

DELVING DEEPER

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LABYRINTH LORD
COMPATIBLE PRODUCT

Skill Systems

Brave Halfling Publishing

Skill Systems

One of the signature advances in the gaming world in the 1980's was the implementation of skill systems. A concrete method of resolving attempted PC actions, skill systems are now standard fare for roleplaying games.

For many old school gamers, they are an anathema. Skill systems remove a certain degree of power from the referee, defining the performance of certain actions in perpetuity. While the referee can modify difficulties, skill systems support themselves. Skill systems often feel tacked on and burdensome in old school games, but that does not mean they cannot be implemented successfully. It is worth noting that legendary game designer Gary Gygax advocated skill systems; however, he suggested that they were at odds with the intentions and methods of a class based game.

The key to using skill systems in Labyrinth Lord is to make them fit as seamlessly into the system as possible. They should use mechanics already inherent in the system, offering the least interference and most potential gain, without disrupting the feel of the game. As such, the skill systems given below play on existing mechanics and standards of play to feel smooth and unobtrusive.

Labyrinth Lords should take care to note that skill systems are a double edged sword - they give players a better idea of what they can do, and a concrete explanation of how to do them. While this may help them, it may hinder your ability to improvise, and may also lead to a form of exceptionalism, whereby only those skilled may perform any given action.

With that in mind, we offer two guiding points for these systems. First, it must be stressed that the absence or presence of a skill is not in and of itself the last word on PC skills. Rather, it is a simple way to measure those skills, and the right to adjudicate skills or determine expertise is still solely the power of the Labyrinth Lord. Second, one must use a diverse but broad range of skills. This cuts down on total rules and mechanics, but also prevents the massive fracturing that turns skill systems into a

quagmire of bookkeeping and inane details.

The skill systems given below all use the same group of 11 skills, given here. In parentheses following each skill is an ability, which is important in certain skill systems, as indicated in its description. These “key abilities” should be a good guideline about the basis of the skills. Each skill is followed by a brief description of what it may be used for.

Some canny readers will note the absence of certain skills pertaining to the Thief class. This is intentional, as allowing every class to perform the skills of the Thief removes the special qualities of that class and renders it useless for future games. Additionally, mundane skills like crafting and smithing are not represented, as they are mostly unnecessary in an adventure game.

Skills

Open (Strength): This skill is used when attempting to break down doors, bend bars, or open gates.

Movement (Strength): This skill is used when attempting to climb normal surfaces, jump, swim, or move in other ways involving body strength. This should not be used to climb sheer surfaces, which is the sphere of the Thief skill.

Athletics (Dexterity): This skill is used to determine success at balancing, acrobatics, and tumbling.

Sleight of Hand (Dexterity): This skill is used when trying to palm items, confuse enemies, or feint. This should not be used to pick pockets, which is the sphere of the Thief skill.

Concentration (Constitution): This skill represents the ability to maintain concentration and focus under dire circumstances or rough situations, or environmental extremes.

Lore (Intelligence): This skill represents the general and specific knowledge of a character, and the basic chance to know or recall something.

Arcana (Intelligence): This skill is used to determine knowledge, understanding, and memory about magic, the planes, or religion.

Nature (Wisdom): This skill is used to survive outdoors, track, deal with animals, locate food and water, and intuit weather and directions.

Detection (Wisdom): This skill is used to search, see things, and perceive things that are difficult to find or are hidden. This should not be used to find traps, which is the sphere of the Thief skill.

Streetwise (Charisma): This skill is used to gather information, track people in urban locales, and make one's way among the people.

Persuade (Charisma): This skill is used to bluff, deceive, convince, persuade or intimidate an NPC or monster.

Option 1: d6 Skills

Many of the possible actions taken by PCs in Labyrinth Lord pertain to a 1 in 6 chance; hearing noises, determining surprise, and other mechanics use the chance in 6. Systems that use the d6 as the core of their skills are therefore well within the mechanical suppositions of Labyrinth Lord, and are also very simple.

Skill Ratings

Under this system, each skill has four ratings: Unskilled, Skilled, Expert, and Master. On the character sheet or attached paper, each PC should list the 11 skills given above. Following each skill they should list their rating in that skill; all skills begin at "unskilled."

To determine their rating, each player receives 3 skill slots at first level. By spending 1 skill slot, they may upgrade their skill rating from unskilled to skilled, skilled to expert, or expert to master. Master is the absolute upper limit of skills in this system. At each new level, a character receives one new skill slot to spend as they choose. For Labyrinth Lords who feel that 3 skill points per per level is too generous, one option might stipulate that characters receive 3 skill points at their creation and only 1 skill point every level thereafter. Another option would be to say a character at the start of each new level can either have 3 points to spend on prime requisite skills, or 1 point for any non-requisite skill.

Using Skills

To use a skill, a player must roll a 1d6. Depending on their rating, they must roll a certain number or below to succeed at the skill attempt. These numbers are given on the following chart. Labyrinth Lords may give bonuses or penalties to the rolls based on circumstance and situation, and skills may not be used to circumvent what has been declared possible or impossible by the Labyrinth Lord. Skill rolls may only be made when the Labyrinth Lord gives approval. When using a skill tied to your class prime requisite, you may subtract 1 from your rolls.

Skill Rating	Success on
Unskilled	1
Skilled	2 or lower
Expert	3 or lower
Master	4 or lower

Advantages and Drawbacks

The d6 system is the most unobtrusive and easy to learn skill system given here. It does not require math or extensive new rules, and fits with the existing Labyrinth Lord system well. Unfortunately, character ability scores are not abundantly important, which may be unacceptable to some players.

Option 2: Ability Skills

One of the mechanics offered in the Labyrinth Lord core rules is the ability check. When attempting to take an action, the Labyrinth Lord may ask for an ability check, which requires a d20 roll. That roll must be equal to or less than the ability in question to be successful. This skill system plays on that existing and widely-used mechanic.

Skill Ratings

Under this system, each skill rating is recorded in skill points. On the character sheet or attached paper, each PC should list the 11 skills given above. Following each skill they should list their rating in skill points; all skills begin at 0, and may go up to as high as 10. No rating may exceed half the

character's level. Thus, the maximum skill points for a level 6 character in a skill is 3.

At each level, a character receives 3 skill points, which they may assign to any one of the 11 skills. All skill points invested in a skill add to prior invested points for the total rating.

Using Skills

To use a skill, a player must roll 1d20. The total of the roll must be equal to or less than the ability tied to that skill. For every skill point invested in that skill, a player may subtract 1 from the roll. So if the ability in question was a 10, and the skill in question had 2 skill points, then the player would roll 1d20, subtract 2, and attempt to get 10 or lower.

Advantages and Drawbacks

This system is easy for many players, as it plays off of a mechanic used by many Labyrinth Lords to determine success. The key abilities also play a large roll, making ability scores very important for PCs. Unfortunately, this system requires a little more arithmetic, and is not as smooth in implementation as the d6 system.

Option 3: Percentage Skills

The final skill system possibility is the percentage system. Many players know this system as the method of dealing with the usage of thief abilities. In that manner, the system is also familiar and normal within the confines of the game rules.

Skill Ratings

Under this system, each skill rating is measured in a percentile. On the character sheet or attached paper, each PC should list the 11 skills given above. Following each skill they should list their rating in that skill in a percentile; all skills begin at 0%, and may go up to as high as 99%. Each skill has a cap of $(\text{level} \times 5) + 19\%$. Thus, at level 16, any skill may reach as high as 99%. If the character has a 15 or higher in the key ability of the skill, they receive a bonus of + 5%, which may exceed the level cap.

At each level, a character receives 30 percentage points which they may split as they wish among the 11 skills. Each point adds one to the percentage chance to perform an action.

Using Skills

To use a skill, a player must roll two d10s, designating one as the 'ones' place and one has the 'tens' place, to generate a number between 1 – 100 (2 '0's mean you have rolled 100). If the number rolled equals or is lower than the skill percentage, then the attempt is successful.

Advantages and Drawbacks

The similarity of this system to the existing skill system in the core rules makes it easy enough to learn. Unfortunately, the probabilities inherent in this system mean that at low levels, even the most skilled characters have a poor probability of succeeding, while at high levels, they almost never fail. Labyrinth Lords may consider implementing different maximums to get the best results out of this system.

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