

White Box Thievery

A Sub-Class option for Rogues and Footpads

This is an attempt to incorporate thief-like skills for player characters into an original fantasy game. Rather than present an entirely separate class for the thief, which has been done with varying degrees of success a multitude of times, this solution considers thievery a supplement to a character's normal class functions or demi-human racial abilities. The idea is that all thieves are essentially multi-classed individuals, and in order to advance their shadowy skills they pay an experience point penalty on their standard rate of advancement.

First, it is important to recognize that many of the abilities gamers have come to refer to as thief skills are not restricted to those who choose stealing as a profession. Climbing, listening for noise, and sneaking past (or upon) someone are activities in which all adventuring characters participate regularly. In order to quantify the skills of the adventurer who elects to devote time and practice to honing these skills, a baseline level available to all adventurers needs to be established.

Here are the skills in question rated for all characters of all classes:

Table 1: Thief-like Functions for all characters (Chance for success on a d6)

Activity	Find or Remove Traps	Pick Pockets	Sneak Quietly	Climb Walls	Hide	Hear Noise
Modifier	Int	Dex	Dex	Str	--	--
Chance for success on 1d6	1	1	1	4	1	1

Racial bonuses apply to the above activities, such as elves keen detection giving a +1 when searching for traps, halflings getting a +1 when hiding in woodlands, or dwarves familiarity with stonework construction earning a +1 when attempting to determine the presence of or bypassing stone-based traps. The GM will rule which racial bonuses are applicable. Additionally, the indicated ability score bonus or penalty may apply for each skill.

Situational bonuses and penalties will, of course, apply as well. An inattentive sentry may give a +2 bonus to characters attempting to sneak past, while a scroll tucked into an inner pocket may give a -1 penalty to a pick pockets attempt. Game masters may list common modifiers appropriate for his or her campaign ahead of time, but, whether or not this is done, on-the-fly rulings during play should be expected. These skills, by their very nature, are apt to be used for unusual and unforeseen purposes.

Similarly, the game master may simply rule on certain actions as warranted. A smooth and polished iron tower, for instance, may be declared un-climbable without assistance, while a wall overgrown with vines may not require a climbing roll at all. An attempt to hide in the plain sight of a squad of orcs which have already spotted the PC will certainly fail, but an attempt to hear a loudly snoring giant may always succeed.

By clearly establishing baseline chances of success for all adventurers, daime that thief skills somehow restrict such activity to thief-specialized characters should be minimized. Everyone will know that their cleric (or fighter or magic-user) can try to pick someone's pocket or climb a wall, just as everyone already knows that their character can listen for noise or search for a secret door whatever their class.

Thief Specialist Sub-Class

While specifying every character's chances for success when attempting thief-like activities will mollify the player who asks *why can't my fighter try to climb a wall?* there will be other players who remain unsatisfied. They wish to play the role of adventurers who are skilled in the shadowy skills of thievery beyond what normal fighting-men and spell casters are capable of. Fantasy and Swords & Sorcery literature is filled with these characters, and very few of them are simply burglars and robbers. Instead, most of them are capable warriors or even sorcerer types who also could rob a room full of people blind while no one was looking. If subtlety and sleight of hand fail, swift swords or terrible spells may save the day (or at least cover an escape.) Such stories are richer for these characters, and they should not be excluded from original fantasy gaming.

Players wishing to play such characters must specify this during character creation, noting it next to their PC's standard class. Thus, fighter/thieves, cleric/thieves, dwarf/thieves, and combinations with all other classes are possible. The PCs must pay an **additional 25% experience point requirement** in their normal class, so a first-level fighter/thief must earn 2,500 XP to advance to 2nd level. As these characters advance they will see their thief-like functions increase in effectiveness. Though there is no Prime Attribute Bonus for the thief sub-class, the bonuses earned for the character's primary class still apply.

Below are the chances for success as the character advances in level. Note that the chances for success at first level are the same for thief and non-thief characters. Two skills not available to normal adventurers, opening locks and reading languages, become available as the thief sub-classed character advances.

Table 2: Thief-like Function Advancement

	Open Locks	Find or Remove Traps	Pick Pockets	Sneak Quietly	Climb Walls	Hide	Hear Noise	Read Lang.
Mod	--	Int	Dex	Dex	Str	--	--	Int
1 st	0	1	1	1	4	1	1	0
2 nd	1	1	1	2	4	1	1	0
3 rd	1	1	2	2	4	2	1	0
4 th	1	2	2	2	4	2	1	1
5 th	1	2	2	2	4	2	2	1
6 th	2	2	3	2	5	2	2	1
7 th	2	2	3	2	5	2	2	1
8 th	2	2	3	3	5	3	2	1
9 th	3	2	3	3	5	3	2	2
10 th	3	3	3	3	5	3	2	2

This progression allows for the improvement of two skills every time the character advances in level. While the chances of success at higher levels may not compare favorably with those of thieves in later editions of the game, keep in mind that this method portrays a standard character with additional abilities rather than a full-time professional thief focused solely on these skills.

In addition to modifiers for ability scores, racial abilities, and situations, the game master may rule on catastrophic failures. For example, any natural roll of 6 may be ruled a spectacular failure. Instead of simply failing to pick a pocket, the attempt may have been noticed by the intended victim. Or, rather than being unable to climb a wall, a significant failure may indicate that the character nearly reached the top and then fell. Instead of simply not finding a trap, a catastrophic failure may trigger it, subjecting the thief and those around him to its effects. As always, the game master will determine the course of events.

This is a First Draft. Feedback is welcome. Email: kilgore@lordkilgore.com