 1 (the d20 shows 1), she fails regardless of her skill check's result and has "fumbled," meaning the failure might be a critical failure. To determine if its a critical failure, the character immediately makes an attempt to "confirm" the critical fumble—another skill check with all the same modifiers as the skill check she just made. If the confirmation roll also results in a failure against the skill check's DC, the original failure is a critical failure. (The confirmation roll just needs to fail to equal or exceed the skill check's DC to cause a critical fumble, it does not need to come up 1 again.) If the confirmation roll beats the skill check's DC, then the failure is just a regular failure.

A critical failure means that the character loses completion towards clearing the skill challenge. The amount of completion lost depends upon the skill challenge's completion method, as described below.

Points: A consequence occurs, as noted in the contest's special quality entry. This can be severe as scoring points for the opposition or as simple as the character's turn ending.

Critical Success: Whenever a character rolls a natural 20 (the d20 shows 20), she scores a "threat" in addition to automatically succeeding as normal. This means that the success might be a critical success (or a "crit"). To determine if its a critical success, the character immediately makes an attempt to "confirm" the critical success—another skill check with all the same modifiers as the skill check she just made. If the confirmation roll also results in a success against the skill check's DC, the original success is a critical success. (The confirmation roll just needs to beat the skill check's DC to cause a critical success, it does not need to come up 20 again.) If the confirmation roll does not beat the skill check's DC, then the success is just a regular success.

A critical success means that the character earns additional points, as noted in the contest's special quality entry.

Dogpile: In a contest with the dogpile special quality, multiple characters can use the block special action to prevent their opposition from scoring points (see page 39 for more information regarding blocking). When dogpiling in this manner, only the highest skill check to earn completion is used to determine if the attempt at scoring is blocked.

Fake Out: In a contest with the fake out special quality, characters can use the fake out special action to attempt to

trick their opponents when attempting to score points (see page 40 for more information regarding fake outs).

Imbued: The area where the skill challenge takes place is imbued with one or more spells, whose effects linger for the duration of the skill challenge. The spells imbued in the area are listed in the entry along with their caster levels and save DCs (if any). Imbued spells have no duration; their effects are permanent, though a successful *dispel magic* attempt (or a similar effect) can suppress an imbued spell for 1d4 cycles. Most imbued spells use the minimum caster level and ability score required to cast the spell to determine their effects, but the GM can use more powerful magic if necessary.

Spells chosen for this special quality in a contest are often spells that prevent cheating, such as *dimensional anchor*, or that punish cheaters, such as *baleful polymorph*.

Match: In some contests, winning a single round is not enough to claim victory. Contests with the match special quality require multiple victories by accumulating or depleting the number of points listed in the skill challenge's completion entry the requisite number of times. Most contests list an odd number for this special quality so that a winner is always decided, with three being the most common number.

Pass: In a contest with the pass special quality, characters can use the pass special action to attempt to pass an object to another contestant (see page 40 for more information regarding passes).

Set: In a contest with the set special quality, characters can use the set special action to attempt to provide an allied contestant with an increased chance at successfully passing or striking with an object (see page 41 for more information regarding sets).

Strike: In a contest with the strike special quality, characters can use the strike special action to attempt to send a possessed object out of play in order to score points (see page 41 for more information regarding strikes).

Special: Some contests have miscellaneous qualities that produce special effects, such as drowning or ability damage. Saving throws are typically equal to 10 + the skill challenge's CR.

Description

Each skill challenge describes how it is played at the end of its entry, as well as any special rules that contestants must follow. The description is divided into several subsections: basics, cycle, initial play, and play reactions.

Contest Stat Block

Contests are organized into stat blocks, almost identically to standard skill challenges. This is where all of the information needed to run a contest can be found. A contest stat block is organized as follows. Note that contests don't have CRs of their own—a contest's CR is determined by the PCs' opposition. Additionally, in cases where a line in a contest stat block has no value, that line is omitted.

Name: The contest's name is presented first.

Type: This line notes the type of contest that is being

conducted, as described on page 37.

Goal: This is a brief description of what the PCs and their opposition are trying to accomplish during the contest.

Teams: This lists the team composition of the contest, such as how many teams compete and how many contestants participate on each team.

Initiative Quality: The contest's initiative quality is listed here. For more information regarding initiative qualities, see page 36.

Zones (Optional Element): If physical space is part of the contest, this section lists the number and shape of those zones, as well as their orientation in the contest environment.

Scoring Skills: This lists the skills that the PCs can use to gain an advantage during the contest, as well as the difficulty and skill check DC associated with each skill.

Frequency: This lists the amount of time that passes between each cycle during the contest.

Scoring Interval (Optional Element): This lists the number of cycles that the PCs have to finish the contest. Once all scoring intervals have ended, the contestants have no further chances to earn completion and the contest ends.

Completion: The ultimate goal of every contest is to complete it, and this outlines the contest's completion method (points) and the amount of completion needed to successfully clear it.

Scoring Event: This entry notes the conditions under which contestants score points during the skill challenge.

Foul: This entry notes what happens when any contestant gains a foul for inappropriate conduct. For more information regarding fouls, see page 41.

SQ (Optional Element): This entry notes any special qualities or rules that the contest has.

Description: This describes how the contest is played and any special rules that contestants must follow.

Sample Contests

The following contests were designing using the rules described above.

BADMINTON

Contest (target)

Goal Teams take turns serving a conical, feathered projectile called a shuttlecock. The first team to score 21 points wins the round, while the first team to win 3 rounds wins the contest.

Teams Two teams of singles or doubles

Initiative Quality rotational initiative

Zones Four rectangular zones (two per team) each boarding a net that divides the court in half (one half per side).

SKILLS

Scoring Skills ranged attack (DC 18)

Frequency 1 minute

COMPLETION

Points 21 accumulated; **Scoring Event** Whenever a team fails a skill check to block, set, or strike, that team loses 1 point.

Foul When a contestant commits a foul, their opposition scores 1 point.

SQ block (ranged attack DC 18), catch (ranged attack DC 18), critical fumble, fake out (Acrobatics, Bluff, Sleight of Hand, or ranged attack), match (3), pass (doubles only; ranged attack DC 18), set (ranged attack DC 18), strike (ranged attack DC 18)

DESCRIPTION

- **Basics** In badminton, each team takes one side of a 20-foot by 44-foot court that is divided into two 20-foot by 22-foot sides by a net. In doubles, each team's contestants occupies a single zone on their side, while in singles each contestant occupies both zones. Teams take turns serving a shuttlecock from side to side while attempting to strike the shuttlecock into one of their opposition's zones to score points.
- **Cycle** The player whose turn it is serves the initial play. If the serving player's team scores, that player takes another turn, and continues making additional turns until the opposition scores. If the opposition scores, initiative rotates as described by the rotational initiative quality.
- **Initial Play** On her turn, a contestant serves the shuttlecock by making a DC 18 ranged attack roll to serve the shuttlecock to one randomly determined zone on her opponent's side of the court. If she succeeds, she scores 1 point. If she fails, her opponents score 1 point.
- **Play Reactions** Whenever a contestant serves or strikes the shuttlecock, her team's opposition can attempt to block the attempt to earn completion. If the block is successful, the contestant can choose to pass, set, or strike the shuttlecock as part of the same play reaction. If the contestant chooses to pass the shuttlecock, the target attempts to catch then strike it as part of a single play reaction. Any character can attempt the fake out special action as a play reaction before serving or striking the shuttlecock.

BASEBALL

Contest (striking/fielding)

Goal Teams take turns hitting a ball that the opposition pitches to them. If the ball is hit, batters runs from base to base while their opposition strikes to tag them with the baseball, striking them out. The team with the most points at the end of nine innings wins the contest.

Teams Two teams of 9 contestants

Initiative Quality possession initiative

Zones Eight zones, five "infield" and three "outfield." The infield zones connect together to make a diamond, with the fifth zone located at its center. The outfield zones boarder this diamond on two of its four sides.

SKILLS

Scoring Skills ranged attack (DC 18

Frequency 1 minute

- Scoring Interval 9 innings (1 cycle per team per inning)
- COMPLETION
- Points highest accumulated; Scoring Event Whenever a



contestant manages to run from home plate to first plate, then from first plate to second plate, then second plate to third plate, and finally from third plate back to home plate, that contestant's team scores 1 point. This doesn't need to occur in a single cycle.

SQ block (ranged attack DC 18), catch (ranged attack DC 18), critical success (hit is an automatic home run; see initial play), dogpile, fake out (Acrobatics, Bluff, or Sleight of Hand), pass (ranged attack DC 18), strike (melee or ranged attack against the target player's AC)

DESCRIPTION

Basics In baseball, teams rotate between being the batting team and the field team. The batting team is always the team that possesses the initiative count. The field is a 400foot zone from nose to base, with the "nose" being the home plate zone and the "base" being the three outfield zones. There is a 60-foot distance between each set of adjacent infield "base" zones, such as home to 1st and 3rd, 1st to home and 2nd, and so on. The field team must choose which zones each of their players occupy. Typically, one player occupies each zone (save home plate), while the remaining two players divide place themselves wherever they like.

The field team pitches the baseball to the batting team, who attempts to hit the ball out into the field. If she succeeds, the batter runs from home plate to first base, then from first to second base, then from second to third base, and finally from third base back to home plate. Any contestant that manages to do so without being struck out by the opposition scores a point for their team. Contestants are struck out either when they fail three times to make an initial play on their turn, or when the opposition manages to catch the ball as a play reaction to the initial play or tag a running batter before she reaches a base. Once a team accumulates three strikes, that team loses possession of the initiative count to their opposition. After 9 innings, the team with the most points wins.

- **Cycle** The team with possession over the initiative count (the batting team) makes the initial play. If the opposition of this team manages to strike out one of the team's contestants, the batting team gains an out. When the batting team gains three outs, they lose possession over the initiative count and their opposition gains possession over the initiative count.
- **Initial Play** On her turn, the baseball is pitched to the contestant (the "batter") by a member of the opposition (the "pitcher") up to three times. The pitch is a DC 18 ranged attack roll. If the pitcher misses this ranged attack, the batter gets 1 ball. If the batter gets a total of 4 balls, she and every contestant on her team who is occupying a

base gets to "walk" to the next base, with the batter herself walking to first base. If this allows a contestant to walk from third base to home plate, her team scores 1 point, as usual.

If the pitcher's ranged attack is successful, the batter must attempt her own ranged attack roll. If her result is less than the pitcher's result, she misses and gains 1 strike. If the batter accumulates 3 strikes, her turn ends and her team gains 1 out. If the batter's attack roll is successful, she hits the ball to a randomly determined zone (roll 1d8; 1: pitcher's mound; 2: first base; 3: third base; 4: second base; 5: right outfield; 6: left outfield; 7: center outfield; 8: home run). If the batter hits a home run, she immediately scores 1 point, and every contestant on her team that is occupying a base immediately walks to home, scoring 1 additional point per contestant that walks home in this manner. All contestants that score in this manner leave the field and return to the initiative at the bottom of the initiative count.

Play Reactions Before pitching the ball, the pitcher can attempt to use the fake out action against the batter as a play reaction. After the batter successfully hits the ball, the batter must spend three play reactions to advance to first base, and all other contestants on the batter's team must spend a play reaction to advance to the next base (first base to second base, second base to third base, and third base to home plate). If a contestant doesn't have enough play reactions to advance, she must use the push self special action to try and make additional play reactions. A contestant that fails the Constitution check to push herself is automatically struck out. A character that is struck out leaves the field and returns to initiative at the bottom of the initiative count, and her team gains 1 out.

When the batter hits the ball, any contestant positioned at the zone where the ball lands can attempt to block the ball as a play reaction. A contestant attempting to block the ball in this manner takes a -2 penalty if she is positioned at first base or third base, a -4 penalty if she is positioned at second base, left outfield, or right outfield, or a -6 penalty if she is positioned at center outfield. If her block is successful, the batter is struck out, as described above, and none of the other contestants on her team get to advance bases. If her block fails, she loses possession of the ball, and must spend a play reaction to regain possession (see below).

When a contestant attempts a play reaction to advance to a base, her opposition can attempt to gain possession of the baseball, pass the ball to another teammate, or move to an adjacent zone as a play reaction. A character can only gain possession of the baseball if it is in the same zone as her. If a character passes the baseball to a teammate, that teammate can attempt to catch it as a play reaction; if she fails, she must spend a second play reaction to gain possession of the baseball.

A contestant with possession of the baseball can attempt to use it to strike out a contestant that is in the process of advancing from one base to the next base. This is a melee attack roll against the target's AC if both contestants are in the same zone, or a ranged attack roll if both contestants are in different zones. A contestant that is moving from one base to the next can spend a play reaction to make an Acrobatics check with a -10 penalty and use the result as her Armor Class against the next attack roll made to attempt to strike her out. If a contestant's attack roll to strike out a contestant equals or exceeds her target's AC, the target is struck out, as described above. If a contestant's ranged attack roll to strike out a contestant fails, she loses possession of the baseball.

CATAPULT

Contest (imperfect deterministic strategy)

Goal Teams take turns attempting to locate the coordinates of model siege engines on the opposition's grid in order to "wreck" their models, removing them from play. The first contestant to wreck all of her opponent's siege engines wins. **Teams** Two teams of singles

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Initiative Quality standard initiative SKILLS

Scoring Skills Intelligence (DC 0)

Frequency 1 minute

COMPLETION

Points 7 casualties; **Scoring Event** Whenever a team's siege engine is wrecked, that team loses 1 point.

DESCRIPTION

Basic In catapult, each team takes one set of 12-inch by 12-inch game boards, a divider, 7 siege engine miniatures (2 canons, 2 ballistae, 2 light catapults, and 1 heavy catapult), grid paper, a pencil, and a small container of boulder tokens. One game board is placed on the table, with the dividers placed between both teams' boards to prevent cheating. The other game board is held in a contestant's hand and is used (along with the grid paper and pencil) to keep track of the contestant's guesses. Teams take turns guessing the location of their opposition's siege engine miniatures on their game board; a successful guess is represented by a "hit," which is marked by a "boulder token" being placed on that siege engine's model. When a siege engine takes enough hits, it is "wrecked," at which point its owner removes it from play, losing points in the process.

- **Cycle** The contestant with the higher initiative result goes first, after which turns alternate normally between both contestants.
- Initial Play On her turn, a contestant attempts to hit one of the opposition's siege engines by attempting an Intelligence check to earn completion. After rolling her check, she then rolls d%. If the result of her d% is equal to or less than 5% times the result of her Intelligence check, she hits one randomly determined siege engine (roll a second d% to determine which siege engine is hit; 01–20: heavy catapult; 21–50: light catapult; 51–75: ballistae; 76–98: canon; 99–100: contestant's choice). If the opposition has multiple siege engine is hit.

Each siege engine can withstand one or more hits based the number of squares on the grid it occupies. Canons can take up

The Golden Rule of Contests

Of all the various rules and challenges presented within the *SKILL CHALLENGE HANDBOOK*, contests are by and large the most difficult to run and create from scratch, if only because they focus more on the "feel" of gameplay then codified rules and processes. Whereas its relatively easy to cobble together a standard skill challenge or even a chase with the rules provided, with contests GMs need to also worry about creating gameplay and atmosphere that is conductive to the activity that the contest represents. For instance, if you're going to run a skill challenge themed around soccer, then your skill challenge needs to be able to capture the feel of the ball being passed from player to player, avoiding defensive plays until the perfect moment to strike presents itself.

Because contests seek to emulate a specific activity, such as a sport or competition, as a general rule the GM should try to keep any rulings or decisions she makes in the spirit of whatever game or competition that she is running at the time. If she or other players at the table are familiar with the intricacies of the contest as it is experienced as a real activity, conflicts that arise should always be handled in a similar vein how would the conflict be resolved if the sport or competition were actually happening in the real world? Be sure to use your best judgment and common sense should any such conflicts arise, and err towards the side of fun and consistency in your decision-making processes.

to two hits, ballistae can take up to 3 hits, light catapults can take up to 4 hits, and heavy catapults can take up to 6 hits. When a siege engine has taken its maximum number of hits, it is wrecked and removed from play. Each time one of a contestant's siege engines is wrecked, that contestant loses 1 point. In addition, if a contestant destroys all of her opposition's siege engines of a specific kind, such as ballistae or heavy catapult, any further results of that siege engine when rolling to determine which siege engine she hits instead count as 'contestant's choice.' The first contestant to reduce her opponent to 0 points by wrecking all of the opposition's siege engines wins.

Play Reactions By default, there are no play reactions in catapult. Players simply take turns making initial plays against each other until a victor is decided.

CHESS

Contest (perfect stochastic strategy)

Goal Teams take turns moving a set of 16 game pieces around a grid while trying to capture their opposition's king, a condition known as "checkmate." The first contestant to capture her opponent's king wins.

Teams Two teams of singles

- Initiative Quality standard initiative
- SKILLS

Scoring Skills Intelligence (DC 0)

Scoring Period 1 minute COMPLETION

Points 39 casualties; **Scoring Event** Whenever one of a team's pieces is captured, the team loses points. The team loses 1 point when a pawn is captured, 3 points when a bishop or knight is captured, 5 points when a rook is captured, 9 points when the queen is captured, or 39 points when the king is captured.

DESCRIPTION

- **Basic** In chess, each team takes one set of colored chess pieces consisting of 16 pawns, 2 bishops, 2 knights, 2 rooks, a queen, and a king. The pieces are lined up on opposing sides of the chess board, arranged with the bishops, knights, rooks, queen, and king on the backmost lines and two rows of pawns in front of them. Teams take turns moving their pieces across the chess board, capturing each other's pieces as they go by placing their piece into the same square as their opponent's piece, at which point the piece's owner removes it from play, losing points in the process.
- **Cycle** The contestant with the higher initiative result goes first, after which turns alternate normally between both players. The contestant with the higher initiative plays with the white pieces, while the other contestant plays with the black pieces.
- Initial Play On her turn, contestants attempts to maneuver her pieces across the chess board to capture an enemy pieces by attempting an Intelligence check to earn completion. Immediately after making this check, the contestant's turn ends. During the first cycle, the contestant playing the white pieces gets a +1 bonus to her Intelligence check. At the end of the cycle after both contestants have made their Intelligence checks, the contestants compare their results, as if they were making opposed checks. The contestant with the higher Intelligence check result wins the round, allowing her to capture one of her opponent's pieces (roll d% to determine which piece is captured or placed into check; 01–50: pawn; 51-65: knight; 66-79: bishop; 80-89: rook; 90-99: queen; 100: king). Each time a contestant captures a pawn, reduce the chance for that contestant to capture a piece of that type again by 4% (minimum 0%), and increase the chance for that contestant to capture the king by 4% (maximum 100%).

Unlike other pieces, it takes three consecutive victories to capture a contestant's king. The first time that a contestant succeeds on an Intelligence check and her d% roll results in a 'king,' that contestant king is placed in check. On the checked contestant's turn, if she succeeds on her Intelligence check, her king is placed out of check instead of capturing her opponent's pieces. If the checked contestant loses this Intelligence roll a second time and her opponent's d% roll results in a 'king' a second time, the checked king is captured instead. The player who first reduces her opponent to 0 points by capturing her opponent's king wins the contest.

Play Reactions By default, there are no play reactions in chess. Contestants simply take turns making initial plays against each other until a victor is decided.

COOKING COMPETITION

Contest (judgment)

- **Goal** Teams compete to impress one or more judges by creating the highest-quality meal possible. The team whose meal is judged as being the best wins.
- Teams Any number of teams with an equal number of contestants

Initiative Quality standard initiative

SKILLS

Scoring Skills Diplomacy (DC 20), Knowledge (local) (DC 20), Perception (DC 5), Profession (cook) (DC 10), Sense Motive (DC 20), Survival (DC 10)

Frequency 10 minutes

Scoring Interval 4 phases (1 or more cycles per phase)

COMPLETION

- **Completion** highest accumulated; **Scoring Event** Whenever a team attempts a skill check to earn completion, they score 1 point, plus 1 point for every 5 by which their skill check's result exceeds its DC.
- **SQ** mishap (4d6 points); if using ingredients that she has never cooked with before, a contestant adds +10 to the DCs of all Perception, Profession [cook], and Survival checks made to earn completion during the skill challenge

DESCRIPTION

- **Basics** In a cooking competition, each team attempts to craft a meal across four phases to attempt to appease one or more judges. Teams attempt to discover their judge's appetites, prepare their meal, and ultimately deliver the best culinary experience possible, scoring points based upon how successful they are in each phase.
- **Cycle** The contestant with the higher initiative result goes first, after which turns alternate normally between both players.
 - A cooking competition is broken into four phases: the selection phase, the preparation phase, the cooking phase, and the presentation phase. The selection phase lasts 1 cycle, the preparation phase lasts 2 cycles, the cooking phase lasts 3 cycles, and the presentation phase lasts 1 cycle. Each phase has a different initial play, as described below.
- **Initial Play** On her turn, a contestant performs an action relevant to the creation of her team's meal by making a skill check to earn completion. Which skill is used depends upon the current phase, as described below.

Selection Phase During this phase, contestants choose which ingredients to use in their meal, as well as make other choices and considerations. Contestants make a DC 5 Perception check to earn completion during this phase.

Preparation Phase During the preparation phase, contestants prepare their ingredients before cooking them. Contestants make a DC 10 Profession (cook) or Survival check to earn completion during this phase.

Cooking Phase During the cooking phase, contestants take prepared ingredients and construct their meal from them, cooking and arranging those ingredients as needed. Contestants make a DC 10 Profession (cook) or Survival check to earn completion during this phase.

Presentation Phase During the presentation phase, contestants arrange their meal and serve it to the judges. Contestants make a DC 20 Diplomacy, Knowledge (local), or Sense Motive check to earn completion during this phase.

Play Reactions During each phase, a contestant can attempt a number of special play reactions in order to improve her chances at winning the contest. Each phase has its own list of reactions that can be made, as described below.

Selection Phase A contestant can attempt a DC 20 Diplomacy, Knowledge (local), or Sense Motive check to earn completion as a play reaction by attempting to discover information about the judges and their biases. Unlike other skill checks to earn completion during the contest, failing this check does not cause a backlash to occur.

*Preparation Phase*There are no play reactions that contestants can attempt during the preparation phase.

Cooking Phase A contestant can attempt a DC 10 Profession (cook) or Survival check to earn completion as a play reaction by attempting to further spice up her team's dish. Each contestant may only attempt one play reaction to spruce up her team's dish each cycle.

Presentation Phase There are no play reactions that contestants can attempt during the preparation phase.

Horseshoes

Contest (target)

Goal Teams take turns throwing horseshoes at a peg that has been imbedded into the ground. The team that first scores 21 points wins.

Teams Two teams of singles or doubles

Initiative Quality rotational initiative

Zones One 5-foot by 5-foot zone with a peg located directly at its center.

SKILLS

Scoring Skills ranged attack (DC 14)

Frequency 1 minute

COMPLETION

Points 21 accumulated; **Scoring Event** At the end of each cycle, the team who managed to get a horseshoe closest to the peg scores 1 point, or 3 points if the closest horseshoe was a ringer.

SQ critical success (3 points)

DESCRIPTION

- **Basics** In horseshoes, each team takes turns throwing horseshoes at a peg that has been thrust into the ground. The teams stand 40 feet from their peg when throwing horseshoes at their target. Teams attempt to score the most points possible while denying points from their opposition.
- **Cycle** The contestant with the higher initiative result goes first, after which turns rotate between both teams.
- **Initial Play** On her turn, a contestant makes a skill check to earn completion by throwing a horseshoe at a scorable zone. This is considered an attack made with an improvised



thrown weapon with a range increment of 10 feet, and as a result a character takes a -4 nonproficiency penalty and a -6 range increment penalty on this attack roll. The contestant can reduce or ignore these penalties with applicable feats and effects (such as Throw Anything for the nonproficiency penalty or Far Shot for the range increment penalty).

If the contestant's ranged attack is 5 or less than the peg's AC, the horseshoe lands within 6 inches of the peg (roll 1d8–2 to determine the horseshoe's distance; a result of 0 means the horseshoe is touching the peg). If the contestant's ranged attack equals or exceeds the peg's AC, the horseshoe touches and leans against the peg (a "leaner"). If the contestant's range attack roll is a natural 20 and she confirms the critical hit, the horseshoe rings the peg (a "ringer"). At the end of the cycle, the team that scored the most ringers scores 3 points. If both teams scored an equal number of rings, the team that scored the most leaners, the team with the closest horseshoe to the peg scores 1 point. If both teams are tied in all three categories, no team scores any points. The first team to score 21 points wins.

Play Reactions By default, there are no play reactions in horseshoes. Contestants simply take turns making initial plays against each other until a victor is decided.

PIG WRESTLING

Contest (grapple)

- **Goal** Teams compete to chase down and pin a greased-up pig in a muddy pig pen as fast as possible. The team that manages to pin the pig in the least amount of time wins.
- **Teams** Any number of teams with an equal number of contestants per team (up to 4 contestants per team)
- Initiative Quality rotational initiative

Zones One 20-foot by 20-foot zone.

SKILLS

Scoring Skills grapple check (DC 10)

Frequency 1 round

Scoring Interval 10 cycles per contestant

COMPLETION

- **Points** 1 accumulated; **Scoring Event** The team with the contestant who pins the pig in the fewest number of cycles scores 1 point.
- **SQ** critical fumble (The pig escapes the contestant's grasp, causing it to lose the grappled condition)

DESCRIPTION

Basics In pig wrestling, the teams take turns trying to catch and wrestle a pig in a muddy pig pen (use the statistics for a pig as presented in *PATHFINDER ROLEPLAYING GAME: BESTIARY 3*; more dangerous versions of this contest might use boars or even dire boars instead). The pig is coated in grease, granting it a ± 10 bonus on checks to escape from a grapple, as well as to its CMD against grapple maneuvers. (A typical pig has a CMD of 20 and a ± 9 bonus on checks made to escape a grapple.)

During a contestant's turn, she attempts to catch or pin the pig by making a skill check to earn completion. This action includes the contestant's movements throughout the pigpen, and this added difficulty imposes a -4 penalty on her skill checks to earn completion unless she is able to ignore at least 10 feet of difficult terrain per round. If her check is successful, the contestant grapples the pig. At the end of any round that the pig is grappled, it immediately attempts to escape the grapple by making a combat maneuver check (most pigs have a +9 bonus on this check). If the pig succeeds, it escapes the grapple. If it fails, the contestant can attempt to pin the pig on her next turn. Pinning the pig requires a second successful grapple attempt, as outlined above (including the -4 penalty if the contestant is affected by the difficult terrain present in the pigpen). If she succeeds, the contestant pins the pig, and the pig gets one final attempt at escaping the pin. If the pig succeeds, it reduces the severity of the pinned condition to the grappled condition. If it fails, the contest ends and the number of rounds it took the contestant to pin the pig is recorded. After all contestants have either pinned the pig or have failed to pin the pig in 10 cycles, the contestant who was able to pin the pig the fastest scores 1 point, winning the contest.

Play Reactions Before making a skill check to earn completion, a contestant can attempt a DC 20 Acrobatics check to steady herself despite the pen's slippery conditions. If she succeeds, she ignores the pig pen's difficult terrain for 1 cycle. If she fails by 5 or more, she loses her next cycle as she falls prone and must spend the cycle clearing mud from her eyes and shakily standing from prone amidst the slippery conditions.

Poker

Contest (imperfect stochastic strategy)

Goal Teams compete to build the best five-card hand possible using two hidden cards and a set of five community cards. The contestant with the highest five-card hand wins the contest.

Teams Up to six of teams of singles

Initiative Quality standard initiative

SKILLS

Scoring Skills Bluff (DC 0), Sense Motive (DC 0), or Profession (gambler) (DC 0)

Frequency 1 minute

Scoring Interval 1 hand (5 betting cycles and 1 showdown cycle)

COMPLETION

Points highest accumulated; **Scoring Event** Contestants begin the game with a predetermined number of points, and earn points whenever they win a hand of poker.

SQ match (unlimited) DESCRIPTION

Basics In poker, contestants begin by exchanging some form of wealth for an equivalent number of tokens, which act as the contestant's starting number of points. Contestants generally begin with the same number of points, but in some games a newer player might be afforded extra points as a handicap. Typical wealth-to-points conversion rates include 1 cp per token (kiddie poker or penny poker), 1 sp per token (poor man's poker), 1 gp per token (proper poker), or 1 pp per token (big money poker).

At the start of a new hand, each contestant must spend 1 or more points as an ante in order to participate in the contest. This "entrance fee" is determined by the players in advance and cannot be waived. Each participating contestant is dealt two cards from a 52 card deck, which is simulated by rolling a skill check to earn completion. The result of the skill check (as well as the result of the d20) is kept hidden, but the contestant makes public their total bonus on skill checks of the kind made. (Contestants are not, however, required to disclose any other information about this skill, such as which skill was rolled.) For instance, a contestant might roll a Sleight of Hand check to earn completion, roll a 4 on a d20 with a +10 bonus, and publicly announce, "I have a +10 bonus on my skill check to earn completion," while keeping the d20 result and the ultimate result of the skill check secret.

Over the course of five cycles (called "betting cycles"), five community cards are revealed to the contestants, and those contestants may place bets and rearrange the cards in their hand. After five cycles, players reveal their hand, and the team with the highest-scoring hand wins.

- **Cycle** The contestant with the higher initiative result goes first, after which turns alternate normally between all contestants.
- Initial Play On each betting cycle, a contestant rolls a skill check to earn completion. After rolling her skill check to earn completion, she rolls a d6, plus one additional d6 for every 10 by which the result of her skill check exceeds DC 0. After all d6s have been rolled, the contestant keeps the highest d6 and displays it publicly, discarding the rest. Contestants don't make initial plays during the showdown cycle-instead, they total all d6s they kept during the contest and add the sum of those d6s to the skill check to earn completion that they made at the start of the contest. The contestant with the highest result wins the match, as well as all points in the pot. Typically, a poker match continues until the players agree to end the contest or no one has any points left to pay the entrance fee (see basics). Ultimately, the contestant with the most points at the end of the match wins.
- **Play Reactions** Whenever her opposition rolls a skill check to earn completion during a betting phase, a contestant can spend points in order to up the ante as a play reaction. The number of points spent must be equal to at least half the total number of points in the pot, and all points anted

in this manner are likewise added to the pot. As a result, as more contestants up the ante, it becomes increasingly expensive to do so. Whenever a contestant ups the ante, she can make a skill check to earn completion. If the result of her skill check equals or exceeds that of her opposition's, she chooses which of the rolled d6s the opposition keeps for that turn instead of her opposition getting to choose.

Whenever a member of the opposition attempts to raise the ante on a skill check to earn completion that you made, you can negate their attempt at raising the ante if you spend twice as many points as that contestant did raising the ante as a play reaction.

Skip Rope

Contest (momentum)

Goal Teams participate in multiple events that showcase their speed, power, and overall ability at skipping over a thin piece of rope or wire. The contestant with the most points at the end of a phase wins that phase, and the contestant with the most points overall wins the contest.

Teams Any number of teams of 4 contestants

Initiative Quality possession initiative

SKILLS

Scoring Skills Acrobatics (DC 10)

Frequency 1 minute

Scoring Intervals 4 events (10 cycles per event)

COMPLETION

- **Points** highest accumulated; **Scoring Event** Whenever a team succeeds at a skill check to earn completion, that team scores 1 point, plus 1 point for every 5 by which the result of the check exceeded the check's DC.
- **SQ** backlash (1 point), critical success (1d6 points), critical fumble (1d6 points); Contestants gain one play reaction per event during the skill challenge. If a contestant has the Combat Reflexes feat, they gain an additional number of play reactions per event equal to their Dexterity modifier. Contestants may still use the push self special action to make additional play reactions during an event.

DESCRIPTION

- **Basic** In skip rope, teams perform a number of tricks and acrobatic stunts that involve swinging a 10-foot long around their bodies so that it passes under their feet and over their heads. Contestants participate in four events—singles speed events, doubles speed events, singles freestyle events, and doubles freestyle events. The team with the most points after all four events have concluded wins the contest.
- **Cycles** The team or contestant with possession over the initiative count makes the initial play. In singles events, one contestant at a time has possession over the initiative count, and they retain possession of the initiative count for 10 cycles, after which possession transfers to the contestant with the next-highest initiative.

In doubles events, one team at a time has possession over the initiative count, and they retain possession of the initiative count for 10 cycles, after which possession transfers to the contestant with the next-highest initiative.

- **Initial Play** On her turn, a contestant attempts to skip over a rope without allowing it to touch her body by making a skill check to earn completion. She makes one skill check to earn completion each cycle. After all teams and contestants have completed their cycles in all four events, the teams total all points accumulated by each of their members. The team with the most points accumulated wins the contest.
- Play Reactions During the contest, a contestant can attempt to push themselves in order to perform a special trick as a play reaction that enables them to score additional points during the contest. Each time she uses this play reaction, the contestant chooses one physical ability score (Dexterity, Constitution, or Strength) and makes an ability check with the chosen ability score. The DC for this check is 10 + 1for each previous check that the contestant made with the chosen ability score as part of this play reaction during the current event. If she succeeds, the contestant earns twice as many points if her next Acrobatics check is successful. If her result is a 15 or higher, she instead earns three times as many points if her next Acrobatics check is successful. If her result is 20 or higher, she instead earns four times as many points, and so on. If her check fails, she takes a -10 penalty on her next Acrobatics check instead, or a -20 penalty if she rolled a result of a natural 1 on her ability check.

Trivia

Contest (recollection)

Goal Teams participate in multiple events that showcase their speed, power, and overall ability at skipping over a thin piece of rope or wire. The contestant with the most points at the end of a phase wins that phase, and the contestant with the most points overall wins the contest.

Teams Any number of teams of any number of contestants Initiative Quality standard initiative

SKILLS

Scoring Skills Knowledge (any) (DC Varies), Profession (any) (DC Varies)

Frequency 1 minute

- Scoring Intervals 25 questions (1 question per team)
 COMPLETION
- **Points** highest accumulated; **Scoring Event** Whenever a team succeeds at a skill check to earn completion, that team scores 1 point.

DESCRIPTION

Basic In trivia, teams take turns answering questions about a variety of topics ranging from historical events and local trivia to complex questions regarding science, philosophy, and magical studies. Contestants act as a team, with all contestants acting simultaneously in order to increase their team's chances at success. Answering questions correctly causes teams to score points, and the team with the most points after all questions have been asked wins the contest.

- **Cycle** The contestant with the highest initiative modifier on each team makes an initiative check. The team of the contestant with the highest initiative result goes first, after which turns alternate normally between all teams, as if those teams were individual characters.
- Initial Play Each time a team is given a question, a contestant on that team attempts a skill check to earn completion. This skill check can always be attempted untrained. Each time a question is posed, determine randomly what skill is used to earn completion. (For most trivia contests, roll 1d8 on the following table; 1: Knowledge [engineering]; 2: Knowledge [geography]; 3: Knowledge [history]; 4: Knowledge [local]; 5: Knowledge [nature]; 6: Knowledge [religion]; 7: Profession [any]; 8: GM's choice [any Knowledge or Profession skill.] After the skill is determined, randomly determine the difficulty of the question. (Roll 1d6 to determine the question's difficulty; 1: easy [DC 5]; 2: average [DC 10]; 3: challenging [DC 15]; 4: difficult [DC 20]; 5: very difficult [DC 25]; 6: extremely difficult [DC 30].)

If the contestant answers the question correctly, her team scores 1 point. If she answers incorrectly, one of the other teams has an opportunity to steal the question (see below). Note that specific trivia contests can have alternate lists of topics and question difficulty then the ones provided here, at the GM's decision.

Play Reactions Whenever a contestant attempts to answer a question, any number of allies on that contestant's team can spend a play reaction to attempt to use the aid another action to assist that contestant. Because skill checks made to earn completion can be made untrained in a trivia contest, skill checks to aid another can likewise be made untrained.

In addition, whenever a team fails to answer a question correctly, their opposition can attempt to steal the question if every member of that team spends a play reaction. All teams attempting to steal roll an initiative check (using only the initiative bonus of the contestants with the highest initiative modifiers on each team). The team with the highest initiative result can attempt to steal the question by rolling the appropriate skill check to earn completion. If they succeed, they score a point and the cycles resume as normal. If they fail, the team with the next highest initiative result attempts to steal the question. This continues until a team manages to successfully steal the question, or all teams eligible to steal try and fail to do so.

Designing a Contest

Unlike the other types of skill challenges presented in the *SKILL CHALLENGE HANDBOOK*, contests do not have guidelines involving their creation. This is due to the fact that contests largely derive their difficulty from the relationship between opposed characters—the PCs should find difficulty in surmounting their adversaries, not in actually participating in the contest itself. As a result, designing a new contest is more about evoking the feel of a particular game or sport rather than picking skill DCs off of a table or assigning special qualities to a stat block.

Variant Contests

GMs can tweak the contests described in this section slightly in order to create entirely new contests. Listed below is a sample of a variant contest that tweaks the default rules for one of the contests listed to create a different play experience.

Scaled Trivia: This variant of the trivia contest uses 5 predetermined categories rather than randomly rolling a new category each round, and there are 25 questions total rather than 25 questions per team. Each category has one easy question, one average question, one challenging question, one hard question, and one very hard question, and this information is publicly available to contestants. Each round, teams choose one question category and difficulty to answer—a team cannot choose a category and difficulty combination that has already been answered. Answering a question correctly scores a number of points equal to the question's DC divided by 5.

Strip Poker: This variant of the poker contest functions identically to poker, except strip poker lacks tokens as a betting mechanic. Instead of betting wealth, all contestants begin the game wearing a predetermined number of articles of clothing, with the most common number being six (examples include shoes, socks, pants, underwear, shirt, and undershirt). Sometimes inexperienced players are allotted additional garments as a handicap. Instead of betting tokens, players bet articles of clothing when they play poker, declaring specific articles by name when they bet them. If the player "loses" that hand, they must remove any articles of clothing that are bet until the game ends. The last player wearing any clothing wins.

Typically, players cannot bet clothing that is being worn under another piece of clothing. For instance, a player can't bet her undershirt until she's bet (and lost) her shirt.

The most important consideration when creating a new skill challenge is, "Does this feel like my players are participating in the game or sport described by the contest without having to actually be masters of that game or sport?" This is challenging to codify, as it requires the ability to distill a given activity to its essential components and translate that activity to the game's quintessential medium-the d20. When considering how to best capture the "feel" of a contest by distilling it down to its most essential components, it is best to consider the dynamics of the game or sport itself-if you were watching real-life players participating in that activity, what would you see? What would be moving, who would be participating, what does the playing space look like and how does it change as conditions within the contest grow and evolve? A contest's mechanics should generally reflect these emotions and observations. For example, in the baseball skill challenge, the game starts out slow, with the pitcher determining the DC that the batter must meet in order to hit the ball, giving the sense of a pitcher throwing a ball to a batter over and over again, trying to trick him into striking out. These considerations are what make contests into fun, memorable experiences.

Influence Chellenges

Some of the most important encounters that adventures face are battles of wits and words, during which they must convince great kings to take action or gently ease secret information from guarded lips. Influence challenges are powerful transitional encounters that allow the GM an opportunity to provide exposition, create tension, and potentially introduce or reacquaint the PCs with friend and foe alike.

Influence challenges are a specific type of progress-based or success-based skill challenge in which one or more characters attempt to earn the favor of other characters to meet some greater objective, such as learning a secret or gaining support in a war effort. Influence challenges can be progress-based or success-based and follow the same rules for running them as standard skill challenges (see page 06), but they consist of several different stat blocks, have a significantly different list of elements, and have additional special qualities not found in standard skill challenges. In addition, there are special actions that only apply to influence challenges. Unless otherwise noted, assume that influence challenges follow all of the standard rules associated with skill challenges with the same completion method (progress- or success-based), such as the sequence for which characters act during a cycle and how initiative is determined.

Running an Influence Challenge

Although influence challenges follow the same rules for running them as standard skill challenges, all influence challenges possess a minimum of two stat blocks—one for the skill challenge itself and one for each character being influenced during the skill challenge. A character's stat block during a skill challenge is different from its stat block during combat—this stat block lists the character's goals, desires, the methods by which it can be influenced, and the benefits for successfully influencing it.

Characters can participate in an influence challenge for up to 8 hours per day without suffering any ill effects. Characters wishing to influence other characters for longer periods of time may attempt to as described in the Running a Chase Challenge section of the Chase Rules (see page 30) but few characters will tolerate such long-winded attempts at influencing them and often disengage from the influence skill challenge, which may impose a penalty of the GM's choosing on the overbearing character or cause her to fail the influence challenge outright. Influence challenges follow this sequence:

1. When the skill challenge begins, all characters roll initiative.

- 2. After all characters acting in the influence challenge roll initiative, they can attempt a relevant Knowledge check or a Sense Motive to recognize target NPCs. The DC for this check is equal to 13 + the influence challenge's CR. If a character succeeds on this check for an NPC, she and all of her allies gain a +4 bonus on discovery checks involving that NPC. This bonus doesn't stack.
- 3. Characters act in initiative order (highest to lowest).
- When everyone has had a turn, the next cycle begins with the character with the highest initiative, and steps 4 and 5 repeat until the skill challenge ends (either because the characters succeeded or failed).

Completion

Earning completion during an influence challenge is generally the same as earning completion during any other progress- or success-based skill challenge with one notable exceptioncharacters must guess what skills they can use to attempt to earn completion with an NPC in an influence challenge. Characters generally gain no benefit or hindrance when using a skill that cannot influence the NPC, though the GM may rule that multiple fumbling annoy the target and impose penalties on future rolls. Characters can learn which skills can be used to earn completion with an NPC by making discovery checks (see the discovery section under special actions on page 10).

In an influence challenge, "influencing a target NPC" is synonymous with "earning completion," and an "influence check" is synonymous with, "a skill check made to earn completion." Unlike most skill challenges, a skill challenge isn't necessarily cleared when the PCs manage to gain the listed amount of progress or successes with a target NPC. Instead, an NPC's completion lists the amount of progress or successes needed to gain sway with an NPC (see Sway, page 56), and characters clear an influence challenge by completing the objectives listed under the skill challenge's scene and objectives (see page 56).

Special Actions

In addition to the list of special actions that you can perform during a standard progress- or success-based skill challenge, there are several special actions that you can take during an influence challenge that are unique to this type of skill challenge. This section discusses all of the various actions that you can perform during an influence other than attempting to earn completion or using one of the special actions detailed in the standard skill challenge rules on page 09. In addition, the rules for discovery checks function differently during an influence challenge then as outlined on page 10.

Counter Sway

During an influence encounter where opposition is present (see page 55), a character can attempt to lower an enemy's influence level over an NPC rather than raise her own. This functions exactly like attempting a skill check to earn completion, except a successful influence check allows the character to lower an enemy's sway over the NPC instead of gaining progress or



successes. The sabotaging character gains a +2 bonus on her influence check if she has minor sway over the NPC, a +4 bonus if she has moderate sway, or a +6 bonus if she has major sway. Sabotaging an NPC's influence level requires as much progress or as many successes as the enemy would need to increase her influence level with that NPC. A sabotaging character who knows of an NPC's strengths can use that knowledge to ascribe unfavorable characteristics to the enemy she hopes to sabotage. If these disparaging descriptions are true (or if the NPC believes them to be true), the saboteur gains a +2 bonus on influence checks per strength on influence checks to counter her enemy's influence. Generally, you can make an NPC believe such remarks are true as a half-cycle action by making a successful Bluff check. The DC for such a Bluff check is equal to 15 + the target's CR, and this DC increases based upon the lie's believability, as if the target NPC were making an opposed Sense Motive check. (See the Sense Motive skill in Chapter 4 in the PATHFINDER ROLEPLAYING GAME CORE RULEBOOK.)

This mechanic is appropriate when the saboteur and the enemy she is trying to sabotage are on roughly equal footing, or when the saboteur has a high level of influence. A saboteur wishing to erode the influence of a far more trusted individual, such as a group seeking to convince a queen that her closest advisor is betraying her, either cannot attempt to lower the trusted individual's influence level without first gathering substantial evidence against them, or might not be able to lower their influence at all in some circumstances.

Discovery

During an influence challenge, a character can attempt a discovery check to discover information about an NPC that she is attempting to influence. This can be represented in a multitude of ways—socializing with the target NPC, gathering information about the target NPC through friends, eavesdropping, or rumormongering, or quietly observing the target NPC's actions from a distance. Attempting to discover information about a target NPC is a half-cycle action.

Before attempting a discovery check, a character chooses whether to try and learn the target NPC's strengths, the NPC's weaknesses, or the skills that can be used to influence that NPC. Each NPC's stat block lists a number of skills that can be used to make discovery checks, as well as their DCs and difficulties. When a character attempts a discovery check, the GM should tell her the possible types of skill checks for each kind of discovery check (though not their difficulty or DCs), and let the character pick which to attempt. Discovery checks that rely on a Knowledge skill requires observation in the current moment, not static knowledge.

A character who succeeds at a discovery check learns one of the skills that can influence the target NPC (starting with the skill with the lowest DC), one of the target's biases, one of the target's strengths, or one of the target's weaknesses. For every 5 by which the character's result exceeds the DC, she learns one additional influence skill, bias, strength, or weakness. At the GM's decision, skills other than those listed as discovery skills may be applicable, though the difficulty is always one step higher then the highest difficulty list. For instance, characters might be able to steal information using Sleight of Hand, search for it using Perception, or intuit it from bystanders using Sense Motive.

Locate Objective

When participating in an influence challenge, it is often necessary for characters to split up to search for target NPCs, uncover mysteries, or perform other objectives that they need to fulfill during the gathering. (See page 56 for more information about objectives during an influence challenge.)

A character can locate any objective present during the influence challenge as a cycle action. This action includes time spent moving around looking for the objective, allowing a character to interact with the desired objective on the round after she locates it. Alternatively, a character can attempt to locate an objective as a half-cycle action instead of a full-cycle action by attempting a Diplomacy, Knowledge (local) or Perception check with a DC equal to 11 + the influence challenge's CR. If the character knows what her objective looks like or has been there before, reduce the DC to DC 11. If a character fails this check, she fails to locate her objective as a half-cycle action, and instead takes the entire cycle locating it.

GMs can use this action to simulate the time required to move across large areas or throughout the area where the influence challenge is taking place. For example, the GM might require a character attending a coronation at the king's palace to use the locate objective action to move from the dining room to the vizier's study.

Opposition

Although opposition isn't a defining feature of an influence challenge, an opposing party of NPCs with goals that conflict with, or outright oppose, those of the PCs can place additional pressure on both parties to complete their tasks. In this regard, the opposition exists not to directly compete with the PCs and their allies (though this can certainly be the case), they can provide an additional layer of difficulty and urgency during the skill challenge.

During an influence challenge, anytime a character succeeds on an influence check against a target NPC, that character's opposition takes a cumulative -2 penalty on influence checks against that NPC. If she and her allies have any penalties on further influence checks to influence that NPC as a result of their opposition's successes, a successful influence check also reduces such penalties by -2. As a result, characters might feel inclined to change tactics upon noticing that an opposing character is successfully influencing a target NPC. For instance, if Kyr'shin notices a rival talking with a particular NPC, he would have to decide whether to try and influence that NPC himself, thus foiling his rivals' efforts at undermining him and potentially ruining further attempts to sway that NPC for his rivals, or yield that NPC to the opposition and focus on influencing other NPCs instead.

The opposition is never referenced in an influence challenge's stat block, but nevertheless it is important for the GM to have stat blocks for the opposition to determine their skill check bonuses and special abilities. The CR for any character or characters acting as opposition in an influence should always be equal to or less than the influence challenge's CR.

Scene and Objectives

In an influence challenge, the scene refers to the location where the skill challenge is taking place, while the objectives refer to the specific goals that character(s) must complete in order to clear the influence challenge successfully. This stat block also notes the consequences of successfully clearing or failing the influence challenge. A skill challenge's scene and objective forms its own stat block, and is described in-depth below.

Sway

During an influence challenge, the objectives are often directly tied to swaying one or more NPCs to perform a special favor



or service or some kind. In longer-term social engagements, the PCs may need to succeed at multiple influence challenges to build towards larger goals. Characters start with having no sway over most target NPCs. Each time a character sways a target NPC during an influence challenge (gaining the amount of progress or number of successes listed in its stat block), they increase their influence level over that NPC by one step.

No Sway: The NPC treats the character as any group of strangers with the character's fame or infamy (if any). If the NPC speaks of the character, it is often off-hand or in passing, and the NPC places her own plans above the character's own.

Minor Sway: The NPC might perform small favors for the character that do not involve a significant expenditure of resources. The NPC speaks favorably about the character to others, and the NPC does not interfere in the character's plans unless they conflict with her goals.

Moderate Sway: The NPC might perform favors for the character that require some of her own resources or are timeconsuming, as long as they do not threaten the NPC's overall interests. The NPC actively seeks to convince people to work with the character, and if the NPC's plans conflict with the character's goals, the NPC tries to work with the character to find a mutually acceptable resolution to the conflict.

Major Sway: The NPC assists the character with tasks that pose a significant risk to her position or status, and depending upon the circumstances, may risk her safety for the character. The NPC advocates for the character, even when doing so is unpopular, and she undermines the character's enemies. The NPC concedes a personal goal in order to allow the character to move forward with one of their plans, as long as the character provides a suitable alternative.

Elements of the Scene

All scenes, regardless of location, have the following elements: CR*, setting, objectives, phases, frequency*, benefit*, and penalty*. Some influence challenges might also include optional elements, such as special qualities. Elements marked with an asterisk (*) use the same rules as standard skill challenges, as described on page 12.

Setting

An influence challenge's setting is a short summary of the abstract location where the influence challenge is being held. Typically, an influence challenge's setting entry is several sentences long and lists only the most important facts and information. For instance, if the setting is a wedding, the influence challenge will likely list the settlement that the wedding is taking place in, as well as important details about the wedding. The influence challenge would typically refrain from noting information like the nation, plane, or planet that the influence challenge takes place on unless the this location is a drastic departure from where the PCs had been previously adventuring or provides special qualities or other features that affect the influence challenge's scene stat block (see page 57).

Objectives

During an influence challenge, all characters have specific objectives that they must accomplish in order to successfully clear the influence challenge. Under most circumstances, these objectives are achieved by gaining enough sway (see page 56) with one or more target NPCs, but at the GM's decision clever PCs might be able to find other ways to accomplish these objectives during the influence challenge.

Objectives can be general or specific to one or more characters. If opposition is present during the influence challenge, the opposition's objectives are also listed.

Phases and Cycles

Influence challenges occur in cycles, just as standard skill challenges do. Where influence challenges differ is in how these cycles are organized. In an influence challenge, cycles are grouped together into phases, which generally represent what is going on during the social event that the influence challenge is taking place in. For instance, the phases of an influence challenge that takes place during a typical wedding might be broken as follows: arrival, ceremony, cocktail hour, newlywed's arrival, toasts, dinner, first dance, cake cutting, second dance, and farewell. The phases of any influence challenge, however, are ultimately determined by the GM and can be combined, subdivided, or altered as necessary to create the desired encounter and atmosphere.

Each phase lasts a specific number of cycles, which is noted next to its name in parenthesis. Different phases might consist of a similar number of cycles, or they might be starkly contrasted. Some phases are so brief that they don't allow for much socialization—these are noted as having 0 cycles.

SQ (Optional Element)

Influence challenges can possess numerous special qualities specific qualities that use standard rules that are referenced (but not repeated) in skill challenge stat blocks. Influence challenges can possess any of the following special qualities available to a standard skill challenge (see page 15): imbued, individual completion, limited completion, specific completion, specific skills, variable difficulty, or special.

Events (Optional Element)

Special happenings often occur during social encounters, and the events optional element records all scripted happenings that occur during an influence challenge. In many ways, the events optional element functions like a standard skill challenge's thresholds (see page 18), except events don't advance based on how much progress or completion is earned during the skill challenge, they're determined strictly by phase. Events create circumstances that make certain target NPCs harder or easier to influence, create effects that hinder a character's ability to participate in the influence challenge, and similar complications.

Each event is associated with a specific phase count, such as "1st Phase" or "4th Phase". When the phase indicated by the influence challenge's phase counts begins, the event takes effect. Events can take effect immediately when the phase count begins, or they may take effect after a number of cycles, as described by the specific event. Events also list how long they last, with 'one or more cycles' or 'until the end of the phase' being the most common.

For example, a wedding might list that during phase 3 (the cocktail hour), several target NPCs get into a scuffle, and characters have the opportunity to take sides. The event might describe how siding with one target NPC grants characters sway with her, but reduces sway with the other target NPC.

Influence challenges list events in ascending order based upon their phase count. Since phases pass sequentially, this means that events are listed in chronological order—the first event happens first, the second event happens second, and so on. If multiple events happen in the same phase, multiple events are listed with the same phase count, with those events being listed in chronological order from first to last.

Events describe the scenario that takes place when the event occurs, followed by any effects or consequences based upon potential character action. A consequence can be anything from combat breaking out to a skill challenge starting, to gaining or loosing sway with a target NPC.

There is no limit to the number of events that an influence challenge can have-influence challenges have as many events as are needed to set the scene that the GM wishes to provide to the players, and the GM shouldn't feel like she has to plan every event that occurs in advance (though having a list ready, especially for plot-relevant events, is useful). Typically, events are sporadic in low-count phases (no more than 1 or 2 every few phases) and tend to increase in frequency to help build a sense of urgency in the characters participating in the skill challenge. Other influence challenges may not have a single event, or others might have events that are contingent upon the character's prior actions. For instance, an event might dictate that a vizier returns to his room to powder his nose during an influence challenge's 5th phase, and upon doing so, has an opportunity to notice if anyone has rifled through his belongings. Should he notice, the event triggers. Ultimately, the purpose of events is to give the GMs tools to make target NPCs feel alive and active, rather than caricatures that only exist when the PCs choose to humor them.

Scene Stat Block

In an influence challenge, the scene and objectives receive their own stat block separate from those of the target NPCs. This is done to make it easier for GMs to keep track of the setting as well as participating characters' overarching goals, both of which often extend across multiple target NPCs. A scene stat block is organized as follows.

Name and CR: The name of the location or event where the influence challenge is taking place is presented first, along with its Challenge Rating (CR). An influence challenge's CR is a numerical indication of what the Average Party Level (APL) of a group of characters should be before they attempt the influence challenge, and all target NPCs and opposition use the CR noted in their corresponding scene stat block to determine their skill DCs and other effects dependant upon CR.

Setting: Listed here is a general description of the location(s) where the influence challenge is taking place. Each location receives a brief description that includes the size of the area, the function of that area, and any important information about that location. As this listing is part of a stat block, more in-depth descriptions of these locations should be located elsewhere, such as in the GM's notes or within the body of an adventure.

Objectives: Listed here is a general description of the objectives that each character participating in the skill challenge is attempting to complete. This does not include the objectives of target NPCs, who have a separate section within their stat block to summarize their personal goals. Instead, this section lists the goals for characters who are actively attempting to influence those target NPCs—namely the PCs and their opposition (if any).

Benefit: This is the reward or boon that each character or characters who are actively attempting to influence the target NPCs gain for completing the influence challenge. The PCs' boons are always listed here, and if they have opposition, the opposition's boons are listed here as well.

Penalty: This is the consequence that each character or characters who are actively attempting to influence the target NPCs gain for failing to complete the influence challenge. The PCs' consequences are always listed here, and if they have opposition, the opposition's consequences are listed here as well.

Events: This notes any events that occur as the influence challenge progresses.

Sample Scene

The following scene is designed to be used in conjunction with the sample target NPCs on page 61.

Would-Be Wedding

CR 9

- **Setting** After Kyr'shin narrowly bested Gea, a would-besuitor, in single combat, both their kingdoms are hosting lavish celebrations in anticipation of Kyr'shin and Gea's betrothal. At the end of the party, the two are expected to announce whether or not they will be married, and the conditions of the marriage.
- **Objectives** Each character participating in the would-be wedding has the following objectives.
 - *Dyne* The gathering of so many minds from foreign nations has provided Dyne with a unique opportunity to try and gleam ancient about a forgotten foe from the jungle's ancient past from the natives.
 - *Kyr'shin* Whether or not Kyr'shin wishes to marry Gea, the wedding provides him with a unique opportunity to interact—and potentially smooth over—political ties with a foreign nation. Additionally, Kyr'shin needs to determine the arrangements of the wedding and decide

whether or not to marry Gea, or whether to potentially strike some other bargain with her outside of the normal stipulations of her peoples' matriarchal society.

Inquisitor Sala'dean Kyr'shin's political ties represent a financial investment from Sala'dean's employers, who have gotten wind of an assassination attempt on Kyr'shin's life during his wedding. Sala'dean needs to not only find and route the assassins without alerting them to his presence.

Phases 5; Cycles 3 each

Frequency 20 minutes

SQ individual completion

- **Benefit** The characters can gain the following boons and rewards if they successfully influence the target NPCs.
 - *Dyne* can glean additional insight and information regarding his studies, and potentially enlist help in doing so.
 - *Kyr'shin* can potentially create stronger ties with foreign nations and negotiate a more favorable political deal with Gea, which may or may not include marriage.
 - Sala'dean can dampen or outright thwart the assassination attempt on Kyr'shin's life.
- **Penalty** The characters take the following consequences if they fail to influence the target NPCs.
 - *Dyne* fails to gain any additional insight or information from the locals, or could potentially burn bridges with some of the region's most influential mages and historians.
 - *Kyr'shin* accidentally gets himself caught in an unfavorable arrangement with Gea and her people, or could incite hostilities from a foreign nation.
 - *Sala'dean* fails to hamper the assassin's progress, allowing them to attempt to assassinate Kyr'shin unopposed.

Elements of a Target NPC

Target NPCs have a variety of elements, based upon the nature of the character and their role during the influence challenge. All target NPCs have the following elements: vital statistics, appearance, recognize, background, goals, skills and saves, discovery, primary skills*, secondary skills*, strengths, weaknesses, completion (progress- or successes-only)*, benefit*, and penalty*. Some target NPCs might also include optional elements, such as biases or hidden agenda. Elements marked with an asterisk (*) use the same rules as standard skill challenges, as described on page 12.

Vital Statistics

A target NPC's vital statistics is a summary of the following, in order: alignment, age category, creature or race, classes and levels. Included with the target NPC's classes in parenthesis are any archetypes that the target NPC possesses for those class levels. If the NPC has racial Hit Dice, its total Hit Dice are also noted here.

Appearance

The target NPC's appearance is briefly listed here. This entry notes physical attributes of the target NPC (such as their race,





sex, and defining features) as well as their current dress. A target NPC's appearance focuses on the NPC's physical appearance, behavior, and social presence, rather than their personality or other purely mental attributes of the character.

Recognize

A target NPC's recognize entry lists the skill DC required to recognize the target NPC by reputation, fame, or similar descriptions. The skill or skills used to recognize the NPC are based upon her personal accomplishments and profession. For instance, identifying a target NPC as a renowned extraplanar scholar might require a Knowledge (planes) check, while identifying a high-ranking noble might require a Knowledge (nobility) check. The DC for the check is always equal to 13 + the influence challenge's CR, although certain special qualities can adjust this DC, as noted in their description. All target NPCs can be recognized using Sense Motive, but the DC is sometimes higher than it would otherwise be with a more applicable skill.

Characters participating in an influence challenge attempt to recognize target NPCs at the start of the skill challenge, after initiative rolls are made. If a character succeeds on her check to recognize a target NPC, she and all of her allies learn the target NPC's background (see below), which grants them a +4 discovery checks involving that NPC. This bonus doesn't stack.

Background

A target NPC's background is a brief summary of their history, status, and significance to the influence challenge. A target NPC's background normally centers around their reason for being involved in the influence challenge, as well as their relevance to the influence challenge's objectives. This often includes the target NPC's honorifics, profession, family heritage, and similar information. Characters can learn a target NPC's background by successfully recognizing the target NPC (see above), and doing so grants the character and her allies a bonus on discovery checks involving the target NPC.

Goals

This section notes the target NPC's personal goals as they related to the influence challenge. In many ways, a target NPC's goals are their own objectives while at the influence challenge (see page 56), but often they are irrelevant to the influence challenge or aren't applicable. If a character's objectives is at odds with a target NPC's goals, she will likely need to earn significant sway in order to convince the NPC to assist her (see Sway, page 56). At the GM's decision, learning a target NPC's goals through sleuthing or good roleplaying may allow afford the character up to a +8 bonuses on skill checks to influence that target NPC should she use this knowledge to actively further the NPC's goals. In an intrigue-heavy influence challenge, it is unlikely that every target NPC will be entirely upfront about their goals. If a target NPC has any secret objectives or hidden agendas relevant to the events of the influence challenge, they're found in this section rather than the goals entry (see above). At the GM's discretion, uncovering a target NPC's hidden agenda could provide a character with up to a +12 bonus on skill checks to influence the target NPC should the character use this information to her advantage, often by helping the target NPC accomplish their hidden agenda or through blackmail. Although simpler and ultimately unlikely to negatively impact the character during the influence challenge in which she blackmailed the target NPC, blackmailing target NPCs is likely to have negative consequences after the influence challenge ends, such as by shifting the target NPC's attitude towards the character to unfriendly or even hostile.

Skills and Saves

It is crucial to have the skill and saving throw bonuses of target NPCs at hand because characters will often try actions against them that requires opposed skill checks or saving throws. For example, a character might try to steal a target NPC's brooch with a Sleight of Hand check or charm an NPC with *charm person*. Although it is helpful to have a full stat block for each target NPC you use, it isn't fully necessary. Instead, target NPCs list their total skill bonus in relevant skills (such as Knowledge skills, Perception, Sense Motive, and social skills like Bluff or Diplomacy) and their total saving throw bonus for each of their saves. Also included here are any noteworthy feats, items, or abilities that the target has that are related to her skill bonuses or saving throws, such as the trapfinding ability or a *belt of physical perfection* +2.

Discovery

In an influence challenge, target NPCs don't simply walk up to characters and explain in detail precisely the most effective way to sway their thoughts and actions. Instead, characters must analyze a target NPC in order to discover which skills can be used to sway them. The NPC's discovery lists the skills that can be used to discover the target NPC's primary skills, biases, strengths, and weaknesses, as well as the DCs of those skills.

Biases (Optional)

Most characters have biases—subtle attitudes that influence their behavior and world view. Target NPCs likewise have biases, and they can influence the outcome of an influence challenge. For example, a target NPC may think favorably of half-orcs and be suspicious of elves. If the target NPC's biases affect a character, apply a +2 circumstance bonus to the character's influence checks if the bias works in her favor, or a -2 circumstance penalty if the bias works against her. These modifiers may be even greater for extremely strong biases, up to a +8 for a favorable bias or a -8 for an unfavorable bias.

Strengths

Target NPCs may be impervious to certain social tactics; such tactics are referred to as that NPC's strengths. For example, a target NPC with little patience for flattery may think less favorably of someone who showers her with compliments. A character who incorporates a target NPC's strength into an influence check made to sway them through roleplaying or circumstance takes a -4 penalty on the check. Knowledge of a target NPC's strengths can also be used as a powerful tool for sabotaging the opposition's attempt to gain influence over a target NPC, as described under the counter influence special action above.

Weaknesses

Target NPCs often have at least one weakness—a social tactic that is particularly effective against them. A weakness can manifest as a deep-seated secret or insecurity, a hobby that the target NPC could talk about for days on end, or a type of flattery or interaction that quickly arouses the trust and sway of the target NPC. A character who incorporates a target NPC's strength into an influence check made to sway them through roleplaying or circumstance gains a cumulative +2 bonus on the check for each weakness she incorporates.

Favor (Optional)

The target NPC might ask a favor of a character he trusts. Oftentimes completing such favors award additional sway with the target NPC, counting as a number of successful skill checks made to sway them. The precise amount of influence garnered from such tasks varies from individual to individual, but it often depends upon the difficulty of the task and the margin of success the character manages in completing it. For instance, convincing a rival into an unfavorable contract is likely to count for more influence over a target NPC than compromising with that same rival on more mutual terms. This task doesn't necessarily need to be socially-based—a target NPC might just as easily call for a political rival's assassination, assistance in dealing with some kind of a threat, or a few well-trained baby sitters to watch their kids for the night. In any case, these favors should always be run as either a type of skill challenge or as combats, with the number of encounters needed factoring in heavily when determining how much sway is earned for completing the favor.

A target NPC's favor entry always lists the nature of the favor required, the amount of process or successes earned from completing it, and how many skill challenges or combat encounters are needed to complete the favor.

Events (Optional)

Whether literal or symbolic, events are likely to occur throughout an influence challenge. Events can be as blatant as moving from dinner to a cake-cutting ceremony during a wedding or as subtle as a saboteur spiking a buffet with poison. These events are often planned out in advance and are listed in the influence challenge's scene stat block, but actions taken



prior to the influence challenge may also be listed here, such as a note of how the target NPC responses based upon a prior engagement with a character or how rumors and the like have spread about her, based upon her conduct.

SQ (Optional Element)

Target NPCs can possess numerous special qualities—specific qualities that use standard rules that are referenced (but not repeated) in skill challenge stat blocks. Influence challenges can possess any of the following special qualities available to a standard skill challenge (see page 14): critical fumble, individual completion, limited completion, specific completion, specific skills, variable difficulty, or special.

As a general rule, if a special quality can appear in both a scene stat block and a target NPC stat block (such as individual completion or limited completion), it doesn't need to be listed in the target NPC's stat block if it is already listed in the scene stat block unless that special quality functions differently for the target NPC then it does for the overarching influence challenge, in which case both apply if applicable; if they conflict, the target NPC's special quality takes precedence over the scene stat block's special quality.

Target NPC Stat Block

In an influence challenge, each target NPC receives their own stat block separate from that of the scene. Social stat blocks are very flexible, and can influence any information relevant to the influence challenge, though commonly included information is listed below. A target NPC stat block is organized as follows.

Name: The name of the target NPC is presented first. The target NPC's CR does not appear in its stat block, as the skill DCs needed to influence a target NPC are based on the influence challenge's CR rather than the NPC's CR, as noted in the influence challenge's scene stat block.

Vital Statistics: This entry lists the target NPC's alignment, age category, creature or race, classes and levels.

Appearance: The target NPC's physical appearance, including their apparent age, race, sex, and garb, is described here.

Recognize: The skill DC to recognize the NPC's significance at the start of the influence challenge is noted here.

Background: A brief detailing of the target NPC's background, as it pertains to the characters participating in the influence challenge, is described here.

Goals: This is a list of the target NPC's goals.

Hidden Agendas: If the target NPC has a hidden agenda, it is noted here.

Skills and Saves: The target NPC's saving throw bonuses, as well as their bonuses in any socially pertinent skills, is noted here.

Discovery: This entry lists the skill DC of any discovery checks made to attempt to learn the target NPC's primary skills, biases, strengths, or weaknesses.

Primary Skills: This lists the skills that the PCs can use to sway the target NPC, as well as the difficulty and skill check DC associated with each skill.

Secondary Skills: This lists the difficulty and skill DC of all skill checks that are attempted sway the target NPC with skills that are not primary skills. The GM is the final arbiter of which skills can be used to sway a target NPC, and they can choose to allow a particularly applicable secondary skill to instead act as a primary skill with a skill DC of their choosing.

Biases: Any biases that the target NPC has, as well as any circumstance bonuses or penalties that a character gains from including them in their influence check, are listed here.

Strengths: Any tactics that the target is invulnerable to, as well as the penalty that a character gains from including them in their influence check, are listed here.

Weaknesses: Any tactics that are particularly effective against the target NPC, as well as the bonus that a character gains from including them in their influence check, are listed here.

Completion: This entry outlines the amount of completion (progress or successes) that a character needs in order to sway the target NPC.

Benefit: This is the reward or boon that the PCs gain for successfully swaying the target NPC.

Penalty: This is the consequence that the PCs incur should they fail to sway the target NPC.

Favors: This lists any favors that characters can do for the target NPC in order to sway them faster or more effectively.

Events: This notes any reactions that the target NPC has to the events of the influence challenge, as noted in the influence challenge's scene stat block.

Sample Target NPC

The following target NPC is designed to be used in conjunction with the sample scene on page 58.

Nolliss

CN Venerable elf expert 9

- **Appearance** This ancient elf's age is belied by her grace and beauty, hinted at only by her delicate, silver hair. Countless elven tattoos cover her wiry frame, and a cunning intellect hone by centuries of intrigue glitter within her gray eyes.
- **Recognize** Knowledge (local) (easy, DC 22) to recognize as one of the two leaders of the local jungle elf tribes.
- **Background** Nearly seven centuries old, Nolliss has lead her tribe for longer than most civilizations have existed and knows countless secrets about her homeland's ancient origins. Although required to attend the wedding by tradition, Nolliss opposes Kyr'shin and Gea's wedding because she doesn't believe that it's fair for Gea to straddle Kyr'shin to jungle elf traditions that ultimately move too slowly for the shortly-lived races to ever truly benefit from.
- **Goals** Although Nolliss opposes the wedding, she's content to let the 'children' make their own mistakes, as she sees Kyr'shin himself as the only person with anything to lose from the wedding arrangement.
- Skills Bluff +15, Diplomacy +15, , Knowledge (history) +18, Knowledge (local) +18, Sense Motive +15; Saves

Fort -1, Ref +0, Will +12

SKILLS

Discovery Sense Motive (easy, DC 22)

Primary Skills Diplomacy (average, DC 27; Nolliss is no stranger to diplomacy, and responds well enough to it.), Knowledge (arcana) (average, DC 27; Nolliss is well-versed in the arcane, and respects those who take more than a passing interest in it); Knowledge (history) (easy, DC 22; Impressing Nolliss with knowledge of the ancient past is a surefire way to earn her respect.); Knowledge (nobility) (easy, DC 22; As leader of her tribe, using the proper airs when dealing with Nolliss is a surefire way to earn her respect.)

Secondary Skills difficult, DC 32

- **Biases** Although she harbors no ill towards them, Nolliss is somewhat racist against races whose maximum lifespan is less than two centuries, believing their world view to be too short-sighted and ultimately treating them like children. A PC who belongs to such a race takes a -2 penalty on checks to influence Nolliss.
- **Strengths** Because of some trauma in her past, Nolliss is completely immune to threats or intimidation. A PC who includes a threat in an influence check against her takes a -4 penalty on the check.
- **Weaknesses** Centuries of leadership have inflated Nolliss's ego, and she respects those who show her the proper respect. As a result, acting submissively around Nolliss is an easy way to get her talking. A PC who submits to Nolliss as an authority figure or as a more knowledgable individual gains a +2 bonus on their influence check.

COMPLETION Successes 4

Benefit If Kyr'shin sways Nolliss, she fully discloses jungle elven marriage tradition to him, which provides him with enough context to know whether or not it benefits him to go through with the engagement. If he decides to marry, this knowledge gives him a +10 bonus on Diplomacy checks to negotiate the terms of the marriage.

If Dyne sways Nolliss, she provides him with the ancient history of the jungle, specifically regarding an ancient evil that once dwelled in the land. Nolliss confirms and refutes parts of Dyne's theories, and her first-hand information grants Dyne a permanent +5 bonus on Knowledge checks made to research this evil, and points him towards avenues and repositories of research that were previously unknown to him that he can better use to further his studies and defenses.

If Sala'dean sways Nolliss, he is able to determine that no one in her camp is suspect as Kyr'shin's assassin. Furthermore, Nolliss has seen shady humans lurking around the camp of the local human representatives, and points Sala'dean's investigation in that direction.

Penalty If Kyr'shin fails to sway Nolliss, she maintains her composure for political reasons and doesn't mislead him, but she doesn't provide him with any information regarding elven traditions. In fact, she decides that she can rest easy at night, knowing that, "At least that thick-headed fox'll get what's coming to him."

If Dyne fails to sway Nolliss, she simply refuses to engage him in academic discourse. If Dyne fails while simultaneously evoking one of Nolliss's strengths into his discourse, Nolliss is so offended that she decides to play a prank on the abrasive elf, feeding him a falsehood designed to muck up his research. Dyne must immediately make a Sense Motive check opposed by Nolliss's Bluff. If he fails, the next time he attempts to research any topic that Nolliss is knowledgable he takes a -5 penalty on his check. If he fails, there is a 50% chance that Dyne will instead uncover factually incorrect information, as determined by the GM.

If Sala'dean fails to sway Nolliss, he takes no penalties she refuses to engage him in further conversation, and he can simply investigate another target NPC.

Favors Nolliss is interested in the many happenings in the world, especially those that her insular jungle elves would otherwise be ignorant of. Any character who provides Nolliss with information that would have a Knowledge DC of 20 or higher immediately increases their sway with Nolliss by 1 step. A character can repeat this favor multiple times, but each time the minimum Knowledge DC increases by 5 for that character (DC 25 for the second increase, DC 30 for the second increase, and so on). Characters do not earn sway with Nolliss if the information that provide is not relevant to her or her interests, as determined by the GM.

Designing an Influence Challenge

Influence challenges essentially run like standard progressor success-based skill challenges, and as a result designing an influence challenge is similar to designing a standard skill challenge. When designing an influence challenge, you follow the same steps and guidelines as you would when designing a progress- or success-based standard skill challenge with several exceptions. First, you must design the target NPCs that will be present in the influence challenge. Next, you must design any events that will occur during the influence challenge, and describe how your target NPCs will react to them. Finally, you must design any opposition that will be present during the influence challenge. Tips and guidelines for designing appropriate events, opposition, and target NPCs are detailed below.

Determine Events

Events make your influence challenge feel alive and vibrant, and ultimately it is encouraged (but not required) for your influence challenges to have special events that occur. These events can be festivities that have been planned in advanced, or scripted encounters or events that happen during the course of the influence challenge. Whatever the case may be, forcing the PCs to adapt to ever-changing circumstances and complications makes for a more interesting and exciting event.

When choosing events that occur during an influence challenge, it can be helpful to design your target NPCs and opposition first, as well as define the setting of your skill challenge. Most events can be flavored to fit anywhere and many PCs enjoy a good surprise, but events are often more satisfying when they are a predictable surprise. In other words, events work best when they don't expect them, but they aren't so random that they couldn't have potentially predicted their occurrence. Furthermore, events should be driven by the NPCs that the PCs are interacting with (or who are capable of being interacted with). While it is perfectly acceptable for a dancing event to occur at the behest of some random party attendant, the start of an event is better used to draw attention to an NPC that the PCs have not engaged with yet, or to provide further information about an NPC that the PCs might have already met. For instance, the PCs might be able to figure out that they can sway a particular target NPC with Perform (dance) if they see her ushering in a dancing phase at a gala even if they haven't successfully discovered that about her with a successful discovery check. Such occurrences encourage and ultimately reward your players for paying attention to the things that the target NPCs are saying and doing during the skill challenge.

The circumstances imposed by an event should be able to benefit or hinder the PCs, but never by so much that they make the influence challenge trivial or impossible while the event is happening. Offering the PCs a +2 bonus or a -2 penalty based upon conditions that arise during the event and how they react to them is appropriate. Likewise, events should last long enough that all players have some time to try and take advantage of them, but they shouldn't last so long that the players become comfortable with their presence. Allowing an event to last three to five cycles is often a fair range of time for the PCs to try and gain their bearings and take advantage of the situation.

Determine Opposition

When your PCs are participating in an influence challenge, you may deem it necessary for the PCs to have opponents present who are actively working against them to complete their own goals during the influence challenge. Opposition NPCs can provide a multitude of rules—they might seek to discredit the PCs by reducing the PCs' sway over target NPCs, or they might have their own goals that the PCs are actively working to undermine. You can design your PCs' opposition either before or after designing the skill challenge itself. Ideally, you'll want to assign NPCs to your influence challenge who stand a fair chance at winning, but who aren't so competent that the PCs stand little chance of defeating them.

Although having full stat blocks for the opposition can be helpful if your PCs get into a brawl with them (and could be necessary based upon the events that occur before or after the influence challenge), the most important part of designing good opposition for the PCs is determining their skill bonuses. When choosing the opposition's skill bonuses, the opposition should be able to succeed on most easy skill checks by rolling a 5 or higher and on most average skill checks by rolling a 10 or higher. The opposition should be able to succeed on at least one-fourth of challenging skill checks by rolling a 10 or higher, and should be able to succeed on at least one difficult skill check by rolling a 10 or higher. The best way to determine the minimum bonus needed to accomplish this is to reference Table: Skill Challenge DCs by CR on page 28 and subtract the minimum d20 result that you want to result in a success from the skill DC for the desired difficulty and use the remainder as the opposition's DC.

For instance, if your PCs are participating in a CR 9 influence challenge (such as the one on the previous page) and you want to create opposition for them, you would begin by consulting Table: Skill Challenge DCs by CR and listing the skill DCs for each skill check difficulty for that CR. In the case of CR 9 encounters, the target DCs are easy (DC 22), average (DC 27), challenging (DC 29), and difficult (DC 32). To determine an appropriate bonus for easy DCs, take the easy DC associated with the skill challenge's CR (in this example, DC 22) and subtract 5. The remainder, 17, represents a good target bonus for the opposition, which will allow them to reliably clear easy skill checks in the skill challenge. Continue this process for each remaining difficulty and desired result (rolling a 10 or higher on average DCs, rolling a 10 or higher on challenging DCs, and rolling a 10 or higher on difficult DCs). This will give you a good list of bonuses to build for when designing the NPCs, or you could simply note the target bonuses and the skills they apply to and use them that way.

Sometimes, you may not want a skill challenge that is fair for the PCs. For instance, when the PCs are attempting to upset the efforts of the local mafia. In such instances, you should adjust the CR of the skill challenge accordingly, reducing the CR of the skill challenge by 1 if the opposition is weaker than the PCs or increasing the CR of the skill challenge if they are more powerful or skilled. This may also apply to a powerful opponent who is inconvenienced by the nature of the skill challenge (such as a charismatic inevitable attempting to win over support at a human gala). In such instances it is acceptable, even encouraged, to give the opposition circumstantial bonuses or penalties that place them on more even footing with the PCs.

Determine Target NPCs

Target NPCs are essential to influence challenges, and designing them is as important as building the skill challenge stat block for a standard skill challenge. The number of target NPCs in an influence challenge varies, but it should correlate to the amount of time that your PCs have to complete the influence challenge. For instance, don't expect your PCs to fully sway one target NPCs in two cycles, let along a contingent of four or five target NPCs!

When you create a target NPC, the character's skills and saves should be generated in the same manner as a member of the opposition, while discover and influence check DCs are generated using the rules for determining skill DCs for a standard skill challenge. This occurs because such skill DCs are better thought of as the circumstantial difficulty of engaging the NPC in that particular moment, rather than a static number that does not change from scene to scene.





The art of debate is among the most important that a person can master, for being able to linguistically confuse and confound enemies gives one the edge in negotiations of all ilk, and ultimately helps secure an individual's interests. In many ways debates are like duels, battles of words rather than swords. In a verbal duel, a duelist's greatest weapons are facts, wordplay, and rhetorical flourishes that enable her to win arguments or sway the masses.

Verbal duels are a specific type of success-based skill challenge in which two characters face off in a contest of wit and wordplay to attempt to win a series of exchanges with an ever-increasing ante. Verbal duels follow similar rules for a standard success-based skill challenge, but they are largely based upon the ever-changing conflict between the duelists rather than static difficulty classes. To this end, verbal duels have a significantly different action hierarchy, use different special actions, and have drastically different stat blocks. In addition, there are special actions that only apply to verbal duels. Unless otherwise noted, assume that verbal duels follow all of the standard rules associated with skill challenges with the same completion method (success-based).

Running a Verbal Duel

Although verbal duels follow the same rules for running them as standard skill challenges, the skills used to earn completion vary not from duel to duel, but by the decisions made by those participating in them. Furthermore, verbal duels feature the presence of opposition, rivals that actively oppose the PCs' attempts at victory during the skill challenge. Except where noted otherwise, the opposition follows the same rules as the PCs when determining how they act during a cycle in a verbal duel.

Characters can participate in a verbal duel for up to 8 hours per day without suffering any ill effects. Characters wishing to duel other characters for longer periods of time may attempt to as described in the Running a Chase Challenge section of the Chase Rules (see page 30) but few characters will tolerate such long-winded attempts at dueling them and often claim that such long-winded tactics are a sign of concession, which may impose a penalty of the GM's choosing on the overbearing character or cause her to fail the verbal duel outright. Verbal duels follow this sequence:

- 1. When the skill challenge begins, all characters assign their skills to the various tactics, as described under the Completion section below.
- 2. After all skills have been assigned to tactics, all characters can attempt a Diplomacy, Knowledge (history), Knowledge (local), or Sense Motive check to discover the audience's biases (see page 65). If there is no audience present to witness the verbal duel, skip this step.
- 3. After skills have been assigned and biases have been discovered, characters roll initiative, using the higher between their Dexterity modifier and their Intelligence modifier for this purpose.
- 4. Characters act in initiative order (highest to lowest).
- When everyone has had a turn, the next cycle begins with the character with the highest initiative, and steps 4 and 5 repeat until the skill challenge ends (either because the characters won or lost).

Completion

Verbal duels are success-based skill challenges, and earning

completion during a verbal duel is generally the same as earning completion during any other success-based skill challenge with several notable exceptions. First, verbal duels do not have a standardized list of skills used to earn completion. Instead, at the start of each verbal duel she assigns her skills to the list of tactics available for use in a verbal duel (see Tactics, page 66). A character can only assign a given to a single tactic at a time, so if a character assigns Perform (oratory) to allegory, she couldn't also assign it to emotional appeal.

Second, when attempting skill checks to earn completion during a verbal duel, a character is limited in which bonuses she can apply to skill checks that she makes to earn completion in a verbal duel. When making a skill check to earn completion in a verbal duel, a character gains a +1 bonus for each rank in that skill she possesses, as well as the +3 bonus for having ranks in the class if it is a class skill. Finally, she adds her Charisma modifier to any skill check made to earn completion in a verbal duel, even if that skill isn't normally Charisma-based. Any other modifiers that the character has grants edges instead of a bonus on her skill check to earn completion (see Edges, page 65).

Third, verbal duels possess one or more opponent characters, known as the opposition. The opposition in a verbal duel functions as described in the chase and contest rules (see Opposition, page 55), with the two characters making opposed checks that represent their back and forth debate. In addition, the number of successes needed to clear a verbal duel is based upon each character's magnetism, native intelligence, ability to gauge and react to her opponent's tactics, and similar factors. In order to win a verbal duel, a character must accumulate a total number of successes against her opposition equal to her opposition's Hit Dice + the average of her opposition's Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma modifiers (rounded down, minimum of 0).

Verbal Exchange

Verbal duels are fought in a series of exchanges. Each exchange is an argumentative back-and-forth in which each duelist attempts to gain the upper hand over her opponent earn successes towards completion. The end of an exchange often signals the end of the verbal duel or mark a change in the flow of the debate's conversation. Verbal duels may contain a single long-winded exchange or many smaller exchanges depending upon the tactics used by the duelists.

The first exchange begins at the start of the verbal duel. The character with the higher initiative result is the opening duelist, while the character with the lower initiative result is the countering duelist. At the start of the exchange, the opening duelist chooses a tactic that she has assigned a skill to (see Tactics, page 66) and attempts a skill check to earn completion as cycle action. Doing so increases the current ante from 0 to 1, and the exchange's DC is set to equal the result of the opening duelist's skill check.

During the countering duelist's turn, the duelist must decide whether she wishes to counter, end the exchange, or concede the duel. These choices (and their consequences) are detailed below. If she fails to counter the opening duelist or she concedes the exchange, the opening duelist earns a number of successes equal to the exchange's current ante and her opponent gains 1 edge (see below). If this isn't enough successes for the opening duelist to win the verbal duel, the countering duelist decides whether to begin a new exchange (wherein she is now the opening duelist and her opponent is the countering duelist) or concede the duel.

If she successfully counters her opponent, her opponent must decide whether she wishes to counter, end the exchange, or concede the duel, as described above. The two duelists repeat this cycle until one character concedes or manages to earn a number of successes equal to their opposition's Hit Dice + the average of their opposition's Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma modifiers (rounded down, minimum of 0).

The actions that a duelist can take during her turn are described below.

Counter: If a character decides to counter her opponent, first she increases the current ante by 1. Next, she chooses a tactic that she has assigned a skill to (see Tactics, page 66) and attempts a skill check to earn completion with that skill. If her check equals or exceeds the exchange's exchange DC, the exchange continues and the exchange DC is set to the character's skill check result. The character's opponent then has an opportunity to counter, end the exchange, or concede.

End the Exchange: If a character ends the exchange, her opponent gains a number of successes equal to the exchange's ante and her opponent gains 1 edge (as described above), but the character can begin a new exchange. In this new exchange, the character who ended the exchange becomes the opening duelist, while her opponent becomes the countering duelist.

Concede the Duel: If a character concedes the verbal duel, she automatically loses, as if her opponent had earned enough successes to win the verbal duel.

Special Actions

In addition to the list of special actions that you can perform during a standard success-based skill challenge, there are several special actions that you can take during a chase that are unique to this type of skill challenge. This section discusses all of the various actions that you can perform during a chase other than attempting to earn completion or using one of the special actions detailed in the standard skill challenge element rules on page 12.

Discover Biases

If a character failed to discover the audience's biases before rolling initiative, she can attempt a second discovery check to discover the audience's biases at a -5 penalty once during the verbal duel. If she succeeds, she learns the audience's biases as if she succeeded on her initial check. Regardless of whether she succeeds or fails, a character can only attempt one check to discover the audience's biases once the verbal duel has taken place—she is simply too overcome by the mental demands of dueling to take a second, closer look at her audience.

Attempting to discover an audience's biases is a free action that a character can attempt during her turn.

Seed the Audience

During a verbal duel, allies of either duelist can attempt to seed the crowd to grant that duelist benefits to help her succeed. In order to seed an audience, at least one character (the duelist or one of her allies) must have successfully discovered the audience's biases. Seeding an audience requires a successful Bluff, Diplomacy, or Intimidate check with a DC equal to 10 + the verbal duel's CR + the crowd's size modifier (see Audience, page 69).

When attempting to seed a bias, a character chooses whether to seed a positive bias or a negative bias. If a character succeeds at a skill check to seed a positive bias, one duelist of that character's choice gains an edge (see below) that can be spent with that duelist uses the tactic associated with the positive bias during the verbal duel. If a character succeeds at a skill check to seed a negative bias, one duelist of that character's choice gains an edge that can be spent when that duelist counters the tactic associated with the negative bias. Regardless of whether she seeds a positive bias or a negative bias, a character cannot attempt to seed the same audience again if she fails her skill check, and if she fails by 5 or more, no character can attempt to seed whichever bias she tried to seed (positive or negative) again in her duelist's favor for the rest of the verbal duel.

Both sides can attempt to seed the audience, and the GM might allow either side to seed the audience before the skill challenge begins as appropriate. A duelist can only benefit from a single successful seeding of a particular bias (positive or negative) once per verbal duel.

Edge

Edges are special advantages that duelists gain throughout a verbal duel from using various measures. A duelist can spend an edge to reroll a skill check to earn completion during a verbal duel. Some edges have limits to when they can be spent. For instance, edges gained from seeding a positive bias can only be spent when using the tactic associated with

the positive bias. Several circumstances that grant edges to characters participating in a verbal duel are detailed below.

Class Features, Feats, and Other Effects: Some class, such as the wit archetype^{ui} for bards, grant bonus edges that can be used during a verbal duel. Such effects note all (if any) restrictions placed on those edges.

Ending the Exchange: Whenever a character wins an exchange, either from her opponent failing to counter her or from her opponent ending the exchange, she gains 1 edge. This edge can be used with any skill check to earn completion during the verbal duel.

Seeding a Negative Bias: Whenever a character or her allies successfully seed a negative bias into the audience, that character gains an edge that she can use whenever she attempts to counter her opponent. She can only use this edge if the skill that her opponent used to set the exchange DC is the skill associated with the seeded bias. For example, if Graxiclees and Roy are dueling and Virgil manages to seed a negative bias towards the rhetoric tactic, Graxiclees would gain 1 edge that he could use to counter Roy should Roy use the rhetoric tactic to set the exchange DC. For more information on seeding an audience, see page 66.

Seeding a Positive Bias: Whenever a character or her allies successfully seed a positive bias into the audience, that character gains an edge that she can use with the particular tactic associated with the seeded bias. For example, if Virgil manages to seed a positive bias towards flattery into the audience while Graxiclees participates in a verbal duel, Graxiclees would gain 1 edge that he could use when he uses a skill associated with the flattery tactic to earn completion.

Skill-Modifying Effects: Characters participating in a verbal duel only add their bonus from skill ranks, their class skill bonus, and their Charisma modifier to skill checks made to earn completion during a verbal duel. However, other effects that would normally increase the modifier of an entire associated skill (not just circumstantial uses of that skill, such as the *glibness* spell's bonus on Bluff checks made to lie) grant edges instead. When determining the number of edges gained from such effects, total all such bonuses that the character gains and divide the sum by 3. For example, if Graxiclees has Skill Focus (Diplomacy) and a *circlet of persuasion*, he would total the bonuses on Diplomacy checks from those effects (+6) and divide that bonus by 3 to determine the number of edges he gains from those effects. In this case, +6 divided by 3 results in a total of 2 edges.

All edges gained in this way are limited to the particular tactic associated with the skill. For instance, if Graxiclees assigns Diplomacy to the flattery tactic, he could only use these bonus edges on Diplomacy checks.

Tactics

When a verbal duel begins, all characters participating in the verbal duel (the "duelists") can assign any skill that they have ranks in to one of the tactics associated with that skill. A duelist can only assign a given skill to a single tactic, so if a duelist assigns Perform (oratory) to the allegory tactic, she couldn't also assign it to the emotional appeal tactic. A duelist's choice in tactic might grant her additional bonuses or penalties to skill checks made to earn completion with that tactic.

The various tactics that duelists can employ during a verbal duel are summarized here. Additional rules and considerations are also provided below.

Last Tactic: Its often considered bad form and awkward to counter with the last tactic used against you. Whenever a character counters her opponent with the same tactic that her opponent used to set the exchange DC during the previous round, she takes a -2 penalty on skill checks made to earn completion with that tactic. For instance, if Roy uses the rhetoric tactic against Graxiclees in a verbal duel, Graxiclees could counter with the rhetoric tactic if he wanted to, but doing so would cause him to take the aforementioned penalty on his skill check to earn completion.

Tactic Interaction: Some tactics are less effective at countering other tactics. Others are more effective at countering specific tactics, and others still have special rules governing their use. For instance, it is harder to counter a logical argument with mockery, and most tactics have a hard time foiling a verbal trap set by baiting.

Tactics with special interactions feature an "interaction" entry that details that tactic's conflicts and synergies.

Repetition of Tactics: Using the same tactic over and over again is not an effective way to win verbal duels. Over the course of a verbal duel, each time a character wins an exchange, she takes a cumulative -2 penalty on all further skill checks to earn completion using the skill that she assigned to that tactic for the remainder of the verbal duel. In effect, she's already given the best she has to offer using that tactic, and subsequent to use it are less effective as a result.

Versatile Performance: A character with the versatile performance ability (such as a bard) can assign any Perform skill that she has chosen with versatile performance to a number of tactics equal to 1 + the number of skills that she can substitute her Perform bonus for using versatile performance. She can only assign a Perform skill to tactics that list the chosen Perform skill, or any skill associated with that Perform skill.

For example, Graxiclees, a 2nd-level bard, has the versatile performance (Perform [dance]) ability, which is associated with Acrobatics and Fly. Therefore, he can assign Perform (dance) to up to three different skills: one skill that lists Perform (dance) as an associated skill, one that lists Acrobatics as an associated skill, and one that lists Fly as an associated skill.

However, some perform skills might not have skills associated with them that are also associated with verbal duel tactics. For instance, no verbal duel tactic is associated with Acrobatics or Fly, so despite Graxiclees having the versatile performance ability he can only assign Perform (dance) to a single tactic because no tactics listed below have Acrobatics or Fly as an associated skill.





Allegory

You use a fable or parable featuring an underlying message to frame the debate. While it is sometimes difficult to use allegory in the heat of an exchange, it makes a very effective opener.

Associated Skills: Knowledge (history), Knowledge (religion), Perform (act), Perform (oratory).

Interaction: You take a -2 penalty on the associated skill check when using allegory as a counter.

Special: If you use allegory to open an exchange, and your opponent chooses to end the exchange rather than attempt to counter your allegory, you gain 2 additional successes towards clearing the verbal duel instead of gaining an edge.

Baiting

You hurl taunts and barbs, or level false dichotomies, goading your opponent into a trap. Baiting works best when the stakes are already high, since in that case backing down can be even more damaging than blundering into your trap.

Associated Skills: Bluff, Intimidate, Perform (comedy), Sense Motive.

Interaction: A duelist using a tactic other than presence takes a -2 penalty on the associated skill check when countering baiting.

Special: Baiting cannot be employed to open an exchange.

If your opponent ends an exchange rather than counter your baiting, your baiting doesn't suffer the normal -2 penalty on future associated skill checks for winning an exchange.

Credibility Challenge

You insinuate that your opponent's arguments are invalid or desperate because of some aspect of that opponent's being, such as their personal failings, background, or bloodline.

Associated Skills: Intimidate, Knowledge (history), Knowledge (local), Knowledge (nobility).

Interaction: You take a -2 penalty on the associated skill check when countering the presence tactic by challenging your opponent's credibility. You gain a +2 bonus on the associated skill check if your opponent or your audience is aware that you have a higher social standing than your opponent. This higher social standing might be due to noble birth or to life circumstances. For instance, an honest trader might be deemed to have a higher social standing than a criminal (even a reformed criminal).

Special: Courtly audiences usually have a positive bias towards the credibility challenge tactic, even when this tactic isn't seeded. A character that successfully seeds a positive bias towards a courtly challenge in a courtly audience earns 2 edges rather than 1; her chosen duelist can spend these edges only on the credibility challenge tactic.

Rewarding Inspired Roleplaying

Although verbal sparing is an acquired skill that not every player will excel at, offering your players rewards for roleplaying their tactics during a verbal duel can help increase the tension and the power of the verbal duel as both a mechanical challenge and as a pivotal scene during an adventure. Whenever a player offers a particularly inspired or heart-felt bit of roleplaying, the GM can reward up to a +2 modifier on her skill check to earn completion. If the player's roleplaying is brilliant, the GM might instead reward an edge that is either general (meaning it can be used with any tactic) or specific to an appropriate tactic of the GM's choice.

Emotional Appeal

You make an argument appealing to the emotional desires of your opponent or audience. This tactic is particularly useful against an opponent with an advantage in status or knowledge; raising the emotional stakes can be rewarding, but it can also be dangerous.

Associated Skills: Bluff, Perform (oratory), Sense Motive.

Interaction: You gain a +2 bonus on the associated skill check when using an emotional appeal to counter logic, presence, and rhetoric.

Special: Successfully countering with an emotional appeal increases the exchange's ante by an additional 1.

Flattery

You ingratiate yourself to your opponent, causing him to either let down his guard or to gain some other advantage. While usually deceptive and manipulative, this tactic also covers the actions of characters who are genuinely likeable and friendly.

Associated Skills: Bluff, Diplomacy, Knowledge (nobility). Interaction: You take a -2 penalty on the associated skill check when using flattery to counter mockery. You gain a +2 bonus on the associated skill check when using flattery to counter presence.

Special: If you win an exchange with flattery, reduce the ante of the exchange by 2 (minimum 0) and gain an edge that can be used with any skill check in a verbal duel.

Logic

When you use logic, you present facts, figures, and expert testimony. While logic can still be used to mislead your adversary or the audience, unlike most other tactics, it still requires a strong understanding of the subject matter to do so.

Associated Skills: Knowledge (any pertinent); occasionally, other skills will apply instead, such as Appraise (for a verbal duel involving barter or haggling) or Profession (for a verbal duel involving knowledge or practice of that profession's skill set, such as Profession [barrister] during a trial).

Interaction: You gain a +2 bonus on the associated skill

check when you use logic as an opener. You take a -2 penalty on the associated skill check when you use logic to counter baiting, emotional appeal, mockery, red herring, or wit.

Special: When you win an exchange with logic, you gain 1 edge that you can only use with logic.

Mockery

You use personal attacks, mudslinging, or creative insults to belittle your opponent. Mockery works best when you capitalize on your opponent's use of an unpopular tactic.

Associated Skills: Bluff, Intimidate, Perform (comedy).

Interaction: You take a -2 penalty on the associated skill check when you use mockery to counter logic and wit.

Special: You gain a +2 bonus on the associated skill check when you use mockery to counter a tactic with a negative audience bias, and if you win the exchange with mockery against such a tactic, increase the ante by 1. You take a -2 penalty on the associated skill check when you use mockery to counter a tactic with a positive audience bias, though if you succeed, reduce the ante by 1.

Polite Befuddlement

You pretend to be unclear about your opponent's points, encouraging him to explain further, provide examples, or otherwise become distracted from his main point. When he provides a poor example or contradictory explanation to your feigned ignorance, you pounce on his error in order to invalidate his position. Polite befuddlement is most effective when countering tactics based on structure or reason.

Associated Skills: Bluff, Diplomacy, Perform (comedy).

Interaction: You gain a +2 bonus on the associated skill check when you use polite befuddlement to counter the allegory, logic, or rhetoric tactics.

Special: You can't use polite befuddlement as an opener. As polite befuddlement relies on an impression of poor understanding or simple thinking, audiences rarely have a positive bias toward polite befuddlement.

Presence

You make a show of confidence or true nobility or you simply put on airs, and an opponent's claims slide off and bounce back against him, leaving you unscathed. This tactic works to deflect baiting and mockery but is less effective against other tricks.

Associated Skills: Intimidate, Knowledge (nobility).

Interaction: You gain a +2 bonus on the associated skill check when you use presence to counter baiting or mockery. You takes a -2 penalty on the associated skill check when using presence to counter allegory, emotional appeal, or red herring.

Special: If you win an exchange with presence, you regain 1 determination (to a maximum amount equal to your starting determination).

Psychological Manipulation

This insidious tactic is used to carefully attack an opponent,

rather than an opponent's argument. You subtly question your opponent's memory and sanity, insisting that past events are not as your opponent remembers them or trivializing your opponent's position. Psychological manipulation is most effective when the opponent lacks witnesses to draw upon for support.

Associated Skills: Bluff, Intimidate, Perform (act).

Interaction: A duelist takes a –2 penalty on the associated skill check when countering psychological manipulation if the duel has no audience.

Special: When you win an exchange with psychological manipulation, your opponent is thrown off balance and loses 1 edge of her choice (if she has any).

Red Herring

You use this tactic to distract your opponent or the audience from the heart of the debate, avoiding the danger of the current exchange. While a red herring can't be used as an opener, it can be used to quickly end an exchange that is getting too dangerous to continue.

Associated Skills: Bluff, Perform (oratory).

Special: You cannot use red herring as an opener. When using a red herring as a counter, you can choose to gain a +4 bonus on the associated skill check. If you do so and succeed, instead of continuing and escalating the exchange as normal, you reduce the ante to 0 and automatically win the exchange. Unlike normal, you start the next exchange.

Rhetoric

You use versatile debating tactics, applying advantageous rhetorical devices to squash your opponent's arguments. Most of the verbal maneuvers included in this tactic are simple and forthright linguistic devices; deceptive debating gambits are often included as part of other tactics such as baiting, emotional appeal, mockery, or red herring. Rhetoric is a multipurpose tactic that lacks some of the dangers of other tactics, but doesn't offer any significant rewards either.

Associated Skills: Diplomacy, Linguistics, Perform (act), Perform (oratory).

Special: Since rhetoric involves subtle word choices that most audiences don't notice consciously, it is very rare for an audience to have a negative bias toward rhetoric.

Spurious Argument

You refute an argument that is similar to, but subtly different than, your opponent's actual position. This allows you to exploit the difference to make your opponent's position seem erroneous or foolish. A spurious argument is particularly useful against nebulous emotional appeals, but crumbles beneath rigid logic that identifies the tactic's false distinctions.

Associated Skills: Bluff, Perform (act), Perform (oratory). Interaction: You gain a +2 bonus on the associated skill check when you use a spurious argument to counter the allegory or emotional appeals tactics. A duelist using logic to counter spurious argument gains a +2 bonus on the associated skill check. **Special**: You can turn a well-crafted spurious argument against your opponent later. When you win an exchange with a spurious argument, you gain 1 edge that you can use only with mockery, a red herring, or wit.

Wit

You use humor or cleverness to gain an advantage over your opponent, but the tactic can backfire if your jokes and jibes fall flat.

Associated Skills: Linguistics, Perform (comedy).

Special: When using wit, you can choose to gain a +2 bonus on the associated skill check. If you do so and fail the associated skill check, decrease your determination by 1. If you fail by 5 or more, you take a -2 penalty on wit's associated skill checks for the rest of the duel.

Elements of a Verbal Duel

All verbal duels have the following elements: type*, frequency, completion (successes-only)*, benefit*, and penalty*. Some verbal duels might also include optional elements, such as audience or time pressure*. Elements marked with an asterisk use the same rules as those found in standard skill challenges, as described on page 12.

Type

Verbal duels are success-based skill challenges in which opposing characters compete to defeat their opponent with wordplay. During a verbal duel, which skill checks are used to earn completion are determined by each character's tactics, as described on page 66.

Frequency

The amount of time represented by one cycle varies from verbal duel to verbal duel based upon theme, and a verbal duel's frequency notes the amount of time that each cycle represents. Verbal duels almost always have a frequency of 1 round, as most verbal duels are fast-paced exchanges between two opponents. However, verbal duels can also take place over longer periods of time, such as two writers who engage in a "verbal duel" through opinion pieces in competing news papers. Such verbal duels can have a frequency of 1 minute, 10 minutes, 1 hour, or even 1 day depending upon the nature of the skill challenge.

A verbal duel's frequency limits which abilities and effects are applicable to the chase. Each cycle that passes reduces the duration by the amount of time indicated by its frequency. For instance, each effect active on a character who is participating in a verbal duel with a frequency of 10 minutes would have its duration reduced every cycle by 10 minutes. As a general rule, an ability or effect cannot have a meaningful impact upon a verbal duel if its duration is less than the chase's frequency, for it is unable to last for the entire cycle.

Audience (Optional Element)

Many verbal duels have an audience presence who watches



and indirectly participates in the verbal duel. If an audience is present, this entry notes the size of the audience, as well as its general make up. This can include information about the audience's race, sex, age, background, and other identifying information. If a specific piece of identifying information is not included, assume that the audience is a well-distributed mix of persons belonging to that identifying category. For instance, if no sex is listed for the audience, the audience is likely an even mix of both male and female attendees.

If no audience is present, characters cannot attempt to discover the audience's biases, nor can they attempt to seed the audience. Seeing as most verbal duels take place between two individuals, an audience allows the PCs who aren't participating in the verbal duel to contribute in a meaningful way, and as a result GMs are generally advised to have a decently-sized audience attend a verbal duel whenever it is appropriate for the scene that the GM is setting.

The difficulty to seed biases among the audience depends upon the audience's size, as described below.

Small Crowd: A small crowd contains no fewer than two and no more than 25 creatures. Small crowds have a size modifier of +0.

Medium Crowd: A medium crowd contains no fewer than 26 and no more than 100 creatures. Medium crowds have a size modifier of +2.

Large Crowd: A large crowd contains no fewer than 101 and no more than 300 creatures. Large crowds have a size modifier of +3.

Massive Mob: A massive mob is made up of no fewer than 301 creatures, and its numbers can expand into the thousands. Massive mobs have a size modifier of +4.

SQ (Optional Element)

Verbal duels can possess numerous special qualities—specific qualities that use standard rules that are referenced (but not repeated) in skill challenge stat blocks. Verbal duels have their own, unique list of special qualities to choose from, which is presented below. A verbal duel cannot have a special quality that is not specifically attributed to a verbal duel.

Critical Fumble: Whenever a character rolls a natural 1 (the d20 shows 1), she fails regardless of her skill check's result and has "fumbled," meaning the failure might be a critical failure. To determine if its a critical failure, the character immediately makes an attempt to "confirm" the critical fumble—another skill check with all the same modifiers as the skill check she just made. If the confirmation roll also results in a failure against the skill check's DC, the original failure is a critical failure. (The confirmation roll just needs to fail to equal or exceed the skill check's DC to cause a critical fumble, it does not need to come up 1 again.) If the confirmation roll beats the skill check's DC, then the failure is a regular failure.

A critical failure means that the character loses completion towards clearing the skill challenge. When a character critically fumbles during a verbal duel, reduce the number of successes that the character has earned by an amount equal to her opponent's highest mental ability score modifier (their Charisma, Intelligence, or Wisdom).

Imbued: The area where the verbal duel takes place is imbued with one or more spells, whose effects linger for the duration of the skill challenge. The spells imbued in the area are listed in the entry along with their caster levels and save DCs (if any). Imbued spells have no duration; their effects are permanent, though a successful *dispel magic* attempt (or a similar effect) can suppress an imbued spell for 1d4 cycles. Most imbued spells use the minimum caster level and ability score required to cast the spell to determine their effects, but the GM can use more powerful magic if necessary.

Limited Completion: The nature of some verbal duels prevents multiple allied characters from attempting to earn completion or advantages at the same time or assisting the same character. Verbal duels with the limited completion special quality only allow a limited number of characters to make skill checks to earn completion or seed an audience—these characters are known as primary participants. Likewise, they might restrict the number of allies who can act as assistants to a primary participant using the aid another action.

Momentum: By default, verbal duels are won when characters accrue sufficient successes to seize victory from their opponent. However, an equally viable tactic is to steal the steam from their opposition's sails, leaving them demoralized and unwilling to debate further. In a verbal duel with the momentum special quality, characters don't accumulate successes to determine the debate's winner. Instead, each duelist has an amount of momentum equal to their Hit Dice + the average of their Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma modifiers (rounded down, minimum 0). During the verbal duel, whenever a duelist would normally gain successes, her opponent instead loses momentum equal to the number of successes that the duelist would have otherwise gained. When a character's momentum reaches 0, that character can no longer participate in the verbal duel. The last duelist with 1 or more momentum remaining wins the verbal duel.

Multidirectional: Verbal duels usually involve debates between two sides, but verbal duels between more than two parties exist. In a verbal duel with the multidirectional special quality, more than two independent duelists actively participate in the verbal duel at the same time. Multidirectional debates follow the same rules as standard verbal duels, except when a duelist opens a debate, she chooses one duelist to be the countering duelist, and the exchange continues between the two of them. When the exchange's winner is determined or the exchange ends, the winner must then start an exchange with a different duelist. A verbal duel with the multidirectional special quality must also have the momentum special quality.

Specific Completion: Although most verbal duels allow some flexibility in regards to the tactics that can be used to clear them, verbal duels with the specific completion special quality require successes with one or more specific tactics in order to complete them. The entry typically notes which tactics are required to clear the verbal duel and the number of successes that must be earned using those tactics to complete it. Completion earned to satisfy a verbal duel's specific completion special quality still counts towards clearing that verbal duel as normal. For instance, if a verbal duel that requires 4 successes to clear it has the special completion (rhetoric 2) special quality, the character must successfully earn 4 successes from winning verbal exchanges to clear the skill challenge, and at least 2 successful skill checks made to start an exchange or open a verbal exchange must be made with the rhetoric tactic.

Specific Tactics: Although most verbal duels allow enough flexibility that characters can use whatever dueling tactics they wish with GM permission, sometimes specific tactics are not appropriate for certain skill challenges. Although no one can stop a PC from using that tactic anyway, doing so comes at a high price. A verbal duel with the specific skills special quality imposes a –10 penalty on all tactics listed by this special quality. In addition, if the verbal duel has an audience, they always start with a negative bias against the listed tactics.

Special: Some verbal duels have miscellaneous qualities that produce special effects, such as drowning or ability damage. Saving throws are typically equal to 10 + the skill challenge's CR.

Team: Sides in a verbal duel are usually one duelist versus one duelist, but some verbal duels feature several people representing one side of a debate. In a verbal duel with the team special quality, each side of the duel consists of multiple characters, as noted in the quality's entry. Team duels typically feature an equal number of duelists on each side, but GMs can decide to allow teams to be made lopsided if one side would otherwise have a significant advantage over the other.

To start a team duel, all characters on both sides roll initiative normally, then determine which character on each side has the highest initiative result. These characters (those with the highest initiative results from each side) are then compared to determine the initiative order of the sides—the side of the character with the highest initiative is side 1 and the side with the character with the second highest initiative is side 2.

During each cycle, turns cycle first between sides, then between characters based on their initiative result on that side. For instance, the characters on each side act first by order of side (side 1 goes first, team 2 goes second, and so on). Next, the characters on each side with the second highest initiative acts by order of team, and so on. When all duelists have acted, the cycle ends and the next cycle begins.

Whenever a side wins an exchange, the duelist who won the exchange for that side takes a cumulative -2 penalty on all skill checks to earn completion for the rest of the verbal duel. All team duels have the momentum special quality, and the team possesses a single momentum score. When determining a side's momentum, first determine the highest Charisma, Intelligence, and Wisdom modifiers possessed by members of that side and average them together. Next, determine the average number of Hit Dice possessed by duelists on that side. Finally, add the side's

average Hit Dice total to its average mental ability score modifier together, then multiply the result by 2.

Verbal Duel Stat Block

Verbal duels are organized in standard blocks that appear similar to standard success-based skill challenges, except they're considerably more concise. This is where a summary of the different rules in effect during the verbal duel can be found. A verbal duel stat block is organized as follows. Note that in cases where a line in a chase stat block has no value, that line is omitted.

Name and CR: The verbal duel's name is presented first, along with its Challenge Rating (CR). A verbal duel's CR is always equal to the CR of the opposition.

XP: Listed here are the total experience points that the PCs earn for clearing the chase.

Type: This line notes the type of skill challenge that is being conducted. In a verbal duel, this always lists 'verbal duel.'

Goal: This is a brief description of what the PCs and their opposition are trying to accomplish during the chase.

Frequency: This lists the amount of time that passes between each cycle during the chase.

Time Pressure (Optional Element): This lists the number of cycles that the PCs have to finish the verbal duel. If neither side has claimed victory in the listed number of cycles, the verbal duel ends with a draw.

Audience (Optional Element): If an audience is watching the verbal duel, a brief description of the audience is noted here.

Audience Bias (Optional Element): If the audience has any positive or negative biases at the start of the verbal duel, they are noted here.

Backlash (Optional Element): This entry notes any negative effects that the PCs take when they fail a skill check to earn completion during the verbal duel.

SQ (Optional Element): This entry notes any special qualities or rules that the chase has.

Benefit: This is the reward or boon that the PCs gain for completing the chase.

Penalty: This is the consequence that the PCs incur should they fail to complete the chase.

Sample Verbal Duels

The following verbal duels were designed using the rules described above.

Law AND ORDER IN THE COURT CR 9 XP 6,400 Contest (verbal duel) Goal The PCs are attempting to prove a criminal guilty of theft, manslaughter, and other crimes. The criminal is attempting to prove himself not guilty. SKILLS

Frequency 10 minutes

Time Pressure 6 cycles COMPLETION

Audience Medium crowd of mostly adult humans, as well as a minority of adults from other common races; Audience Bias positive (emotional appeal, logic)

- **Benefit** The criminal is found guilty, resulting in his imprisonment and ending his reign of terror on the city streets. For their services, the city's governor grants the PCs a stipend worth 4,000 gp.
- **Penalty** The criminal is found not guilty, resulting in his release. Citizens fear to leave their homes after dark, and the criminal will be looking to settle the score with the PCs.

Verbal Duelist Stat Block

While giving each duelist their own stat block in a verbal duel isn't necessary if you already have a stat block for that character, summarizing the statistics relevant to the verbal duel in a verbal duelist stat block can be a helpful space saver for the GM. Verbal duelist stat blocks are concise and provide only the information needed to use the character in a verbal duel.

Name and CR: The character's name is presented first, along with its Challenge Rating (CR). Use the character's CR as if it were encountered during combat for this purposes—if the character is significantly better-suited to verbal dueling than the PCs, you may add +1 to the duelist's CR. "Better" is defined as having significant bonuses in multiple skills associated with verbal dueling tactics, as well as feats or class features that are suited to verbal dueling. If the character is significantly worse at dueling than the PCs, you may reduce the duelist's CR by 1. "Worse" is defined as having few or no skills that are wellsuited to verbal dueling, or having some other impairment that makes dueling difficult as determined by the GM.

Appearance: The duelist's physical appearance, including their apparent age, race, sex, and garb, is described here.

Background: A brief detailing of the duelist's background, as it pertains to the characters participating in the verbal duel, is described here.

Goals: This is a list of the duelist's goals.

Skills: The verbal duelist's skill bonuses in all skills that it can assign. Typically, the following skills are included: Bluff, Diplomacy, Intimidate, Knowledge (history), Knowledge (nobility), Knowledge (religion), Linguistics, Perform (act), Perform (comedy), Perform (oratory), and Sense Motive. In addition, since duelists can assign any pertinent skills to the logic tactic, any other skills relevant to the skill challenge can also be noted here.

Abilities: Any other abilities that the verbal duelist has that are relevant to the verbal duel are noted here.

Completion: This entry notes the number of successes that a PC needs in order to win the verbal duel. If the verbal duel has the momentum special quality, this notes the duelist's momentum instead.

Tactics: This entry notes the duelist's general tactics, such as what skills she assigns to each tactic and how she opens her first

exchange. Note that tactics listed here are the NPC's preferential tactics—she isn't beholden to them if the opportunity to employ tactics that are obviously more beneficial arises.

Sample Verbal Duelist

The following verbal duelist is a simplification of relevant information from a character's stat block.

CR 9

ROY "REDSTRIP" ROSEWOOD

LN mephian alchemist (clone master) 10

- Appearance Standing as tall as a human, this skunk-like humanoid is garbed in resplendent finery, including several jeweled rings and bangles as well as a ruffled collar. His gaze is cool and calculated, and he seems almost amused by his current situation as a defendant.
- **Background** Orphaned as an adolescent after his parents died in a gruesome raid, Roy studied with some of the world's best alchemists. When he returned home, he found his city had stagnated politically and culturally, and took up a life of crime targeting the political elite in order to force them to adapt to the changing times. Instead, he was apprehended by the PCs, and now stands trial at their hands.
- **Goals** Roy seeks his freedom so he can continue his schemes against the ruling council of the city. In his arrogance, he feels that the PCs pose little threat to him within a house of law, and does not take them seriously as a result.

SKILLS

Skills Bluff +10, Diplomacy +10, Knowledge (history) +10, Knowledge (nobility) +10, Sense Motive +10

COMPLETION Successes 11

Tactics Roy assigns Bluff to the polite befuddlement tactic, Diplomacy to the rhetoric tactic, Knowledge (history) to the credibility challenge tactic, Knowledge (nobility) to the presence tactic, and Sense Motive to the baiting tactic.

Designing a Verbal Duel

Verbal duels essentially run like standard success-based skill challenges, but designing them is fundamentally different from designing other skill challenges. Unlike standard skill challenges, a verbal duel's difficulty is derived entirely from the interaction between the two duelists—there is no need to calculate Difficulty Classes, choose primary or secondary skills, or even list what skills can and cannot be used in the verbal duel. Even with the presence or absence of an audience and over a halfdozen special qualities for GMs to choose from, nearly all verbal duels play similarly from duel to duel, making them one of the most simple skill challenges to build and run.

When designing a verbal duel, you begin by designing the opposition—the duelist or duelists who will actively duel against the PCs. Once the duelist or duelists have been designed, you design the scene where the verbal duel will take place by determining whether it will have an audience and the like. Once this is done, the verbal duel is ready for play.



Designing the Opposition

When designing the opposition for a verbal duel, the only aspects of the character that truly matter are its ability scores, total Hit Dice, and skill bonuses. You need the opposition's ability scores and Hit Dice to determine the number of successes needed to win the verbal duel (or the amount of momentum that the opposition has, if the verbal duel has the momentum special quality), and you need the opposition's skill bonuses so the opposition can participate in the skill challenge. Although this is simple enough, you likely want to know the character's class features, feats, racial traits, and magic item selection as well, as the effects provided by these options and traits can potentially provide duelists with additional edges that they can use during the verbal duel (see page 65). As a result, it is most helpful to build an entire stat block for your character, especially if you intend the duel to potentially end in violence.

When deciding on your skill bonuses for a duelist, try to make sure that the duelist has at least three skills from among those usable in the verbal duel that possess the maximum number of skill ranks, as well as a class skill bonus and an ability score modifier of at least +1, plus an additional +1 for every 4 CR the character has. Its okay to have fewer bonuses than this, but the CR of the encounter should be lowered to compensate the decreased challenge in dueling the NPC, as described on page 70.

Another equally important part of the NPC duelist is determining their tactics. Choosing tactics in advance helps to speed up gameplay, as the players don't have to wait for you to make those decisions. In additionally, it encourages you to pick tactics based on the character's personality and demeanor during the skill challenger, rather than based on what the PC duelist choose. For instance, a character who is condescending towards the PCs is likely to pick tactics like mockery and credibility challenge, while a duelist who wants to give off the impression of being knowledgable often relies on logic or rhetoric. How your NPCs assign their tactics often offers a gateway into their personality, so use special time and consideration when making this choice.

Designing the Scene

Once you have designed the NPCs that will participate in the verbal duel, the next step is to determine how the verbal duel will play out. Compared to other skill challenges, verbal duels are easy to design because most of the work put into a verbal duel is aesthetics—you must determine where the verbal duel will take place, what topic will be debated, and how much time the verbal duel takes.

Perhaps the most important part of designing a verbal duel is deciding whether or not an audience is presence. The audience gives PCs who aren't participating in a verbal duel something to do—they can actively attempt to seed biases into the audience to grant benefits to their ally. If having an audience isn't appropriate for a verbal duel, consider giving the verbal duel the team special quality instead so multiple characters can participate. In some situations, it might be appropriate for a single PC to have a one-on-one showdown with an NPC in a verbal duel, perhaps against a personal rival or a major antagonist, but such scenes should always be kept to the minimum to avoid allowing one character to hog the spotlight for too long.

When considering which biases to give an audience at the start of a verbal duel (if any), it helps to keep in mind the political climate surrounding the duel in mind, as well as the topic being debated. For instance, if the topic being debated is one that the audience has a strong emotional connection to, they will likely have a bias for the emotional appeal tactic. Of course, they just as likely be swayed by logic involving the nature of coal mining, or challenges against the PC's credibility that their employer makes. Ultimately, GMs are encouraged to pick no more than three biases for their audience, as the primary purpose of the audience is to give PCs something to do, and having too many innate biases in the audience diminishes how effectively the PCs are able to interact with that audience.



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