

Going up and getting wet

How DRAGONQUEST™ natives climb and swim

by Paul Montgomery Crabaugh

The fear of falling is one of the most basic emotions humanity enjoys. For characters in role-playing games, it is a fear realized unfortunately often. They're always trying to climb something, and just as frequently not succeeding.

There is also another kind of falling: the swimmer who misses a beat, whose strength or lungs give out, falls as well. It's a much slower, gentler fall — but the oceans are far deeper than any building or cliff is high.

Thieves in the DRAGONQUEST™ game are provided with the ability to climb things, quite high and smooth things, but non-thieves have no such ability. And no one, not even a Navigator, has the ability to swim. These omissions are remedied below.

Climbing is a minor skill, like Stealth or Horsemanship. All characters have it at Rank 0 to begin with. Characters who are Thieves already have access to their own, superior form of climbing and will not generally wish to increase Rank with this skill. Using Climbing, the base chance for a successful climb is $(3 \times MD) \text{ plus } (10 \times$

Rank) minus one-tenth of the square of the height (in feet) being climbed. This figure is expressed as a percentage chance. Thus, a character with a Manual Dexterity of 20 and Rank 2 ability in Climbing has a 40% chance of successfully scaling a 20-foot-high wall: $(3 \times 20) + (10 \times 2) - (400/10) = 40$.

This formula works for a typical building exterior, with cornices, ledges, and other handholds, when the climb is being made in illuminated conditions. If the climber cannot see the surface he is climbing, the base chance is reduced by 15%. If the surface is unusually sheer, the chance is reduced by 20%. The presence of a firmly anchored rope to aid the ascent will increase the base chance by 50%.

If the roll for success is missed, a second roll on percentile dice will determine what percentage of the climb had been accomplished before the fall; this is the distance fallen. The damage the character takes as a result is the square of (distance fallen/10) — 1 point for a 10-foot fall, 4 points for a 20-foot fall, 9 points for a 30-foot fall, and so

on. These points of damage are taken directly off EN, and not absorbed by armor. Damage is increased by 1 point for each point of AG lost due to encumbrance.

Swimming is also a minor skill, but characters do not automatically start with it, even at Rank 0. The chance of swimming without incident is somewhat dependent on the time which will have to be spent in the water, reckoned in increments of 15 minutes. For example, if a character will have to swim for half an hour, then the "duration" in the formula for the base chance is 2. The base chance for a successful swim is $(EN + WP + MD) \text{ plus } (10 \times \text{Rank}) \text{ minus the square of the duration}$. Thus, a Rank 1 swimmer with EN 15, WP 12, and MD 18 who is trying to swim for an hour has a 39% chance of succeeding: $(15 + 12 + 18) + (10 \times 1) - (4 \times 4) = 39$.

The base chance is adjusted by +30% if the water is very still, by -30% if the water is unusually rough, by -20% if the character was completely unprepared for a swim (i.e., thrown in unawares), and by a negative amount equal to the square of (AG loss due to armor + AG loss due to encumbrance).

If the roll is failed and the character is alone, the unfortunate swimmer drowns. If a companion is traveling with the character, all is not lost: the companion may attempt to save the victim, at a base chance of $(2 \times \text{companion's AG}) + (5 \times \text{companion's Rank})$, with modifiers of +20 for still water and -30 for rough water. If this roll also fails, the character is dead. Even if the companion manages to keep the character from drowning, the character being saved takes 1D10 damage directly to Endurance and must make a new attempt to complete the swim. If this second attempt also fails, the character drowns with no possibility of being saved by a companion.

A character who has not attained any Rank with Swimming but who needs it anyway has to make a roll against $(4 \times \text{modified AG})$ to stay afloat — and repeat this for every minute spent in the water. The character who can't swim may be able to keep from sinking, but cannot make any headway in the water.

The experience point costs to gain Ranks in these new skills are as follows:

	Rank					
	0	1	2	3	4	5
Climbing	0	150	300	450	600	750
Swimming	100	200	300	400	500	600
	6	7	8	9	10	
Climbing	900	1050	1200	1350	1500	
Swimming	700	800	900	1000	1100	

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