

Littimer's Skill Challenge system v0.2

Current Problems (lifted from Quickleaf's "Rethinking Skill Challenges" thread)

1. There's a disincentive to participate with low skills because failure is worse than inaction.
2. High number of successes required before failure (or time limit) encourages tactical player to spam their best skill. This problem is magnified if all skills are available.
3. Once the SC begins every character is converted into a striker trying to rack up successes (i.e. damage)
4. One size SC doesn't fit every situation. For example, a chase, an investigation, and a siege seem to have very different underlying structures. While DMG2 made headway in this regard, it seems like the community is pushing that envelope even more.

Design Goals

1. Provide a system that is modular, i.e. can allow additional rules and approaches such as the Obsidian skillcheck system to largely work unchanged.
2. Provide a system that makes sense to DMs without being overly complicated.

The system

1. Instead of a success/failure framework, create skill challenges with hp. The hp in this instance represents the universal difficulty of the task the party is presented with. When a player uses a skill, the total of his skill roll is subtracted from the total hp the challenge has.
2. Instead of allowing a skill challenge to run until a certain number of successes or failures are accrued, set a finite number of rounds. The number of rounds can be entirely arbitrary, so long as the SC's hp is scaled to be appropriate. I would hesitate to make it only one round however, as I'm not sure there would be enough rolls there to really average out one disastrously bad roll.
3. To represent particularly relevant or effective skills, and likewise to represent skills that won't work or are not particularly effective, just treat them like resistances on monsters. A social Skill Challenge could be vulnerable diplomacy 5, resist intimidate 5. I would hesitate to generally make the SC have immunity to any skill, if only because that discourages the players from thinking up ingenious methods of relating their trained skills to the task before them. However, in my own DMing I'll let them know once they propose an idea whether it is relevant enough to be worth a roll or not, and whether that would be more or less difficult (without saying how much) than a more direct skill.
4. To discourage tactical players spamming their key skill, you could lift another ability from some monsters, which is a stacking resistance. So going back to that social skill challenge, maybe you want to reward a show of strength/skill (athletics or acrobatics), but for each "attack" the SC's resistance to that skill goes up by 5.
5. Because I loved the concept of "partial success" so much, that would occupy the same basic role as bloodied value, being an obvious indicator to the players that they are well on their way to conquering the challenge. Partial success would begin at a quarter of the SC's health.

Example: A local band of heroes (5 PCs) recently eliminated some goblins that were attacking trading caravans. They found evidence that the captain of the guard was taking bribes to overlook the attacks, and plans that would suggest the goblins were taking orders from a larger orc tribe. The heroes must bypass the captain and convince the Lord.

Name: Audience with the Lord
Level 1 Skill Challenge (Moderate)
HP: 250 Partial Success: 62
Rounds: 3
Vulnerable: Diplomacy 5
Resist: Intimidate 5

Note: Whenever a player uses a bluff check, the SC gains a stacking 5 resistance to further checks.

This is just a framework and is meant to allow for modifications not impede roleplay. The above example could encapsulate just the meeting with the king, or it could even begin with them discovering a group of the captain's men waiting for them on path home, and they must reach the king without being detected by any of the corrupt soldiers, and then convince him in his chambers. As is everything with DnD, it's ultimately up to you.