

# White Box Thievery

## Sneaking and Skullduggery for Regular Adventurers

This is an attempt to incorporate thief-type skills for 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 skills to be a supplement to a character's normal class functions or racial abilities.

First, it is important to recognize that most of the abilities gamers have come to refer to as "thief skills" are not restricted to those who choose a life of crime. Climbing, listening for noise, and sneaking past (or up on) someone are activities in which all adventuring characters participate regularly. Here are the skills in question rated for all characters of all classes:

**Table 1: Thief-like Skills 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	--	--
Std. Chance	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>

The indicated ability score bonus or penalty may apply for each skill at the GM's discretion. Additional bonuses, penalties, and notes follow:

**Find or Remove Traps:** Elves +1 to find, Dwarves +1 for traps involving stonework, Halflings +1 for snares and traps in woodland settings. A roll of 6 may indicate that the trap has been accidentally sprung.

**Pick Pockets:** A roll of 6 may indicate that the attempt has been noticed.

**Sneak Quietly:** Halflings +2 when alone or in the company of only other Halflings.

**Climb Walls:** Dwarves and Halflings -1. A roll of 6 may mean that a fall from near the top has taken place.

**Hide:** Elves and Halflings +1 in woodlands. Someone already under observation cannot successfully hide.

**Hear Noise** is the standard ability as described in the rules.

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. 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. 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.

By clearly establishing baseline chances of success for all adventurers, claims 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. 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. The PCs choosing this option must pay a **25% penalty to experience point requirements** in their normal class, but as they 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 <sup>st</sup>	0	1	1	1	4	1	1	0
2 <sup>nd</sup>	1	1	1	2	4	1	1	0
3 <sup>rd</sup>	1	1	2	2	4	2	1	0
4 <sup>th</sup>	1	2	2	2	4	2	1	1
5 <sup>th</sup>	1	2	2	2	4	2	2	1
6 <sup>th</sup>	2	2	3	2	5	2	2	1
7 <sup>th</sup>	2	2	3	2	5	2	2	1
8 <sup>th</sup>	2	2	3	3	5	3	2	1
9 <sup>th</sup>	3	2	3	3	5	3	2	2
10 <sup>th</sup>	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.

Thieves who successfully surprise an opponent from behind may **backstab** for automatic maximum damage if they hit with the first blow of a melee weapon. Other special abilities may be allowed as warranted by the campaign setting. As always, the game master will determine the course of events.

*This is a Second Draft. Feedback is welcome. Email: [kilgore@lordkilgore.com](mailto:kilgore@lordkilgore.com)*