

Sinking Ship Challenge

Imagine this: the party are sailing to Stormwreck Isle late in a storm at night. Imagine the white light of the full moon at their backs, the black ocean below, the roiling purple sky above, when a flash of arcane blue illuminates the faces of the party and crew, forcing them to rub spots out of their eyes.

On a distant clifftop, the magical bridge of light that connects the lighthouse observatory flickers and fades as two dragons spiral and clash high above, blasting arcs of lightning into the clouds.

When panic burns through the crew, things get worse aboard the *Compass Rose*. Something lurks in the water, snatching sailors out of their boots. A harpy circles above, her song ensorcelling the weak-minded enter to her violent embrace.

This ship is going to sink. What does the party do?

How to run a Skill Challenge

The Skill Challenge is a relic from *D&D 4th Edition*, so you won't find any mention of it in your current *5th Edition Player's Handbook*. The idea is to take an obstacle the party is facing and abstract it into a series of rolls.

Below are the rules of a Skill Challenge, including some optional homebrew suggestions.

- ★ The Dungeon Master presents an obstacle, then a player nominates a skill they'd like to roll and justification for how the skill is relevant to overcoming the obstacle.
- ★ The Dungeon Master decides how many checks the party needs to win the skill challenge. A moderate challenge would require three successes, a difficult challenge would require four successes, and a very difficult challenge would require five successes.
- ★ If the players fail three checks, the party loses the Skill Challenge.
- ★ The Dungeon Master decides what DC is required to succeed each check. For simplicity, the Dungeon Master could assign the same DC to every check.
- ★ As an optional rule, once a player uses a skill, that skill cannot be used by any other player for the remainder of the Skill Challenge.
- ★ Ideally, everyone should get a chance to participate in the Skill Challenge.

D10	OBSTACLE	EXAMPLE SKILLS	DC
1	A Falling Mast!	Acrobatics, Athletics, Survival	12
2	A fire breaks out!	Investigation, Nature, Survival	12
3	A flood of bilge water!	Arcana, Athletics, Perception	12
4	Something in the water!	Animal Handling, Nature, Stealth	13
5	Panic amongst the crew!	History, Performance, Religion	11
6	Too dark to see!	Investigation, Perception, Stealth	12
7	The deck lurches!	Acrobatics, Athletics, Sleight of Hand	12
8	Looting in the chaos!	Intimidation, Religion, Sleight of Hand	11
9	Harpy attack!	Deception, Insight, Performance	13
10	The captain is injured!	Intimidation, Medicine, Persuasion	11

The Compass Rose

This Skill Challenge happens as described in the introduction of this document.

Use a handout. Show the players their progress through the Skill Challenge with a visible handout.

Offer a reward. Clarify to the players that even if they fail this challenge, the Compass Rose *will* sink and the players *will* live, but if they succeed, they will get a reward. This reward could be Inspiration for the whole group or a single roll on a Magic Item Table from the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

Seeding the campaign. Throughout this Skill Challenge, you should highlight as many elements as possible, so even if a threat doesn't materialize in the rolls, still acknowledge it in your descriptions where possible. Pay special attention to the character of Alietha, as described in Chapter 3 of the adventure.

1. A FALLING MAST!

You hear a resounding crack as the ship's central mast snaps and begins to slowly topple to the deck below. Some sailors heave on the rigging to hold it in place, but are hoisted themselves into the air. Others try to scramble out of the impact zone. How do you survive or mitigate this situation?

Acrobatics. You're not going to be there when the mast falls. You roll out of the way, coming to a stop right as it all comes crashing down.

Athletics. Grabbing a loose rope, you pull with all your might towards starboard. The mast tilts and goes down into the sea but misses you and most of the crew.

Survival. As the mast buckles and cracks, you spot a one of the main stays flying loose and dive to secure it. The knot made, the creaking abates as the mast is stabilized.

2. A FIRE BREAKS OUT!

You hear shouting before you see the fire itself, with the storm howling and obscuring the smoke. When you arrive on the scene, several sailors are fighting a rapidly spreading oil fire as it catches on spillage from a barrel. The flames lick closer and closer to the rigging. How do you survive or mitigate this situation?

Investigation. After a short search, your eyes settle on the ship's emergency fire kit, knocked out of place by the force of the storm. Putting out the fire is short work from there.

Nature. Any fire needs air to burn. You cut down a tarp and tamp it down on the flames.

Survival. Years of handling fire have taught you that oil fires can't be doused by water. You rush belowdecks to grab a spare bag of sand ballast, quenching the flames just in time.

3. A FLOOD OF BILGE WATER!

Suddenly, you're sloshing through more water than even the pounding rain could accumulate. You realize with creeping horror that bilge water is welling up from the floorboards. It's rapidly cutting you off from your destination. How do you escape or mitigate this situation?

Arcana. With some quick thinking, you recall that the ship has magical systems in place to control bilge in just such an event. You shout the activation words just before the water reaches your neck.

Athletics. You dive into the cold water and swim across the room as the water rises, reaching the stairs and pulling yourself safely out of the flood.

Perception. You make your way over to the stairs without risking a dunk in the water, and use several barely visible pieces of furniture and bunks as stepping stones over to safety.

4. SOMETHING IN THE WATER!

A scream rings out as a sailor falls nearby, something slimly wrapped around their ankle. Before anyone can do so much as blink, they're overboard and their screams are cut terribly short as they hit the water. A foul stench emanates from the churn below even through the rain - nauseating mold and decay fill your nostrils. How do you proceed across the area safely?

Animal Handling. That was an octopus tentacle, you're sure of it! Knowing that one of those creatures' strongest sense is their sight, you duck behind some barrels and stay out of sight as you cross the deck.

Nature. You recognize the funk in the air as fungal, and taking a gamble, you decide to toss a keg of black powder into the ocean. The water churns and froths violently, and then eventually goes still as whatever was down there retreats... for now.

Stealth. You carefully edge along the deck far from the edge, counting on the noise of the storm and commotion on the ship to mask your presence. Before long, the stench abates, and you feel like you can breathe again.

5. PANIC AMONGST THE CREW!

Chaos is erupting all around the ship as the storm worsens. With the lighthouse out, the screeches of a harpy above picking people off, and the ship threatening to go under, discipline has broken and the crew is in a complete disarray. Everywhere you look, you see panicked faces. How will you get them back to their stations or otherwise mitigate the situation?

History. Quoting a great captain, you captivate the sailors with a speech about maintaining order to pull through in the roughest of storms. For the moment, discipline is restored as they make a renewed push.

Performance. Your voice rises above the din as you sing the opening verses of a shanty. At first, you're alone, but first one and then two voices join you. As the crew sings along, their morale starts to recover.

Religion. You recite the mantra of a sailing god for safe passage, and your voice cuts over the rain and the wind and the panic. Answered or not, the rhythm and surety of your prayer focuses the crew enough to restore order.

6. TOO DARK TO SEE!

The last struggling lamp nearby runs out of fuel and snuffs out. You're plunged into darkness, storm still raging around you and still very, very dangerous. This could be a problem. How do you deal with or mitigate this situation?

Investigation. Luckily, you have a very good memory. Using your mental map of the decks, you find another lamp and manage to light it, restoring some meager illumination to the area.

Perception. You stop to let your eyes adjust to the dark for a moment before pushing forward, following the faint outlines of the ship's features to the lamp that went out. Re-igniting it is a moment's work.

Stealth. You're used to moving in the darkness. You feel your way back to somewhere you can see what you're doing with light feet and a careful eye.

7. THE DECK LURCHES!

A huge wave slams into the side of the boat, the entire craft rolling with the crest of the wave! On decks, cries of distress are heard as sailors lose their footing around you. The deck is slanting dangerously, and it's already slick from the water - how do you deal with or mitigate the threat?

Acrobatics. Staying in place with the full might of the sea bearing down on you is a fool's errand, so you roll with the punches, moving your weight gracefully from foothold to foothold until the ship is relatively stable once more.

Athletics. You grab a nearby rope and hold yourself fast with an iron grip until the wave passes.

Sleight of Hand. Your hands grab a knife as you slip past almost automatically, and you plunge it into the wooden deck, anchoring yourself in place until the danger is past.



8. LOOTING IN THE CHAOS!

While most everyone is fighting for their lives, a certain type of person is taking advantage of the chaos to liberate some of the cargo! If these sailors don't get back to their posts, the ship will go down before anyone has a hope of getting to shore. How do you deal with them or mitigate their absence?

Intimidation. You catch one of them by the wrist and give them a stern reminder of what can happen to thieves in the dark when the captain isn't looking. They get the message.

Religion. A gentle but firm reminder that many gods tend to look down on looting and that their healing magic can be a privilege and not a right sets the looters on the path of righteousness.

Sleight of Hand. You appear in front of the looters with the contents of their pockets in your hands and a hard set jaw. They decide that looting is an inefficient use of their time and return to their posts.

9. A HARPY ATTACKS!

Eerie siren songs mingle with the screams of her hapless victims as a monstrous harpy picks off the crew in the chaos. If this goes on, there will be no crew left to sail the ship! How do you deal with or mitigate this menace?

Deception. Disguising a small barrel with a sailor's jacket, you lob an alchemist's fire after the harpy as she picks it up and flies away. The resulting explosion and squawk is followed by her retreat to a higher and more cautious vantage for now.

Insight. You realize that the song is a prelude to each victim, and throw some sails atop the harpy to trap her after she broadcasts her next dive. It half-works - almost but not quite snared, she takes off, backing off... for now.

Performance. You band together to perform a shanty, which overpowers the siren song with everyone's voices together. She shrieks and circles higher, deterred for the moment.

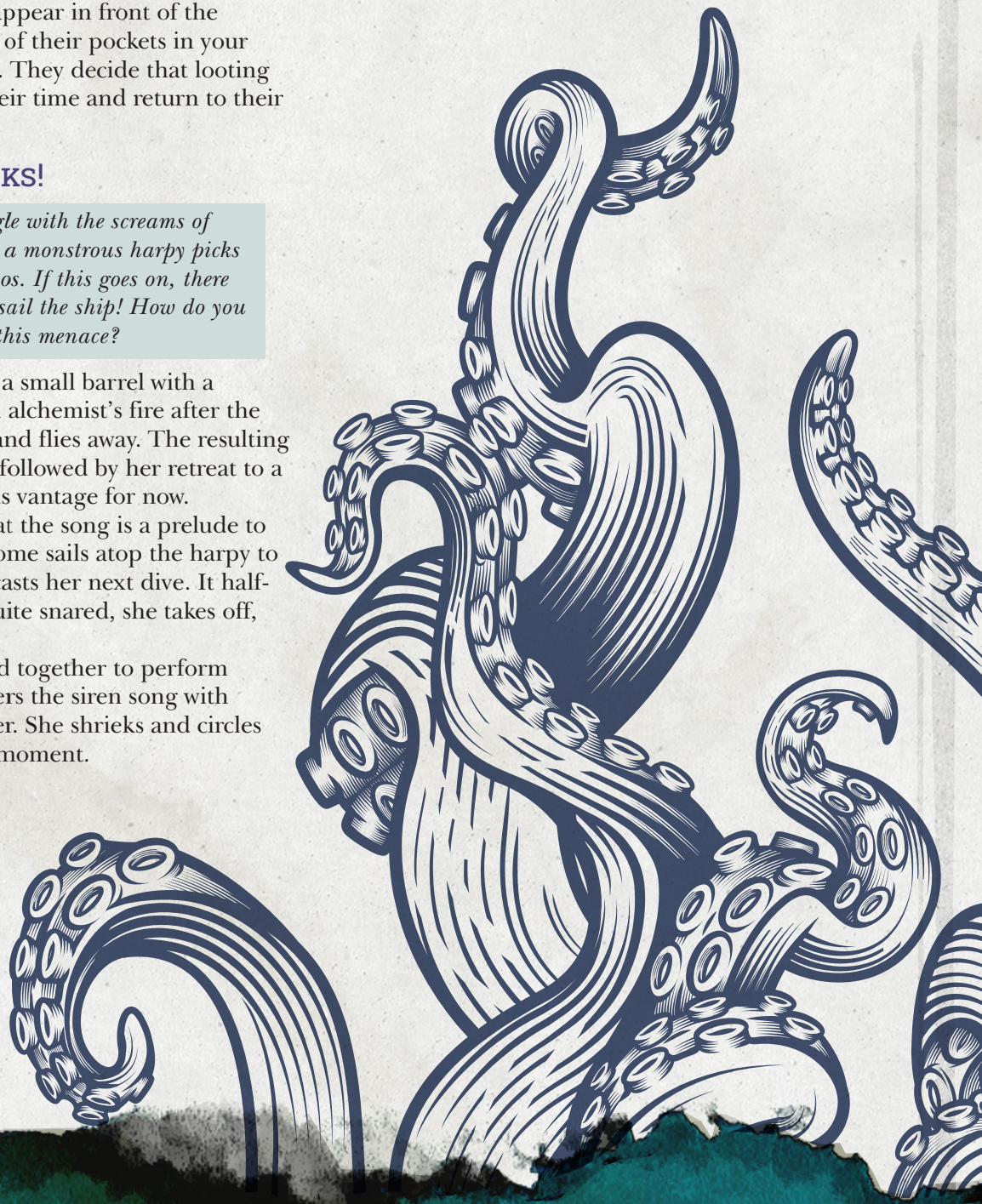
10. THE CAPTAIN IS INJURED!

The captain took a nasty fall and is out for the count! They and other injured crew are piling up at an alarming rate - what do you do to solve or mitigate this situation?

Intimidation. The crew is 'convinced', with your steely-eyed stare and the force to back it up, that morale will not improve until the captain and any other injured are taken to the lifeboats.

Medicine. You begin triage, treating the captain's wounds until they can stand under their own power and give orders again.

Persuasion. You take charge of the situation, delegating crew to treat the injured and take those who can't stand themselves to lifeboats.



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