

SURPRISE: ROLL FOR DOOM

When two (or more) parties appear to be destined to meet suddenly, surprise may be a factor in the situation. Whether the encounter has been triggered by one side intruding on the other's space or both are simply traveling in the same area and randomly meet up, one side or the other can be caught off guard to where it hesitates before being able to take action.

This section of the rules lays out the circumstances in which surprise can happen, what affects the chances of surprise happening, how to check for surprise, how long it lasts, and how it limits what surprised characters are able to do. There is also guidance on what the unsurprised side can accomplish while the surprise lasts.

The Circumstances of the Encounter

There are three factors to consider when deciding whether surprise is possible. This information should be available from pre-mapped encounter entries or generated by the random encounter sub-system of the rules. Each of these will either support the possibility of surprise happening or rule it out completely. Let us look at how distant the parties are, what the terrain and the weather are, and what activity the parties are engaged in.

Distance Between Parties

The distance at which parties can become aware of the other is determined in the encounter rules. Whether or not both parties become aware of the other is something to be determined outside the surprise rules. If one party notices the other and one doesn't, then surprise may yet be possible, depending on what the aware party decides to do; if it chooses to sneak up on the unaware party, then surprise can be a factor.

Example:

The PCs are traveling across dry steppes, rolling hills with short grass. A group of riders crests a hill some 200+ yards away. With nothing between the party and the strangers except grass and wind, it's likely they'll each notice the other without delay and neither can surprise the other.

The parties must be close enough to interact. This means that they must be close enough that one of the parties can close the gap between them in no more than a half move. If the parties aren't close enough that a clash could take place (if it's a hostile encounter), then any surprise would be moot because it would have ended before the two parties engage. This distance is known as closing range. [Half move or full move? I keep wavering.]

Example:

Let's say the riders crest a ridge only 40 yards distant just as the PCs clear an outcropping that had prevented view of the ridge. The two sides are now in closing range, both can easily see the other, so either party can be surprised by the sudden appearance of the other nearby.

Missile fire outside closing range will not result in surprise. Missile fire at longer than closing range is immaterial to surprise conditions. The party firing missiles must be able to, in whole or part, move to reach the other party as above for surprise to be possible. *[See Terrain rules below.]*

Example:

If the two parties are outside closing range and the riders have a couple of horse archers who begin launching arrows at the PCs, there's no chance of surprise, even if the PCs haven't yet noticed the riders. The arrival of an arrow may be unexpected, yet is not enough to generate real surprise.

Terrain and Its Effect

The parties must be able to sense each other. If the terrain prevents them seeing and/or hearing each other, despite their proximity, then no surprise is possible until at least one can sense the other.

Example:

The party is slogging along a twisty trail in rugged hill country in the middle of a severe storm, trying to reach shelter the tattered map promises is just ahead. A small band of dirtspawn is following a trail just across the wooded vale. With the fierce winds, driving rain, and near-constant thunder reducing vision and eliminating any chance of hearing or smelling the other, neither group has any idea the other is nearby, so there's no chance of surprise.

The terrain the encounter takes place in must allow for significant contact. If the two parties cannot physically engage, despite being close enough by distance, then surprise again becomes moot. Beating on one's chest across a ravine from the other party isn't going to accomplish much.

Example:

Continuing onward after the storm passes, the PCs reach a washed out bridge. The dirtspawn appear from among a copse of trees along the path on the far side. Without missile weapons being used, surprise isn't a factor in this encounter.

Missile fire from within closing range can cause surprise. Even if the two parties can't physically close the distance to engage in melee, if they're within distance where that would be possible in different terrain, then missile fire can surprise the other. A flight of arrows from out of the foliage on the other side of a ravine can make a good deal of trouble.

Example:

Say the dirtspawn have javelins and atlatl and noticed the PCs and successfully hid before the PCs could notice them. The arrival of a couple of javelins seemingly out of the blue could surprise the PCs. This is important because a surprised character could receive more incoming javelins prior to being able to scramble for cover. With the possibility of surprise leading to pincushion PCs via missile fire, surprise is relevant to the encounter.

Activity, Natural Elements, and Their Influence

What the parties are doing can affect the chances of surprise. If one party is noisy and the other silent, then it stands to reason that the latter has a much better chance of surprising the former than vice versa. If a party is sleeping, pre-occupied with chopping trees, eating, or involved in other mundane actions, those can affect how easily surprised it is. Invisibility, camouflage, and natural elements such as fog can affect the odds of surprise.

This is a list of examples of what can influence the chances of surprise. The GM can extrapolate from these examples to rule on other situations that arise in play. The modifiers below are from the PC party side and reflect modifiers to its check.

* other party is silent	-2
* other party is camouflaged	-2
* other party is invisible	-3
* other party has a distinct odor	+1
* other party is large (per ten critters)	+1
* other party is moving	+1
* other party is distracted	+1 to +3
* other party is sleeping	+4
* Poor light (dusk, etc.)	-1
* Darkness	-2
* Rain or snow	-1
* Fog (may vary)	-1 to -3
* Loud background noise	-2
* Anticipating attack	+2
* Suspicion hostiles are near	+1

The modifiers to surprise chances are cumulative. Find the sum of all of the factors and apply that to the roll for the affected side. That sum is then added or subtracted from the Surprise Check roll.

Surprise Check Roll

When surprise becomes possible, a player will roll for party surprise checks. The number of phases of surprise is also determined by the roll. A party may be surprised from one to three phases. Note that the roll total may be modified by circumstance.

- * Roll 2D6 and sum the dice, for results of 2 - 12
- * Apply any modifiers and compare the adjusted roll number below

Adjusted Roll Result

- * Roll of 2 or 3: surprised for three phases
- * Roll of 4: surprised for two phases
- * Roll of 5: surprised for one phase
- * Roll of 6+: not surprised

The longest surprise can last is three phases. There are abilities that allow individuals in a party to recover from surprise early.

Example:

The PCs have a total of -1 in modifiers: they suspect dirtspawn are near and the spawn are camouflaged with mud and leaves to disappear from view in the woods. A dice roll of 7 and the -1 modifier adjusts the PCs' roll to 6, so they're not surprised when coming up on where the spawn are trying to hide.

Early Recovery from Surprise

An individual may recover from surprise sooner than the roll would indicate. In these instances, the creature's recovery bonus knack (reaction bonus) is subtracted from the number of phases of surprise to find out when the creature has recovered. This recovery bonus never wholly mitigates surprise, so the character suffers at least one phase of surprise even if the recovery bonus would otherwise remove all surprise phases.

[**Note:** The recovery bonus is not a "Get Out of Surprise Free" card. There may be critters or characters that can never be surprised; that ability would be indicated in its description and makes recovery moot. The recovery bonus is described in the character generation rules.]

[If recovery bonus would nominally reduce surprise to 0, the penalties for surprise get reduced during the one surprise phase? Or the last phase of surprise always reduces penalties?]

Example:

Party A is surprised for three phases. One of the PCs in Party A has a recovery bonus allowing for one fewer phase surprised, so that character is surprised for only two phases and may begin acting normally in the third surprise phase.

Example:

Party A is surprised and the GM rolls one phase of surprise duration. The aforementioned character with the quick recovery still suffers one phase of surprise.

Suggested Rule: As recovery from surprise isn't actually a physical reflex response like dodging a rolling boulder, the use of a Dexterity bonus for recovery makes little sense. The use of Intelligence to determine a recovery bonus seems to fit better.

Optional Rule: Any character may recover early from surprise by succeeding on a saving throw vs spells. This save will allow recovery one phase earlier than the surprise roll result. The character will still suffer at least one phase of surprise.

All surprised individuals recover from surprise when the surprise phases are finished. No check of any sort is required to recover at this point.

[*Lengthening Surprise* Add rules for adding a surprise phase?]

Actions During Surprise Phases

The active party's actions decide, in largest part, how the encounter will proceed. The active party can steer the encounter toward parley and negotiations, toward separation and non-interaction, or toward hostilities. The surprised party has little influence on what happens until it recovers from being surprised.

Actions during a surprise phase are limited due to the short time involved.

Parley Actions:

- * Speak a sentence or two
- * Sound a horn or other device to draw attention
- * Hold action and await surprised party's response

Avoidance Actions:

- * Flee
- * Withdraw
- * Duck into cover

Hostile Actions:

- * Shift position to engage a surprised foe
- * Launch a readied missile
- * Attack a foe already engaged
- * Loose a finished spell
- * Charge an opponent

Preparatory Actions:

- * Ready a weapon
- * Begin casting a spell
- * Pull out an item

Movement:

- * Move up to 20% of movement rate (if not engaged)
- * Engage a foe when reaching melee distance

Missiles:

- * Launch or hurl a readied missile
- * Ready a missile for launch

[Note: A readied missile can be launched in the first phase of the first action round following surprise phases; this attack is a bonus to the normal attack routine of the archer and adds +1 phase to the action speed of the regular routine for the round.]

Magic:

- * Begin casting a spell
- * Loose a finished spell on the phase it finishes
- * Work a casting to be finished during the first full round following surprise

Example:

A magic user in Party A is casting a spell at a surprised opponent. The opponent is surprised for two phases and the spell takes one phase to cast. The spell is finished and loosed while the opponent is still surprised.

[Does surprise affect saves? Penalty -1? Don't want to make them too weak to help.]

Example:

Magic User A from above instead begins a spell with a casting time of four phases. The spell won't finish until two phases into the first full round.

Melee:

Any active character close enough to engage a surprised opponent in melee during a surprise phase may attack the opponent. The active character may use their normal attack sequence, with the following restrictions:

- * A maximum of two attacks in each surprise phase
- * If an attack form requires reloading, only one such attack can be made
- * A multiple-attack routine may only be split between two adjacent targets that are each close enough to engage in melee with the attacker

A surprised character may defend, poorly — with a penalty of -2 — during a surprise phase.
[Make this a bonus for attacker, instead?]

Morale:

If the active party incapacitates one-third (or more) of the surprised party, or otherwise shows overwhelming capabilities, the surprised party has to check morale once surprise has run its course.

A character recovering early from surprise is able to take action:

- * moving, readying a weapon, or other non-attack if not engaged
- * defending normally and/or a snap attack if engaged

When Surprise has Ended

When all surprise phases have played out, the action in the fiction and the mechanics of game play change to the relevant sub-system of rules: parley, pursuit, or combat.