

## - Chapter 4 -

# PLAYING THE GAME

IN *MONSTERS & MAGIC*, your characters will fight monsters, jump across spike-filled pits, pick locks on booby-trapped treasure chests, cast powerful spells, and more. Whenever you attempt something whose outcome appears uncertain, you'll usually roll dice, add modifiers, and compare the total to another number to see if you succeed.

Rolling the dice like this is called an **action check**. An **action** is any interesting, uncertain task you can describe your character doing — it could be sneaking around in the shadows, persuading a guard to look the other way, or hitting a monster with a sword. Anything you can describe can potentially be an action — we've provided a list of typical actions below (page XX), but they're not exhaustive. This chapter tells you how to make action checks for any action you describe.

The GM is always the final arbiter of what constitutes an action.

Sometimes things your character does are easy, with no chance of failure; or impossible, with no chance of success; or just not exciting enough to be worth rolling the dice for. In those cases, the GM can simply say you automatically succeed or fail.

*For example, Gramfive the Grim wants to open a door in a dungeon corridor. There's nothing special about the door, so the GM says there's no need for an action roll — the door simply opens. However, doing so triggers a deadfall trap, bringing the ceiling down! That's a real danger, so the GM says Gramfive must make an action check to get out of the way.*

You describe your character's actions based on his **attributes** and **traits** — his physical and mental prowess, and the things he can do. You can describe your character balancing along a ledge or jumping clear of a deadfall trap, then make an action check based on your Dexterity attribute; or you can describe how you smash down a door or lift a heavy weight, and make an action check based on your Strength.

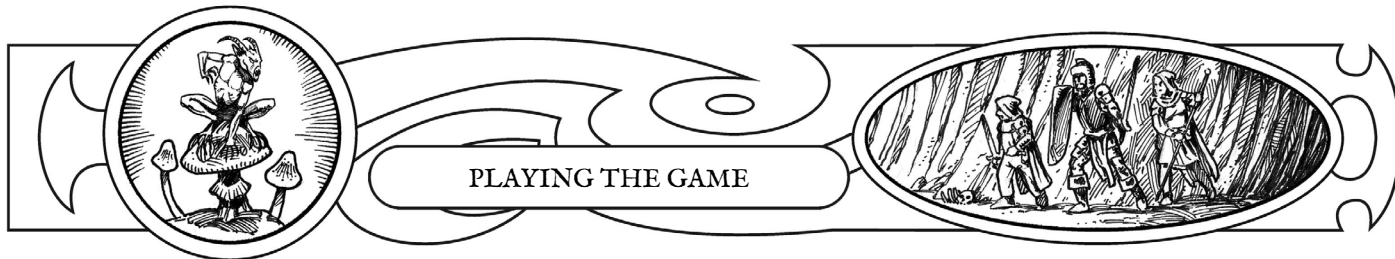
Your character is particularly good at some things, perhaps because he belongs to a certain character class or race, or because he has a personal ability. These facts about your character are described by **traits**, and allow you to **add a bonus to your action check**. There are **class traits**, **racial traits**, and **personal traits**. If you're a thief sneaking around in the shadows, you can make a Dexterity action check **and** get a bonus from your *Hide and Sneak* class trait.

As long as you can describe how you do it, **you can use more than one trait** in an action check. The first trait you describe gives you a bonus equal to your level; any subsequent traits add an additional +1. This is known as your **trait bonus**. The GM should ensure the traits you use are appropriate — it's relatively rare for multiple traits to apply. Your maximum trait bonus is equal to twice your level.

In an action check, you aim to get as high a result as you can, equal to or higher than a target number called the **resistance**. Equaling or exceeding the resistance means your action has succeeded; the **amount by which you exceed** the resistance tells you **how** successful you've been. The points by which you exceed the resistance are called **effect points**, and are your currency in the Effect Engine: you can spend them to achieve effects. These may include damaging your opponent — 1 effect point can cause 1 mental or physical hit point of damage — but equally you can use effect points to put yourself in an advantageous position, perhaps giving yourself a bonus (called an **effect**), or to put your opponent at a disadvantage, incurring a penalty (called a **consequence**).

The sections below explain these elements in detail.





## PLAYING THE GAME

# Checks & Dice Rolls

MOST THINGS YOU try to do in *Monsters & Magic* use the same simple dice roll, as follows:

### Roll 3d6 + ATT modifier (+ trait bonus)

In other words, roll 3 six-sided dice (abbreviated “3d6”) and add them together, then add the attribute modifier for the attribute you’re using, and maybe add your trait bonus. Take this result, and match it against a target number to see if and *how well* you succeed. You only add your trait bonus to the roll if you’re describing an action covered by one of your class, racial, or personal traits; otherwise, you just add your ATT modifier. If you’re describing an action based on your **prime attribute** (which depends on your character class), your ATT modifier is **double its normal value**. It pays to take actions based on your prime attribute.

If you roll three 1’s on the 3d6 (called a **natural 3**), your action **automatically fails**, resulting in at least a **simple failure** (page XX); if you roll three 6’s (a **natural 18**), you **automatically succeed** with at least a **simple success** (page XX).

Sometimes, you don’t have to roll the dice to make a check; instead you can use your attribute **score** in place of the dice plus your ATT **modifier**. The number you use for the check then becomes:

### attribute score + trait bonus

You can only use this unrolled value **if you’re describing an action based on one of your traits**, and either:

1. you’re making an **action check** (see below), and have plenty of time and aren’t under threat, OR
2. you’re making a **resistance check** (see below)

This unrolled check is called a **static check**. You never *have to* make a static check; you can always choose to roll the dice instead.

*For example, if you’re describing an action based on one of your traits:*

- ❖ *If you have Strength 10, you either roll 3d6 +0 + your trait bonus; or use 10 + your trait bonus as a static check.*
- ❖ *If you have Strength 15, you either roll 3d6 +2 (+4 if it’s a prime attribute) + your trait bonus; or use 15 + your trait bonus as a static check.*

The GM may make either a rolled or static check on **any action**, depending on what’s dramatically exciting or expedient.

There are three types of action check: an **action check**, a **resistance check**, and a special kind of check known as a **ranked check**.

## WHAT’S YOUR ARMOUR CLASS?

Your **armour class** is the common name for the Dexterity resistance check attackers roll against in combat. It’s calculated by adding your Dexterity score to your armour bonus. Your trait bonus applies if you’re using weapons and armour for which you have traits.

## ACTION CHECKS

Sometimes you need to check if you can successfully perform an action. This is called an **action check**.

An action check is made to proactively achieve something difficult; to attack something, pick a lock, cast a spell, or otherwise overcome a passive force or difficulty.

*For example: you want to persuade someone to do as you say. You make a CHA action check, and compare it to your target’s static Wisdom resistance check.*

*For example: you want to make a melee attack. You make a STR action check, and compare it to your target’s **armour class** (his modified static Dexterity check — see page XX).*

Other examples of action checks include: threatening or intimidating someone, finding something hidden, knowing an obscure fact, or climbing a rope.

If you have plenty of time and are in a safe place where you aren’t threatened, and are describing an action based on one of your traits, you may make a static action check instead of rolling the dice.

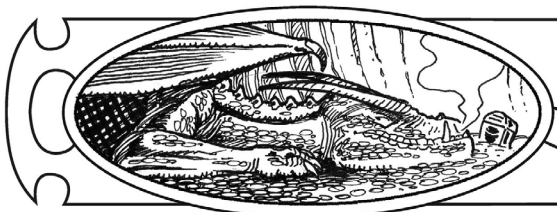
## RESISTANCE CHECKS

Sometimes you need to check if you can resist someone else’s action. This is called a **resistance check**, or simply a **resistance**.

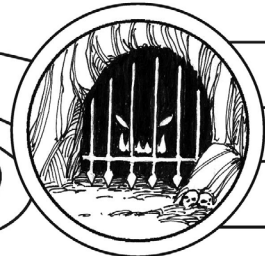
A resistance check is made to avoid an attack, resist a person or a spell, or otherwise defend against an active force, including avoiding it entirely. In fact, you don’t usually have to “make” a resistance check at all; it’s a static (ie unrolled) check, and automatically happens unless you choose not to resist. You may always choose to roll a resistance check (for whatever reason); sometimes, such as when you’ve been **surprised** (page XX), you may have to.

*For example: someone’s looking for you while you’re hiding. They roll a WIS action check against your Dexterity resistance.*

*For example: An opponent is attacking you in melee. The opponent rolls his attack action check, and compares it to your armour class (a Dexterity resistance check).*



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### RANKED CHECKS

A **ranked check** stacks multiple action check results in order from highest to lowest. Ranked checks are used to determine the results of initiative (page XX), races, competitions, and so on.

*For example: you want to roll initiative in a conflict. You make a DEX or INT action check, and rank it against the initiative checks of the other participants.*

In a ranked check, the highest action check result comes first, the next highest second, and so on.

*For example: Felix Pook, Shamira Sunfire, and an orc are running to grab the Gem of Madness from the mysterious pedestal which has suddenly risen from the dungeon floor. The GM declares this is a ranked DEX check.*

*Shamira rolls first with a 9, modified by her -1 DEX penalty for a result of 8. The orc rolls a 15, with a DEX bonus of +1, for 16. Felix rolls a 10, with a +6 DEX bonus, tying with the orc. However, he also has an Agile and Fast trait, which allows him to add his trait bonus (in this case +1, equal to his level). This boosts him to a total of 17: thanks to his innate speed, he makes the extra spurt and grabs the Gem of Madness before the orc!*

Other examples of ranked checks include: a singing competition, endurance test, or running race.

### WHETHER TO ROLL OR NOT

Generally speaking, you **roll dice for action checks**. They're risky and difficult, with significant consequences if you fail, and you want the tension that rolling the dice brings. Under certain circumstances (page XX), you might have the time and wherewithal to make a static check instead, but that's the exception, not the rule.

Resistance checks are the opposite. Usually, **resistance checks are static checks**, whether representing your or an opponent's resistance, or the difficulty of a task.

Sometimes, though, deciding whether to roll the dice may not be as clear-cut, and may even depend on how you've described a situation, or the importance you want a check to have. The situation may not have clear active and passive sides to help you decide.

For example, let's look at a character trying to spot another character hiding from them. If it's you, a PC, doing the spotting, you can roll your spot action check (likely using WIS), and leave the NPC's attempt to avoid detection as a static resistance (using, for example, its Dexterity and maybe level).

However, what if it's **you** doing the hiding, and the monster or NPC trying to find you? This time, it might be more exciting for **you** to make a roll to see how well you hide, and beat the NPC's attempt to spot you. This is completely legitimate, and the above action in reverse: your hide attempt becomes your action check (probably using DEX), and the NPC's ability to spot you becomes the resistance you're trying to beat.

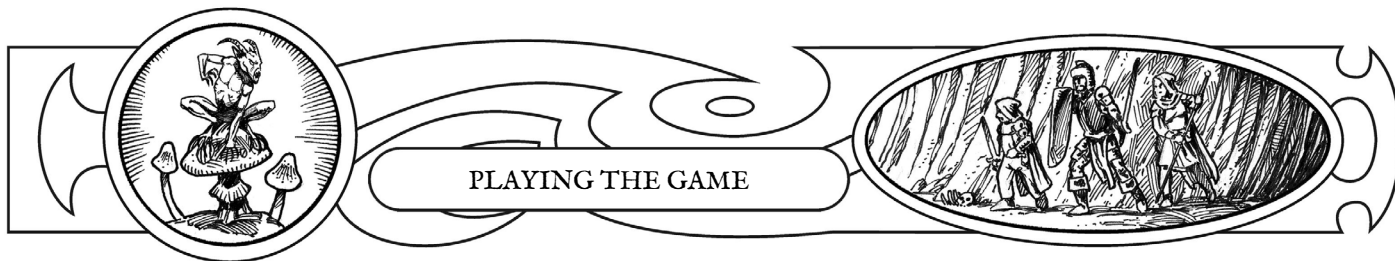
There are times when you may want to roll both sides of a check — the action check itself, **and** the resistance. For example, when you surprise a target, that target **must** roll his resistance. Surprised targets aren't prepared enough to rely on their static resistance, and a poor roll can be disastrous; creeping up on foes lets you get the drop on them. Similarly, in **incremental contests** (page XX), two or more sides roll against each other to try to accumulate a given number of effect points.

Lastly, as we mentioned above, the GM may use static checks for NPC ("non-player character" — see page XX) initiative checks and even action checks, when she wants to quickly resolve NPC actions rather than taking time on dice rolls.

Using dice rolls for action checks and static checks for resistance checks is therefore a broad assumption, except where noted. Don't let that force you against your instincts: within the restrictions given in this chapter, it's up to you. Use what makes narrative sense, and leads to an exciting game.

### MODIFIERS TO ACTION & RESISTANCE CHECKS

Usually in *Monsters & Magic* you won't simply add your ATT modifier to an action check, or just use your attribute score in a resistance check; you'll also add or subtract one or more **modifiers**, depending on what you're trying to do. This section discusses the main modifiers you'll encounter.



## Trait Bonuses

As mentioned above, if you can describe how a trait helps you in an action, you add your level to your check. If you can describe more than one trait contributing to what you're doing, you get a +1 bonus for each trait after the first, to a maximum trait bonus equal to twice your level.

*For example: Gramfive the Grim is chasing a pickpocket through the alleyways of Koth. He's rolling a MOV action check (page XX), and adds his level because he has the Ex-Member of the City Guard of Koth trait, which helps him find his way through its warrenous streets. However, his player also describes how his Highly Adaptable trait lets him instinctively take shortcuts and inspired diversions. The GM agrees, and allows Gramfive a +2 trait bonus on his check.*

## Damage Dice & Armour Bonuses

**Damage dice** and **armour bonuses** are modifiers used in conflicts to increase your chance of attacking and defending respectively. They represent something you have or know — a piece of equipment, a spell or technique.

In physical combat, you may get a **damage die** from a weapon, a magical technique, or a particular unarmed strike; an **armour bonus** might come from a suit of armour, a shield, or a magical defence. In mental combat, a damage die might come from sorcerous robes (guaranteed to make anyone think twice...), a fearsome magical aura, or a rank in a guild or the army; an armour bonus might come from a cosseted social class, or a magical glamour.

Damage dice add to your result on an action check, and armour bonuses add to your result on a resistance check. Unlike traits, whose bonuses are based on your level, damage dice and armour bonuses may be rolled using dice (in the case of weapons, for example) or may be fixed bonuses (in the case of armour or social class).

You'll find damage dice and armour bonuses throughout this book, and in particular in the equipment lists in **Chapter Three: Equipment**. See Table 11: Damage Dice & Armour Bonuses for some examples.

*For example, 1st level fighter Gramfive the Grim attacks an orc with his signature longsword, Cutter. He rolls 3d6 + his STR bonus (+6) + his trait bonus (his level, +1) + his signature weapon bonus (+1), and also rolls the damage die for his signature longsword (+1d8+1). He*

*compares the total against the orc's **armour class**, which is the orc's Dexterity (12) + its armour bonus (+1) + its trait bonus (its level, +1), for a total AC of 14.*

## Effects & Consequences

When you succeed at an action check, one option is to create an **effect** or impose a **consequence** on your opponent. Effects include advantages like superior positioning or increased morale; consequences may be the opposite, or even represent physical wounds. Effects and consequences can give you a bonus to your action checks, or force your opponent to accept a penalty on his; see page XX.

## DIFFICULTIES

Resistances don't always represent someone trying to avoid something you're doing; they can also be an abstract representation of how difficult something is to do. For example, the difficulty involved in climbing a steep cliff is expressed as a resistance; so is finding a trap hidden in a dungeon. Resistances like this are known as **difficulties**.

Difficulties can be rolled or un-rolled. As they aren't associated with a character attribute, the GM sets their values based on how objectively difficult she considers the action to be. An "Average" difficulty is a static resistance of 10, or a +0 modifier if rolled; a "Tough" difficulty is a static resistance of 15, or a +5 modifier. A player facing a Tough difficulty must usually get 15 or higher on his action check; or the GM may roll 3d6 +5, and the player must match or exceed that.

Unrolled (static) difficulties are written *Tough difficulty (15)* or *Tough (15)*; rolled difficulties are written *Tough difficulty (+5)* or *Tough (+5)*.

TABLE II: DAMAGE DICE & ARMOUR BONUSES

Type	Damage die / Armour bonus	Description
Golden carriage	Damage die	+1d6 bonus to action checks to impress, influence, or intimidate
Longsword	Damage die	+1d8 bonus to attack checks
Magic Missile spell	Damage die	+1d4+1 bonus to spellcasting checks
Member of the Nobility	Armour bonus	+4 bonus to mental resistance checks against social intimidation or humiliation
Open-hand strike	Damage die	+1d3 bonus to attack checks
Ostentatious clothing	Damage die	+1d3 bonus to action checks to charm, impress, or socially intimidate
Scale mail	Armour bonus	+4 bonus to armour class or physical resistance checks

## DIFFICULTIES & CONCENTRATION

Many actions are easiest to accomplish in a safe place with no pressure. For such actions, increase the difficulty by +5 if you're in a dangerous environment (ie somewhere combat is occurring), or even by +10 if you're actually threatened (ie someone is attacking you). Casting spells and administering first aid (see below) are common examples of actions where concentration is a key factor in determining difficulties.