

(GM Article)



**"SKILLFUL ENCOUNTERS"**  
**PART #1**

***Making Skill-based challenges just as HACKTASTIC as Combat Encounters***

***By Big E***



SKILLS, many a H/20 player neglects them. Though the fault does not fall wholly on the shoulders of the players. GMs are far more responsible for the lack of players making balanced characters. You may think I have once again had the dry erase markers open a bit too long near my nasal passage, but no. Here is the main reason players focus on combat stats rather than skills, BECAUSE YOU LET THEM! Yep, if you don't make skills an integral part of

your play-sessions, why would players bother to take them? Why take ranks in a LORE skill when they can just jump to the next Advanced Template or take the Blitz Charge Talent? Because of SKILLFUL ENCOUNTERS! Any idiot can get lucky and chop off a Bog Troll's head with a battle axe, but the skilled player can roll his Creature Lore and Know that a Bog Troll Regenerates and might still pose a threat if not burnt with fire or acid. Skills can take an ordinary encounter and turn it into a HACKTASTIC ENCOUNTER! Think about a nasty fight on a swinging rope bridge. The players need good acrobatics to excel in a crazy combat like this. Sometimes encounters just involving Skill Test can be as fun and exciting as any combat. A Thief sneaking into and through an entire encamped army to steal the battle-plans from the general's tent, without being ripped to shreds by his war-dog that is asleep in the tent. We are talking some great STEALTH tests and a nail biting encounter that the

thief's player will remember for a long time. If he does it think of the bragging rights, if not well it is sure to be HACKTASTIC watching him try and get away, cased by a dog, cursing mercenaries, leaping over sleepy eyed soldiers as they rouse to the calls of alarm, dodging past guards and leaping over cook-fires, think of the cool scene. Over the next couple months we will take a look at how to use Skillful Encounters to make your H/20 Fantasy game even more Hacktastic.

## **Teaching Players they "NEED" to take skills**

There are three surefire ways to "Teach" your players they should use some build points on skills. All of these involve giving the players the "HIGH HARD ONE"!

### **Make Skill Test necessary to acquire information or treasure:**

Nothing gets under the skin of players more than them knowing the information, but their players not being able to use it, since none of the PC's have the needed LORE. If they try to meta game and use player knowledge their PC would not have, DON'T LET THEM! You are the GM it is your job to make things fair. So the big badass Trulk Brute, who has spent only enough skill points to reach his next advanced template, gets to miss out on the some choice loot or magic gear, because he is too stupid to know it's true value. NOT YOUR PROBLEM! A few session of this and I will bet the player of said Brute quickly either starts buying some LORE Skills or ends up poor.

Same thing goes when none of the party can use GOSSIP or Negotiate to find out the location of the kidnapped noble they have been hired to free. Once again NOT YOUR PROBLEM! So the PCs fail and end up not getting paid, the noble ends up dead and now the nobles family hires assassins to take revenge on the dimwit PCs. ALL in ALL Id' say they have it coming. Now don't get me wrong, you should make adventures around your players strengths and tastes, but not always. A balanced band of adventurers should have someone able to deal with most skill oriented tasks. Don't grind the point home every game session, but once in a while it is good to "TEACH" your players that they need SKILLS as well as KILLS.

**Give bonus experience rewards to players who make pivotal skill tests:** This experience should be handed out after everyone has been given the group reward, just to grind a little salt into the wounds of other

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players who are just a few points from getting their next longed for Advanced Class.

**Make it hazardous to the PCs Health if they don't have needed skills:** Nothing drives home the point more than either the near death or death of PCs. I will bet you anything that after one encounter where the PCs must CLIMB or SWIM to save their lives that those who lack these skills and survive will, when rewarded with experience take a few ranks in them, because they don't want to get caught without them again. I can tell you this, the guys that play at my table know they are taking their lives of their PCs into their hands when they build some PC that is one sided. Sure you can get away with it for the first couple of games. H/20 is a nasty system, so build your PC tough out of the gate, but after a game or two you need to start rounding him out with some skills. Mark my words, you don't last long at my table with a Crap Luck or no skills. I am notorious for screwing players who think they will never need Climb, Jump, Swim or Lore Skills.

Next Month we will start laying out some cool **Skillful Encounters** you can use in your home games.

Until Next Month remember, when all else fails; ROLL SOME DICE and MAKE SOME CRAP UP!

Big E