

*Administrative note: This specific rule (last updated in Dec of 2024) is excerpted from/and is part of the full "Rob's World!" House rules available online at: <<https://www.robsworld.org/3ehsr/s.pdf>> - Author: Robert Vaessen*

### **WAKING UP:**

(References: PH pages 78-79, 139, 151, 153, 280, 308-309, 313 and DMG page 301 / RC pages 9, 35, 62, 114) Occasionally, a group of adventurers may find themselves attacked during the middle of the night. Out on the trail, sleeping beside a campfire, with a watch set. You can't be awake all the time, and it's bound to happen. "Wake Up! We're under attack!". How easy is it to wake up from a sound sleep? That's the question that this house rule addresses. A sleeping character is considered helpless in game terms (see PH pages 79, 151, 153, 309 and DMG page 301 / RC pages 35, 62). While sleeping, characters have:

- DEX 0 (-5 modifier) for saving throws and or checks
- May not apply any DEX or Dodge bonuses to AC
- Considered helpless with a -4 penalty to AC
  - Prone characters also incur a -4 penalty to their AC against melee attacks
  - Prone character gain a +4 bonus to their AC against ranged attacks
    - Ref Conditions in RC pages 34-35: *"If more than one condition affects a creature, apply them all. If certain effects can't combine, apply the most severe one"* Conditions can stack. Effects might not.
- Cannot move, attack, or take any other actions\*
  - \*Only permitted action is a passive listen check (considered 'Not an action') if permitted by the DM (ref PH pages 78-79), to wake up (see below)).
- Sleeping characters (that are susceptible to precision damage) are vulnerable to attacks that rely on target being denied its DEX bonus to AC; such as Rogue sneak attacks or Scout skirmish damage (ref RC page 42)
- Subject to coup de grace attacks (ref RC page 62)

**What is sleeping?** Players should note that Sleeping and Unconscious are not the same condition. A sleeping character is considered helpless (see helpless condition in RC page 62). A sleeping character can make passive listen checks (If permitted by the DM/see below) ref PH pages 78-79/RC pages 9 & 114). Unconscious characters (ref PH page 314/RC page 72) cannot make passive listen checks, and they cannot be 'awoken' in accordance with the rules described here. They must be healed, otherwise magically revived, or revived in accordance with the rules applicable to their specific condition. Note that some spells, magical or supernatural effects may cause unconsciousness and sleep. If they purport to cause both conditions, then the affected character is treated as if they are unconscious (the more severe/restrictive condition of the two). The Unconscious condition is officially described in the Player's Handbook and other official rules, while Sleeping as a condition is not.

**When do you make a listen check?** The DM may allow (depending on circumstances) sleeping characters (engaged in an encounter/combat) to make a passive listen check (considered 'Not an action' ref PH page 139) just before an initiative roll. Note that 'normal' sounds/noises do not cause characters to wake up (ref PH page 280). If this check is permitted, some characters may be awake (but prone) prior to their initiative. If this initial check is not permitted, the sleeping characters may make another such check (if permitted by the DM) during their turn (in initiative order). An unconscious or sleeping character may not delay or ready any actions. The only allowed action while asleep is a passive listen check (if permitted by the DM), and sleeping characters cannot refuse to make such a check. Other things can happen to a character while asleep or unconscious (such as natural healing, taking damage, etc), but the sleeping or unconscious character doesn't initiate any actions for these effects to occur. Here are some listen DC's for waking up:

### **Sounds of battle (5 or more combatants) 0; Shouting 5; Sounds of combat (less than 5 combatants) 5**

*(If necessary/the DM may apply distance modifiers to the DC / +1 per 10' distance (20' over water/30' underwater) / ref RC page 114)*

See PH listen skill (pgs 78-79) and RC (page 114) for more modifiers. Keep in mind that a roll of natural 1 on a 'd20' is a failure, a natural '20' is automatic success, and a check is not permitted until the DM rules that a condition exists which permits the check (Loud noises, shouting, sounds of combat). Note that 'normal' sounds/noises or light touching does not cause a character to wake up (ref PH page 280). The passive check made by the sleeping character is considered 'Not an action'. It is not an active listen

check made by the sleeping character, and it does not count as the execution of an action by the sleeping character. A sleeping character who makes a successful passive listen check does not learn (from the listen check) the direction where the noise came from, is not able to use the information in order to pin-point the source of the noise, and cannot discern the language used, or content of any spoken message(s). The check only serves to determine whether the noise has woken the character. *That doesn't mean that a character who wakes up, does not or cannot hear subsequent sounds, or learn/discern information from any subsequent sounds/spoken conversation(s).*

**What does it take to awaken a sleeping character?** A slap, shove, forceful nudge, or attack which causes damage (including lethal, non-lethal, ability or level damage), will cause a sleeping character to wake up. Under most circumstances, a character can use a standard action (a non-provoking application of the 'aid another' action (ref RC page 10)) to automatically wake up one other sleeping character (in most cases you will need to be adjacent to the character). Loud noises (Sounds of battle, Shouting or Sounds of combat) may wake a sleeping character. In any round when loud noises occur, each sleeping character must make (if permitted by the DM) a passive listen check to determine whether the noise wakes them up. Characters wearing 'ear-plugs' (improvised or commercially produced) apply a -10 penalty on their listen check. Keep in mind that a roll of a natural '1' on a d20 skill check is an automatic fail (you do not wake up), and a natural '20' is an automatic success (the character wakes up). See Rob's World! House Rules: [AUTOMATIC CRITICAL SUCCESS OR FAILURE](#): Note: Only a magical/supernatural area of silence (or the deafness condition) would guarantee that a character does not wake up from the occurrence of 'noises' in the vicinity of the character.

**What happens when a character wakes up?** While the passive listen check is made when 'loud noises' occur (DM decides that a check may be made), an initial check should be made at the start of the round just before any combat/initiative rounds begin; regardless of whether there are loud noises or not. Additional checks may be made (if the DM permits) at the beginning of a sleeping character's turn (in initiative order) if noises persist. As soon as a character wakes up, they are considered flat-footed (ref RC pages 15, 35, 70 / PH page 137) and staggered. Characters who wake as the result of an initial (beginning of encounter/combat) passive listen check may not act until their initiative comes up (they cannot take any actions that would result in actions outside their turn in initiative order). If sleeping characters are awakened, but their initiative has already passed, then they are considered flat-footed (See PH glossary - pg 308) until their next turn in initiative order.

A flat-footed character isn't able to react normally to most situations; especially combat situations (situations may vary from encounter to encounter, so the DM's adjudication may be required). A flat-footed character is denied its Dex and/or Dodge bonus(es) to AC, can't make attacks of opportunity, and cannot speak (ref RWHR [SPEAKING DURING COMBAT](#) and PH 144). The flat-footed condition persists until a character has taken an action (during their turn (in initiative order)) which is intended to allow them to react normally to the situation (typical situations involve danger in the form of nearby adversaries, but clearly the situation could vary). For example: Waking up, opening one's eyes, speaking, yelling, listening, spotting an opponent, being told about the dangers nearby, dropping an item or weapon, delaying, are not actions that would allow/prepare you to react normally to a combat or hostile encounter situation. Standing up, drawing a weapon, casting a spell, attacking a nearby opponent, tumbling, activating a magic item. These are all examples of actions that a flat-footed character could take (during their turn (in initiative order)) which might allow them to react normally to a situation.

Additionally, in the round that a character wakes, they are considered staggered (see PH glossary - pg 313 and PH pg 139 - Restricted Activity). The character may only take a single move or standard action (including free, swift and immediate actions) while staggered. Staggered characters cannot take any full-round actions. The staggered condition ends after the character/creature has concluded its turn of activity after waking (at the end of their turn).

*Note that some characters/creatures (depending on their racial abilities, class (or prestige class) features, feats, magic items or due to other reasons) may be immune to (or less affected by) the conditions or effects of being flat-footed and/or staggered.*