Stop Saying “I Roll Search”: How Exploration Works in Cresthaven RPG

written by CresthavenRPG Guru | June 26, 2026

Players treat exploration like a skill menu. The dungeon door swings open and instead of thinking about what their character would actually do, they ask:

“Can I roll to search the room?”

This is the exploration equivalent of saying “I attack” without describing who you are swinging at, how, or why. Nobody at the table would accept that in a fight. But somehow we let it slide everywhere else.

In Cresthaven, that changes. Players describe what their character is doing. The Dungeon Master decides whether a roll is needed, which ability or class skill applies, and what the outcome means. The dice handle uncertainty. They do not replace imagination.

The One Rule That Changes Everything

Describe what your character is physically doing, not which skill you are using.

“I check under the desk for hidden seams” is valid. “I search the room” just invites “Where first?”

“I run my hand along the floorboards near the wall, feeling for any that feel loose or different” defines scope and method clearly enough to resolve quickly. “Do I notice anything suspicious in here?” asks a question that cannot be answered without more information.

The Dungeon Master decides whether a roll exists at all. The dice resolve uncertainty, not permission. If something would obviously succeed or fail based on what has been described, no roll happens. Your character still acts. They just might not need dice to do it.

What This Looks Like At The Table

Vague input: Player: “I search the room.” DM: “Where first?” Player: “I look around.” DM: “What do you see?” Player: “Nothing useful.” DM: “You spend ten minutes searching without result. The torches are burning low now.”

Specific input: Player: “I run my hand under the desk edge looking for seams, then check behind the bookshelf where shadows pool.” DM: “You find a loose floorboard beneath the desk. Behind the bookshelf is a narrow gap leading to

a crawlspace.”

The DM can usually resolve specific input without follow-up questions.

Vague input: Player: “I try to pick the lock.” DM: “What tool are you using?” Player: “Just my fingers.” DM: “You fumble and break off a nail.”

Specific input: Player: “I use my thieves’ tools, prying at the keyhole with a thin blade while holding tension on the latch from the other side.” DM: “The lock clicks open. You slip through before anyone can react.”

Good description reduces uncertainty. It does not guarantee success.

How Exploration Works: The Six-Step Loop

Every action in Cresthaven follows the same six-step loop. All rules exist to support one or more steps of this loop. Once you understand it, you can resolve almost any situation in the game.

Before we walk through the steps, here are a few key terms used throughout this article.

A **difficulty check** is how Cresthaven resolves uncertain actions. You roll a d20, add your relevant ability modifier and any applicable class skill bonus, and compare the total to a **Difficulty Check (DC)**, which is the target number set by the Dungeon Master. Meet or beat the DC and the action succeeds.

A **class skill check** is a difficulty check where a trained class skill bonus applies on top of the ability modifier. For example, a Thief searching for traps adds their Search class skill bonus on top of their Wisdom modifier.

An **ability save** is used when your character needs to resist something rather than accomplish something. The formula is the same as a difficulty check, but the framing is different: you are reacting, not acting.

Step 1: Intent (Player)

What is the character trying to change?

- find something
- avoid something
- learn something
- move through something
- influence someone

Step 2: Action and Approach (Player)

Describe what your character is physically doing AND how they are attempting it. Different approaches have different consequences.

- Different methods lead to different Difficulty Classes. Probing a floor with a ten-foot pole is a different action than stepping onto it.
- Different approaches carry different costs. A careful search takes time. Time attracts danger.
- Different tools and class skills may apply. Each approach may require specific equipment or training.

Step 3: State Snapshot (DM)

The Dungeon Master reads the fiction and identifies what matters for this specific situation: light level, visibility, terrain, noise, the speaking character’s Reputation if the action is social. These factors are not automatic penalties. They are prompts for judgment that inform the next two steps.

Step 4: Certainty Decision (DM)

Does this action have a clear outcome based on what has been described?

If yes, no roll is needed. The DM narrates the result and play continues.

If the outcome is uncertain, a roll may be called. Description can remove ambiguity, but only when it genuinely resolves what was in question. A vivid description does not earn a lower Difficulty Class on its own.

If failure would change nothing meaningful about the situation, no roll is offered.

Step 5: Difficulty Check (DM)

Only if a roll is needed does the DM assign a Difficulty Check using the standard difficulty checks (see the reference section below). State snapshot factors inform this decision: adverse conditions increase the DC, favorable conditions lower it. If the result would fall below 5, the action succeeds automatically. If conditions make success impossible regardless of the roll, no roll is offered.

When a character beats the DC by 5 or more, give an additional benefit: extra information revealed, faster completion, complications avoided, or a bonus discovery.

Step 6: Consequence

Even when an action succeeds, the outcome may carry a cost or change the situation in ways that matter. A door opens, but now you are inside a room

with no visible exit. That consequence matters as much as whether the lock turned. One of the following always results:

- gain information
- change position
- trigger hazard
- spend time
- reveal danger

Quick Reference: Difficulty Bands and State Factors

Difficulty Checks

The Dungeon Master assigns a Difficulty Check using the table below to represent the odds of getting what the players want. Each point up or down makes the odds 5% better or worse and is determined by the DM. Use the table below as a guideline.

DC	Challenge Level	When…
0-5	Trivial	Obvious or routine; success is already certain
10	Average	Routine effort, small chance of failure
15	Tough	Requires skill or good use of gear
20	Challenging	Demands training, time, or strong rolls
25	Heroic	Elite effort; exceptional circumstances
30+	Near-Impossible	Miracles or extreme conditions

State Factors

Factor	Effect on Difficulty Class
Light: normal light	No effect
Light: low light without darkvision	Higher DC, or Disadvantage on sight-based difficulty checks
Light: total darkness without darkvision	Automatic failure for any visual check
Visibility: clear line of sight	No effect
Visibility: obstructions	Higher DC
Terrain: clear ground	No effect
Terrain: difficult, wet, or adverse conditions	Higher DC
Noise: quiet environment	No effect on Listen checks
Noise: environmental interference	Higher DC on Listen checks
Noise: armor worn	Disadvantage on Listen checks regardless of ambient noise
Reputation: favorable starting DC	Lower DC or no roll required

Factor	Effect on Difficulty Class
Reputation: poor starting DC	Higher DC or outcomes narrowed

Darkvision rule: Darkvision never qualifies as detail visibility. Shapes, movement, and obstacles are visible in darkness, but fine detail, color, inscriptions, and mechanisms are not. Any difficulty check requiring reading, mapping, examining a mechanism, or spotting a concealed object requires actual light regardless of darkvision. Magical darkness cancels darkvision entirely.

Advantage and Disadvantage

Advantage means rolling two d20s and taking the higher result. It comes from tools, positioning, or preparation that directly changes what the character can physically attempt. It does not come from describing an action well. The description is required to act at all. Advantage is earned separately, through equipment and planning.

Disadvantage means rolling two d20s and taking the lower result. It comes from conditions that impair the character: low light without darkvision on a sight-based check, wearing armor while listening, and similar situational penalties.

If a situation grants both Advantage and Disadvantage at the same time, they cancel out and the character rolls normally.

Heroic Points

Each session you play, your character earns 1 Heroic Point. These accumulate between sessions and can be spent for powerful benefits.

- Re-roll a difficulty check, class skill check, ability save, or attack roll. You must keep the new result even if it is worse.
- Gain Advantage on any d20 roll.

The Deal with the DM

Once per session, at the Dungeon Master’s discretion, a player may propose a Deal with the DM. If accepted, the player changes one d20 roll to a natural 20. In exchange, the DM may change any one of that player’s other d20 rolls to a natural 1 at any point in the same session. Use this sparingly and at moments of maximum drama.

Exploration Belongs to Three Systems

Every exploration scenario in Cresthaven belongs to one of three systems. Knowing which system you are in tells you what the state snapshot will focus

on, how the Dungeon Master is likely to resolve the action, and what kind of consequence to expect.

The three systems are the Information System, the Risk System, and the Social System.

The Information System

Every Information scenario starts from the same place: the character does not know something, and description determines whether the Dungeon Master has anything to tell them. The state snapshot always includes light level and method. The resolution is almost always a Wisdom or Intelligence difficulty check, or a class skill check built around those attributes.

Failure in the Information system does not mean nothing is there. It means the character could not find it with that method, in those conditions, at that moment.

Searching a Room

Step	Content
1. Intent	Find hidden objects or passages.
2. Action and Approach	“I run my hand under the desk edge looking for seams, then check behind the bookshelf where shadows pool.” Describe the area being examined and the physical method.
3. State Snapshot	Light level: normal torchlight, usable visibility, no adjustment. Specific area targeted: desk and bookshelf. No immediate time pressure, but dungeon delay increases wandering monster risk.
4. Certainty Decision	The desk inspection targets the correct location. Outcome is uncertain enough to warrant a difficulty check.
5. Difficulty Class	Hidden objects start at a base DC of 17. Good light and a specific, correct method lower this to DC 15. Darkvision does not qualify as detail visibility; actual light is required. Thief Search class skill adds bonus on top of Wisdom modifier.
6. Consequence	Success: hidden object or passage revealed. Beat DC by 5 or more: additional context revealed, such as why it was hidden or where it connects. Failure: time spent, torches burn lower, wandering monster risk increases. Wrong area examined: question remains open.

Key rule: Searching always costs time. Time always changes risk.

Listening at a Door

Step	Content
1. Intent	Learn what is on the other side before committing to entry.
2. Action and Approach	“I press my ear against the wood, hold my breath, and signal everyone else to stay quiet.”
3. State Snapshot	Door material: solid oak. Ambient corridor noise: faint. Party noise: footsteps from earlier movement still audible. Armor worn: imposes Disadvantage on Listen difficulty checks regardless of other conditions.
4. Certainty Decision	Audible activity may exist behind the door. Outcome is uncertain. A difficulty check is required.
5. Difficulty Class	Standard listening starts at a base DC of 17. Environmental interference increases the DC. Armor imposes Disadvantage. Thief Listen class skill adds bonus on top of Wisdom modifier. Undead make no sound and cannot be detected this way regardless of the roll.
6. Consequence	Success: movement, voices, or meaningful silence revealed. Beat DC by 5 or more: numbers, activity type, or position indicated. Failure: nothing revealed; this does not mean nothing is there. Armored characters may be better positioned to let someone else listen.

Key rule: Failure does not mean nothing is there. It means the character did not hear it.

Identifying a Strange Item

Step	Content
1. Intent	Learn the origin, function, or significance of an unknown object.
2. Action and Approach	“I turn it over in my hands, looking for maker’s marks, engravings, or anything familiar about the craftsmanship.”
3. State Snapshot	Light level: actual light required; darkvision does not qualify for detail visibility here. Colors, maker’s marks, and fine engravings are invisible in darkness. Character background and knowledge: relevant training shifts the DC down.
4. Certainty Decision	Unusual craftsmanship but no obvious origin. Outcome is uncertain. A difficulty check is required.
5. Difficulty Class	Obvious maker’s mark on a common item: automatic (DC 0-5, no roll). Unusual craftsmanship: Intelligence difficulty check, DC 10 to 15. Magical or foreign item: DC 20+ or external expertise required. Completely unknown: no roll resolves it here; research in town with a scholar, temple, or specialist is needed.
6. Consequence	Success: one or more properties revealed at the depth of the check. Beat DC by 5 or more: history, faction, or hidden function revealed. Failure: character does not recognize it; this does not mean there is nothing to know. Full identification may require a second expedition or a cost in time and coin.

Key rule: The difficulty check reveals what the character knows. It does not reveal what the object contains.

Puzzle Solving

Step	Content
1. Intent	Resolve a mechanism, riddle, or mystery that blocks progress.
2. Action and Approach	“I examine the carvings on the door frame and try turning the central mechanism slowly, feeling for clicks or resistance.”
3. State Snapshot	Prior attempts: three failed combinations already tried, which pushes the DC toward 20. Light level: darkvision does not qualify as detail visibility; inscriptions, symbols, and colored elements require actual light. Information gathered so far: pattern of symbols repeats every twelve positions.
4. Certainty Decision	The correct solution is unknown until discovered. A difficulty check may be needed for partial understanding, but no roll is made if the player arrives at the correct answer through description alone.
5. Difficulty Class	Correct solution found through player reasoning: automatic success, no roll. Partial understanding: Intelligence difficulty check, DC 10 to 15. Three prior failed attempts push the base DC to 20. Asking better questions changes the state snapshot and may lower the DC before any roll is needed.
6. Consequence	Correct solution: obstacle resolved. Incorrect attempt: may trigger a hazard or increase the DC with each failed attempt. Better questions: accelerate resolution.

Key rule: No roll substitutes for the correct answer. The dice can sharpen the picture. The player provides the solution.

The Risk System

Every Risk scenario starts from the same place: something in the environment will cause harm or cost if handled incorrectly. The state snapshot always includes tools available and the character’s position relative to the hazard. The Thief class dominates this system through dedicated class skills. Having the right tool grants Advantage.

In the Risk system, failure advances the situation in a negative direction: it produces a consequence or a complication. Success produces progress, information, or safety. Failure is not a stop state. It is a new, worse state.

Searching for Traps

Step	Content
1. Intent	Identify a hidden hazard before triggering it.
2. Action and Approach	“I use my ten-foot pole to probe the floor ahead, feeling for pressure plates or tripwires as I move forward slowly.” Using a pole rather than reaching by hand keeps the character out of the trigger zone and grants Advantage.
3. State Snapshot	Light level: darkvision does not qualify as detail visibility for tripwires, trigger pins, or inscribed runes; low light increases the DC. Position: standing at the edge of the suspected area. Method: pole probing grants Advantage.
4. Certainty Decision	The trap is concealed beneath dust. Whether it is detected is uncertain. A difficulty check is required.
5. Difficulty Class	Standard concealed trap: base DC 17. Low light without darkvision: DC toward 20. Pole probing grants Advantage. Thief Search class skill adds bonus on top of Wisdom modifier. Note: each class skill can only be attempted once per situation. There is no second roll until a level is gained.
6. Consequence	Success: trap location and type identified. Beat DC by 5 or more: mechanism, trigger condition, and potential linked traps revealed. Failure: nothing revealed; this does not mean the trap is absent. Triggering the trap produces its own immediate consequence.

Key rule: Finding a trap and disabling one are two separate actions. Both require a description.

Removing a Trap

Step	Content
1. Intent	Neutralize a known hazard without triggering it.
2. Action and Approach	“I use my thieves’ tools to carefully lift the pressure plate and examine the mechanism underneath.” Describe the specific method: wedging a spike, cutting a wire, jamming a coin, or using thieves’ tools.
3. State Snapshot	Trap type: mechanical pressure plate. Tools: thieves’ tools in hand. Light level: darkvision does not qualify as detail visibility for fine mechanical work; actual light is required for precision. Character class: Thief has the Disable Traps class skill.
4. Certainty Decision	A creative solution that is mechanically sound resolves without a roll. If tools or training are absent, outcome is uncertain and a difficulty check is required.

Step	Content
5. Difficulty Class	Creative, sound solution: automatic success (no roll). Thief Disable Traps class skill check: DC set by trap complexity; full thieves' tools kit grants Advantage. Improvised attempt without class skill: DC increases with risk of triggering the trap on failure.
6. Consequence	Success: hazard neutralized. Failure: trap triggers. Partial success: mechanism left in a more dangerous state.

Key rule: The Thief disables the mechanism. Everyone else solves the problem. Both start with a description.

Opening Doors

Step	Content
1. Intent	Pass through a blocked entry point.
2. Action and Approach	"I examine the lock mechanism and try using my thieves' tools to pick it, holding tension on the latch while I work." Describe how: forcing, picking, looking for an alternative, or examining what is blocking it.
3. State Snapshot	Obstruction type: determines which resolution path applies. Unlocked and unstuck: no roll. Stuck: Strength difficulty check; crowbar grants Advantage. Locked: Thief Pick Locks class skill check. Barred from the other side: no roll resolves this. Magically sealed: no physical resolution until more is learned. Noise risk: forcing alerts nearby creatures.
4. Certainty Decision	If unlocked and unstuck: automatic success. All other cases: uncertainty exists and a roll is required or a creative solution is needed.
5. Difficulty Class	Stuck door: DC 10 to 15; crowbar grants Advantage and may lower the DC. Locked door: Thief Pick Locks class skill check (Intelligence), DC set by lock quality; requires thieves' tools; one attempt per lock. Magically sealed: DC 25+ or automatic failure until the seal is understood.
6. Consequence	Success: passage opens. Failed force attempt: noise created, nearby creatures may be alerted. Failed attempt on a trapped door: hazard may trigger. Creative solution: changes the state snapshot entirely.

Key rule: Every blocked door raises two questions: what is on the other side, and who knows you are trying?

Climbing and Traversing Obstacles

Step	Content
1. Intent	Move through or over an obstacle that blocks normal travel.

Step	Content
2. Action and Approach	“I find a sturdy anchor point for my rope, set a piton, and test my weight on the line before committing to the climb.” Describe the method, tools used, and how the character manages their load.
3. State Snapshot	Surface: clear handholds have no effect; wet, crumbling, or featureless surfaces increase the DC. Light level: characters without darkvision in total darkness have the Blinded condition; darkvision users can navigate but may miss fine surface details like hairline cracks. Encumbrance: heavy armor or a loaded pack increases the DC. Tools: rope, grappling hook, and pitons are relevant. Height: determines consequence of failure.
4. Certainty Decision	Easy surface with clear handholds and no encumbrance: automatic success. Any adverse factor introduces uncertainty and a difficulty check.
5. Difficulty Class	Clear handholds, no encumbrance: automatic (DC 0-5). Difficult terrain or encumbered: Strength or Dexterity difficulty check, DC 10 to 15. Rope anchored at top, pitons set, or secured grappling hook: Advantage. Thief Climb class skill check (Dexterity) for anything requiring class expertise.
6. Consequence	Success: position advances. Failure: no progress; at height, failure means a fall. Partial success: character advances halfway at increased risk for the remaining distance.

Key rule: Encumbrance is a state factor, not a background detail. A loaded pack changes what is possible.

Stealth and Infiltration

Step	Content
1. Intent	Move through or past a guarded area without detection.
2. Action and Approach	“I move slowly along the wall, keeping my cloak low and stopping to listen between each step.” Describe pace, cover used, clothing, and how the character manages noise.
3. State Snapshot	Light level: the most important factor. Normal light with active observers: DC 20+ or automatic failure. Dim light: DC 15 to 20. Darkness with no darkvision observers: automatic. Cover and sight lines: obstructions lower DC. Armor and load: heavy armor increases the DC. Observers with darkvision: a guard with darkvision sees shapes and movement in total darkness; darkness alone does not hide a character from such a guard; magical darkness cancels darkvision for both sides.
4. Certainty Decision	Unlit area with cover and no darkvision observers: automatic success. Any light or darkvision observer introduces uncertainty and a difficulty check.

Step	Content
5. Difficulty Class	Unlit with cover and no darkvision observers: automatic. Dim light or partial cover: Dexterity (Stealth) difficulty check. Thief Stealth class skill bonus applies on top of Dexterity modifier. Ranger Stealth applies in natural areas only, not in dungeons or cities. Soft-soled boots, dark clothing, and a hooded cloak grant Advantage in appropriate conditions. Lit area with active observers: DC 20+ or automatic failure. Important: the Dungeon Master rolls the Stealth difficulty check in secret and uses the result as a hidden DC. Monsters and NPCs compare this against their Notice score (Wisdom + Ability Focus + 10) to determine whether the character is spotted. Players never know their hidden DC. The character always feels as though they succeeded. The consequences arrive without warning.
6. Consequence	Success: position advances undetected. Failure: alert or encounter triggered. The party moves as its noisiest member.

Key rule: Light cancels stealth before the roll is made.

The Social System

Every Social scenario starts from the same place: another party has something the characters want, or stands between them and something they need. The state snapshot always includes Reputation and the other party’s current disposition.

Reputation has one mechanical function in this system: it sets the starting Difficulty Class before the conversation begins. A favorable Reputation opens at DC 10. A neutral Reputation sits at DC 15. A poor Reputation places the DC at 20 or higher, or closes certain outcomes entirely. Reputation does not add to rolls after the conversation starts. It determines what is possible before anyone speaks.

The resolution uses Charisma-based difficulty checks, Grifter class skill checks, or the Monster Reaction Chart for creature encounters.

Persuading a Guard

Step	Content
1. Intent	Gain access, information, or compliance from a neutral or hostile NPC.
2. Action and Approach	“I approach the guard and explain my purpose, offering information about a threat I have discovered in exchange for safe passage.” Describe the cover story, what is being offered, and any supporting evidence.
3. State Snapshot	Reputation of the speaking character sets the starting DC. Ranger starts at +1 (DC 10). Thief and Grifter start at -1 (DC 15). Assassin starts at -3 (DC 20). Guard’s current disposition. Plausibility of the approach.

Step	Content
4. Certainty Decision	Credible story and favorable starting DC: automatic or low DC Charisma difficulty check. Uncertain: Charisma check or Grifter Persuasion class skill check. Hostile starting DC: higher DC or opposed roll.
5. Difficulty Class	Favorable starting DC: 10. Neutral starting DC: 15. Hostile starting DC: 20+. Producing a relevant document, official seal, or matching credential grants Advantage and may lower the DC. Grifter Persuasion class skill bonus adds on top of Charisma modifier.
6. Consequence	Success: access or compliance granted. Beat DC by 5 or more: NPC’s standing disposition shifts favorably for future interactions. Failure: suspicion raised. Critical failure: alarm or hostility triggered. Significant outcomes may shift Reputation in either direction.

Key rule: Reputation sets the starting DC. The approach determines where in that range the result lands.

Negotiation

Step	Content
1. Intent	Reach an agreement with an intelligent party that serves the character’s goal.
2. Action and Approach	“I present my offer: coin and information about enemy movements in exchange for safe conduct.” Describe what is being offered, what the character knows about what the other party wants, and any physical evidence or written terms brought to the table.
3. State Snapshot	What the other party wants: must be determined before the approach; unknown interests increase the DC. Reputation of the speaking character sets the starting DC. Leverage on both sides: clear leverage lowers the DC; no leverage leaves DC unchanged.
4. Certainty Decision	Aligned interests and favorable disposition: automatic or low DC Charisma difficulty check. Uncertain: Charisma check or Grifter Persuasion or Deception class skill check. Actively opposed interests: opposed roll.
5. Difficulty Class	Aligned interests, favorable DC: 10. Uncertain, neutral DC: 15. Opposed interests: DC 20+ or opposed roll. Written terms, a concrete offer, or physical evidence of value grants Advantage. Grifter Persuasion or Deception class skill bonus adds on top of Charisma modifier.
6. Consequence	Success: agreement reached. Failure: this approach is closed; the same approach cannot be retried without changed circumstances. Partial success: conditional agreement reached, with embedded risk on both sides.

Key rule: You cannot make a deal without knowing what the other side wants. Unknown interests always increase the DC.

Gathering Information

Step	Content
1. Intent	Learn something specific about a person, place, or event.
2. Action and Approach	“I approach the local merchant and ask pointed questions about recent events, offering coin for anything useful.” Describe who is being asked, what specifically is being sought, and what is being offered in exchange.
3. State Snapshot	Who is being asked and their relationship to the information. Reputation of the asking character sets how willing the source is to engage. What is being offered: coin or a favor lowers the DC; nothing offered leaves DC unchanged.
4. Certainty Decision	Public knowledge: automatic, no roll. Reluctant source: Charisma difficulty check or Grifter class skill check. Guarded information: requires a cost in coin, favor, or personal risk to shift DC into a rollable range.
5. Difficulty Class	Public knowledge: DC 0-5, automatic. Reluctant source: DC 15. Guarded information: DC 20+, or the character must pay a cost before a roll is offered. Coin or favor offered lowers the DC. Grifter Persuasion or Deception class skill bonus adds on top of Charisma modifier.
6. Consequence	Success: information revealed at the specificity of the question asked. Beat DC by 5 or more: source reveals more than intended. Vague questions return vague answers regardless of the roll result. Failure: reveals whether the source is unwilling or simply does not know.

Key rule: The specificity of the question determines the specificity of the answer.

Parley with Monsters

Step	Content
1. Intent	Create a window for non-combat resolution before or during an encounter.
2. Action and Approach	“I step forward and speak calmly, offering information about a shared threat in exchange for safe passage.” Describe what the party is offering, who is speaking, and what the creature visibly wants.
3. State Snapshot	The Monster Reaction Chart result uses d20 + the party’s average Reputation score + the party’s average Charisma modifier. This roll, not the DM’s judgment, determines whether negotiation is even possible. Creature alignment: Chaotic monsters will not keep their word; Neutral monsters keep agreements when it benefits them; Lawful monsters honor any deal they make. Shared language or communication method available.

Step	Content
4. Certainty Decision	The Dungeon Master rolls d20, adds the party's average Reputation score and average Charisma modifier, and consults the Monster Reaction Chart. Immediately Friendly: negotiation opens without further rolling. Negotiate: the DM runs a negotiation scene and players describe their offer. Attack: negotiation is not available unless the situation changes.
5. Difficulty Class	Negotiation scene opens from the chart: Charisma difficulty check or Grifter Persuasion class skill check if the creature can communicate. Ranger Animal Empathy Wisdom class skill check applies to lower-intelligence creatures that are agitated but not fully hostile, and may improve the state snapshot before the chart is consulted.
6. Consequence	Friendly or Negotiate result: conversation opens; what the players offer shapes what follows. Agreements with Neutral or Lawful creatures may hold; agreements with Chaotic creatures probably will not. Even a hostile result reveals something about what the creature values or fears.

Key rule: Parley is not something players initiate with a skill check. It is an outcome the Monster Reaction Chart makes possible.

Running Exploration at Your Table

Do this:

- Interrupt vague actions with questions that force specificity. "Where first?" is a gift to a vague player.
- Reward precise descriptions with immediate resolution. Speed is the reward for clarity.
- Make vagueness slow and frustrating. Make precision fast and satisfying.
- Let the fiction drive the mechanics. Decide what happened in the story, then find the rule that resolves it.

Do not do this:

- Do not explain Difficulty Classes before a player has described an action.
- Do not offer rolls for vague statements like "I search" or "I investigate."
- Do not let players optimize around rules instead of describing what their character does.
- Do not treat Advantage as a reward for good roleplaying. It comes from tools, positioning, and preparation.

What This Engine Actually Does

Gary Gygax described the Dungeon Master as both creator and final arbiter: someone who builds coherent worlds, paints them with words, riffs on player choices without controlling the story, and serves as the consistent foundation every decision rests on. Exploration is where all of that converges at once.

The three systems in this article support that role, they do not replace it. In the Information system, description determines what the Dungeon Master can reveal from the world they built. In the Risk system, tools and position determine what the character can safely attempt within that world. In the Social system, Reputation sets the starting Difficulty Class before the first word is spoken, and preparation moves the result within that range.

Every scenario runs the same loop: players declare intent, the DM reads the environment, resolves uncertainty with the right method, and delivers a consequence that changes the state of the game. The rules support that loop. They do not replace the judgment behind it.

How do you run exploration at your table? Do your players describe their actions first, or reach for the dice? Tell us in the comments!