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GIVE CHASE

Chase scenes never works at the table like the ones in the movies. In your mind, they're action-packed and thrilling, but in reality, they're a tedious slog that which grinds your game to a halt. They're the reason you cringe when your players decide to pursue those fleeing goblins.

Tracking Turns

As the GM, you must make sure your players are familiar with the chase rules in the GM's core rulebook. Below is a cheat sheet to help players keep track of their turn-by-turn options during a chase. Even if you aren't expecting a chase, keep them handy. You never know when the PCs are going to feel the need to run down every last kobold.

Speedy PCs

Some PCs have features, like the monk's increased speed and the rogue's Cunning Action, that could cut a chase scene short. This is only possible if the PCs are chasing a single creature with normal or slower movement speed. The truth is, creatures with increased speed make most chases more interesting. If a speedy PC threatens to end your chase early, consider allowing them to feel powerful this time; they built their character for speed, let it make a difference! If you really need to your chase to be dramatic, use terrain, hidden enemies, and chase complications that give your villain an advantage.

The fifth-edition core books present new rules to run chases more smoothly than ever before. Gone are the days of every character with the same speed running in perfect time, one after another, to get into attack range. These new rules streamline the classic chase scene, but are unfamiliar even to players comfortable with the fifth-edition system. Keep the new rules open while reading this article, if you're not already familiar with them. The key to a successful chase is letting all participants know their options.

Chase Cheat Sheet

Start of turn. Resolve complication, if any.

During turn. Move, Action.

End of turn. Roll for next participant's complication, additional
Dash Constitution check.

End of round. Quarry makes Dexterity (Stealth) check vs. passive
Wisdom (Perception).

Maximum Dashes (3 + Constitution modifier): _____

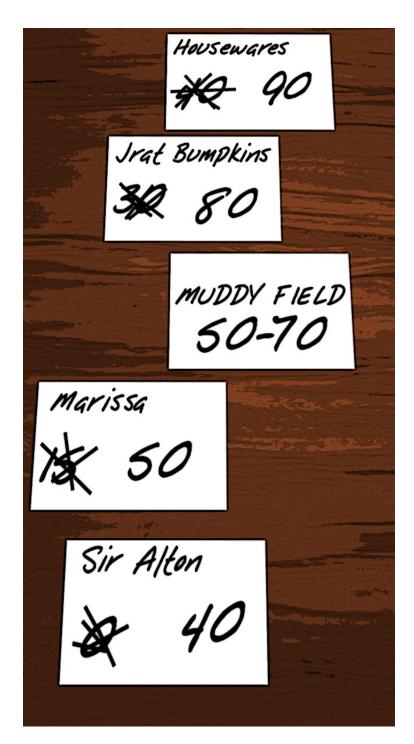*Dashes used*: _____   *Exhaustion level*: _____

Mapping the Chase

Not all chases require maps, but a gridded map can make your chase more tactical. When using this method, you'll want many tiles or a big map, since most creatures can move at least 60 feet in a single turn. Each square on your grid should represent at least 10 feet. If a participant ends their move between two squares, place their token on the line between the two.

If you don't have a wet-erase mat or tiles, or you're running a particularly high-octane chase, you may want a more abstract representation. Some chases are too large and too fast to be contained using miniatures on the table. A group of PCs on horseback fleeing from an ancient dragon will run off most maps in a single turn.

At the start of the chase, assign each participant a notecard with their name. Determine how far apart all the participants are in relation to one another and the direction of the chase. The participant who is furthest back is at position 0. Other participants are then assigned positions based on how many feet they are from position 0. For example, participants 20 feet from position 0 are at position 20. Participants record their positions on their notecards which are placed in a line in order from 0 to highest at the center of the table.

As participants take turns, they record their new positions on the notecards and physically reorder the cards as necessary. As obstacles and new participants appear, assign them cards and position numbers. Large obstacles, like a 100-foot-long lava flow, might occupy multiple positions.

Obstacles and Complications

A fleeing assassin turns a corner into an ambush. A cowardly orc lord hurls a merchant's cart. An earth elemental opens a gaping chasm beneath its pursuers' feet!

Obstacles and complications not only make a chase more interesting, but also give it life beyond moving notecards or miniatures.

Obstacles are larger areas of terrain which affect all chase participants. Spiked pits, a miles-long chasm, a queen's 100-chariot procession, and a vast field of thick mud are all examples of obstacles. Use as many obstacles as you need to excite your players, but don't overdo it. Three to five obstacles should be enough to keep your players engaged. More than that, and they may get overwhelmed.

Before running a chase, jot down some potential obstacles inspired by the setting. What events are happening in the area that might affect the chase? A parade? Is there a ravine ahead that participants have to cross? Is there anything special about your chase setting like fragile, exploding crystals growing out of the ground or unstable bridges connecting a city of treehouses? Specific, unique obstacles turn your chase into an amazing story.

Table 1. Underground Complications

D20	Complication
1	You run into a patch of poisonous fungi, releasing spores. Make a DC 10 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, you take 1d4 poison damage and are poisoned until the end of your next turn.
2	You run into the web of a giant spider. Make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, you are caught in the web and restrained. As an action you can break free with a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check (your choice).
3	You are caught in a small cave-in. Make a DC 10 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check. On a failed check, you take 3d4 points of bludgeoning damage and the cave-in counts as 10 feet of difficult terrain.
4	You must squeeze through a tight tunnel. Make a DC 10 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check. On a failed check, the tunnel counts as 10 feet of difficult terrain.
5	A sudden sinkhole appears beneath you. Make a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, you fall 1d3 x 10 feet, taking 1d6 bludgeoning damage per 10 feet fallen, and land prone. As an action, you can make a DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check to climb out.
6	You disturb an unhallowed burial ground. 1d4 skeletons rise and chase after you.
7	A large crack in your path is a tripping hazard. Make a DC 10 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check. On a failed check, you fall prone.
8	Your path ends in a ledge over a 10-foot drop. You must make a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check or use 20 feet of movement (your choice) to move down unharmed. On a failed check, you take 1d6 bludgeoning damage and land prone.
9	A patch of green slime drops from the ceiling. Make a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, the slime coats you, dealing 1d10 acid damage.
10	A gelatinous cube blocks your path. Make a DC 15 Dexterity (Acrobatics). On a failed check, you run into the cube. You have advantage on this check if your passive Wisdom (Perception) score is at least 15.
11-20	No complication.

Complications, on the other hand, are rolled on a table at the end of each chase participant's turn and affect the next participant in the initiative order. In addition to the ones provided in the fifth-edition core rulebooks, you can use the following tables or create your own. Usually these complications only affect a single participant. A thug waiting to trip someone, a crowded alley, or a puddle of slippery oil on the ground are examples of complications in a low-level game.

When creating a complication table, think about your setting once again. In general, complications involve an ability check or saving throw, deal small amounts of damage, or cost a participant 5 to 10 feet of movement. Complications can also add new creatures to the chase and sometimes restrain or knock a participant prone.

The core rulebooks already contain two example tables of complications covering urban and wilderness environments. This article contains a further three example tables - underground, castle grounds, and mountains.

Table 2. Castle Grounds

D20	Complication
1	You run over a piece of manure. Make a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, you fall prone.
2	You spook a horse. Make a DC 10 Dexterity (Acrobatics) or Wisdom (Animal Handling) check (your choice). On a failed check, the horse kicks you, dealing 2d4 bludgeoning damage and knocking you prone.
3	You run through an area where a noble is changing clothes. 1d4 nearby **guards** hear the noble's cry and chase after you.
4	A royal procession blocks your path. Make a DC 10 Strength (Athletics), Dexterity (Acrobatics) or Charisma (Deception) check. On a failed check, you must use 10 feet of movement to move around the procession.
5	You blunder into the path of a **knight**. Make a DC 10 Charisma (Persuasion) check. On a failed check, the offended knight chases after you.
6	A rose bush garden blocks your path. Make a DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check. On a failed check, you take 1d4 piercing damage and the bushes count as 5 feet of difficult terrain.
7	Servants carrying a cauldron of hot oil spill it in the confusion of the chase. Make a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, you take 1d10 fire damage.
8	A low wall blocks your path. Make a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check. On a failed check, the wall counts as 5 feet of difficult terrain.
9	Above you, a surprised mason drops some stones. Make a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, you take 1d4 bludgeoning damage and the debris counts as 5 feet of difficult terrain.
10	You run through a herd of frightened goats. Make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, you take 1d4 piercing damage and the goats count as 10ft of difficult terrain.
11-20	No complication.

Table 3. Mountain Complications

D20	Complication
1	A cliff side crumbles beneath your feet. Make a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw or fall 1d4*10 feet.
2	You run over the roof of a **stone giant's** cave. The irate giant appears ten feet behind the last participant and gives chase for 1 round. It loses interest and goes home if it has not caught or incapacitated anyone by the start of its next turn.
3	A field of packed snow blacks your path. If you are on foot, make a DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check. On a failed check, you must use 15 feet of movement to move around the snowfield.
4	A **peryton** is feasting on the heart of freshly-killed mountaineer on a nearby bluff. It gulps down the heart and chases after you.
5	A pool of icy water blocks your path. If you run through the pool, you take 1d6 cold damage, but running around the pool costs 10 feet of movement.
6	A **purple worm** bursts from below, sending stones and gravel flying in all directions. Make a DC 12 Dexterity save. On a failed save, you take 2d6 bludgeoning damage and are knocked prone.
7	A thick cloud of bats swarms out of a nearby cave. On a failed DC 10 Dexterity save, you are blinded for 1 round as the bats swarm around you. On a successful save, escaping the cloud of bats costs 10 feet of movement.
8	A boulder falls in front of the path. A successful DC 15 Strength check is required to push it out of the way. On a failed check, you must spend 10 feet of movement to climb over it.
9	2d6 **goblins** are prospecting a shallow cave. They chase after you, thinking that you must have some valuable shinies they can loot.
10	A crystal geode juts out of the mountainside. You may spend your action to break off 1d3 semiprecious stones, each worth 20gp.
11 - 20	No complication.

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