Geek Related's Pathfinder Chase Rules

Many of the most thrilling scenes in fiction are chase scenes, which can be long, nonlinear, and interspersed with fighting. In fact, if you reflect on the exciting movies and TV shows you've seen recently, it's likely that the vast majority have significant chase scenes in them - they are a staple of action, thriller, horror, and many other genres.

Often, adventurers find themselves trying to chase down or escape their foes while going about their chosen profession. The default Pathfinder movement rules are fairly uninspiring in these cases – with constant movement speeds, unless something extremely special happens, the fleeing party either automatically escapes or is caught in short order. The Pathfinder chase rules from the GameMastery Guide are a little better, but are an odd minigame that is hard to integrate with the rest of a complex combat and the vast array of rule options available to characters.

To create more exciting chases for your gaming group, here is a set of chase rules designed to integrate very closely with the normal action of Pathfinder while adding excitement and variety to the chase.

The Move Check

The first step is to remove fixed movement speeds and convert them into a Move modifier. A creature (or vehicle's) Move is +2 per 5 feet of their base speed. For example, Joe, an unencumbered human fighter with a base speed of 30 feet, has a Move of +12. A Move check is simply a roll of d20 + Move.

You can calculate Move off any movement type – it works for running, swimming, climbing, flying, animal-drawn vehicles, ships, and more. You will often see chases mixing many types of movement.

Move changes along with the character's base move – difficult terrain, encumbrance, et al. Apply modifiers to the character's base speed as usual and then change their Move to suit. For example, if Joe the fighter dons plate armor and his base speed changes to 20 feet, then his Move becomes +8. If he is then moving through difficult terrain (half speed), then his Move becomes +4.

Move Checks In Combat

You can use this check during normal combat to add variability and remove predictability – if the enemy caster is 60 feet away and Joe intends to charge him this round, maybe he can reach him and maybe he can't – a Move check would tell. In this case you can roll Move, and with a DC 12 check he can move one square, +1 for every 2 points he exceeds the DC. Since this is a double move, Joe rolls Move twice and gets an 8 (+12 = 20, 5 squares) and a 13 (+14 = 27, 8 squares) for a total of 13 squares (65 feet) – and he easily reaches his opponent. You can then interpret a creature's base speed as taking 10 on a Move check.

While this does add a delightful "do I think I can make it?!?" tension to combat, this isn't where the Move check shines, however – it really comes into play when someone decides to run for it and we leave the scope of normal tactical combat.
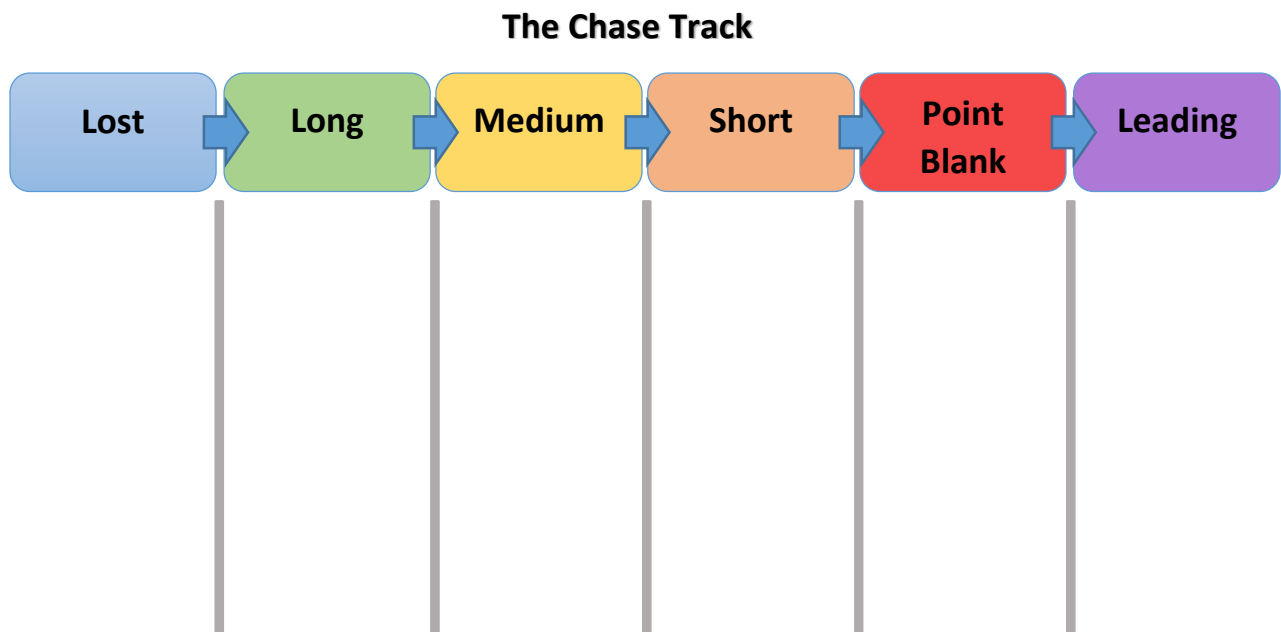
Basic Chase Rules

Rather than keeping up with specific distances moved, a chase is more concerned with relative distance – who is keeping up or falling behind. You don't want the excitement of a chase to get bogged down in detailed measurements, you want it to be fast and furious. Therefore once we leave the battle mat, we will keep track of movement in a slightly more abstracted manner.

The Chase Track

Participants in a chase will be represented on a chase track reflecting how far back a given pursuer is are relative to the leader. The initial leader in a chase is whoever first makes a run for it with the intention of leaving the area. The chase track is split up into six abstract positions reflecting the distance from the leader.

Chase Track Positions

1. Leading – Neck and neck with the leader. Pursuer is within melee range and touch spell range of the leader.
2. Point Blank – Right on their heels. Leader is subject to auras and other tight bursts (e.g. channel energy) from the pursuer (and vice versa).
3. Short - Within 30 feet of the leader, for purposes of all those abilities that activate at that range, and can use close range spells on each other.
4. Medium – Well behind the leader. -4 penalty on ranged attacks and can only use Medium range or longer spells on each other.
5. Long – Barely in sight. -6 penalty on ranged attacks and can only use Long range or longer spells on each other.
6. Lost - You have completely lost track of the leader.   If you have allies still in the chase and you can still run (not fatigued or giving up) you can continue to chase after your allies in order to at least arrive on the scene once the chase is over, but you can't get back into the actual chase proper.

The Chase Track

Lost	Long	Medium	Short	Point Blank	Leading

Getting Started

Chase participants start at a chase track position that makes sense to the GM. The leader always begins in the Leading position on the chase track. If a pursuer is right there next to the leader and takes off after them immediately on their turn, they can start in the Point Blank position. If a pursuer is already a round of movement away from the opponent who initiated the chase, or pauses to attack or take another action before they get going, or otherwise delays participation in the chase, you might start them at Medium range or farther back. Chase participants continue to act in their initiative order. If a chase begins before combat is underway, determine surprise and initiative as normal – perhaps the prospective chase leader can flee before his opponents take other actions, perhaps not.

Consider chase participants to be double moving – the Run and Charge maneuvers are not used in these chase rules. You may make an exception if a PC has an ability that enhances either of those maneuvers that you think they should benefit from in a chase.

Closing the Distance

On their turn, each participant makes a Move check. The leader's check sets the DC for all the other participants. For each 5 points by which a pursuer beats the leader's Move check result, they close by one category on the track; similarly they slip back by one category on the track for each 5 points by which they roll under the leader's Move check result. A pursuer can move up or down multiple levels on the track in a single round. A participant in the chase can always choose to slow down and drop back on the chase track if they desire.

For example, Joe the fighter is in the lead and has a Move of +12 and rolls a 12 on his Move check, for a total of 24. A pursuer making a Move check against this DC of 24 and getting a Move check result of 20 to 28 would stay in the same position they started in during their turn. They would move up a position on the chase track if their result was a 29 or more, and fall back a position on the chase track if their result was a 19 or less.

Taking the Lead

If someone other than the leader wants to pass the leader, they need to pass up out of the Leading position as usual (for example, by being in the Leading position and then beating the existing leader's Move check by more than 5). Then they become the new leader in the chase. Other participants all shift back a position relative to the leader (but not relative to each other). The new leader's Move check is then used to set the bar for the other participants, who continue to act in the existing initiative order.

Characters with the Run feat get a +4 on their Move checks during a chase.

Other Actions

The Move checks in a chase assume a full round of movement. If a participant pauses and uses a move or standard action to perform some other task (like an attack), their Move is effectively halved for the round. If a participant stops entirely to use a full-round action (but doesn't intend to drop out of the chase entirely), they can make a Move check with a Move modifier of +0 to determine exactly how far they fall back.

Chase participants may choose to attack other participants in the same position before making their Move check for the round, or can choose roll Move before they attack (in both cases, halving their Move modifier).

There are no attacks of opportunity for movement on the chase track, all combatants are assumed to be moving all-out next to each other. Attacks of opportunity for other reasons (like trying a trip attack without having Improved Trip) still apply. A leader (or a pursuer ahead of another pursuer) can stop and wait to attack a pursuer, but usually there's enough space for chase participants to maneuver around waiting opponents and not take an attack of opportunity (though narrow tunnels or the like could make that feasible).

Ending a Chase

In some cases, a chase has a goal – a finish line, or somewhere the participants are trying to reach. Determine how many rounds of chase are required to get there (or how many points of Move, and tally up the rolls each round to see when they hit the desired number – a quarter mile, for example, is 1320 feet which could be equated to a total of 528 points of Move rolled by the leader). The leader determines what general direction he's going. "Back towards the surface," "east into the dock district," or "towards the tree line we can see across the plain" are valid. The GM may determine some directions are infeasible based on the circumstances of the chase.

In many cases, the goal is more vague - "get away" or "don't let that guy get away" - in which case the chase proceeds until one of those two things happen (or someone loses an eye in the process). Participants who are killed, knocked out, fatigued, or otherwise rendered incapable of continuing drop out of the chase. The chase ends when no one wants to chase anyone else any more.

Simple Chase Example

Joe the fighter is in combat with Natasha the drow necromancer and her skeleton minion. All three have Speed 30 ft. and therefore have Move +12. Joe is toe-to-toe with the skeleton and the priestess is standing 30 feet away casting spells at him.

Joe is wounded badly and decides he needs to cut and run. On his turn in the initiative order, he says "I run for it!" (technically, a Withdraw action). The chase begins.

Joe is the leader as the chase begins. He makes a Move check and rolls a 9 on the die and +12 for his Move, which gives him a total result of 21. The skeleton, following its prior command directive of "kill that guy!", immediately clatters after him on its turn, so it starts in the Point Blank position. It rolls a 16 (+12) on d20, so its Move check of 28 beats Joe's by 5, and it catches up to him quickly and is with Joe in the Leading position on the chase track.

Natasha was already 30' away and would start at Short range if she joined the chase immediately. She decides to take the chance of pausing to cast *expeditious retreat* before pursuing Joe. While this loses her half of her Move this round, and causes the GM to rule that she starts in the Medium position on the chase track, she is counting on the spell's effect to allow her to catch up quickly. With her new base speed of 60 ft., her Move is +24! This first round, however, it's only +12 (halved because of the use of a standard action to cast a spell), but she rolls a 14 on her d20 for her Move check netting a 26 (5 more than Joe's 21), enough to gain on Joe and move from Short to Point Blank position despite her delay!

The chase proceeds the next round in order; each participant can choose whether to run all out, pause and try to make an attack or cast a spell, or jockey for position.

Joe just keeps running. He rolls a 19, setting the bar for this round at a respectable 31.

The skeleton is Leading, and wants to take an attack on Joe. It rolls to hit and cuts him for another 3 points of damage. Then it makes its Move check. A decent roll of 15 is added to its halved Move (+6) for taking an action for a 21, which is ten full points below the DC of 31 set by Joe's Move check. The skeleton drops back two positions, all the way to Short position.

Natasha does not want to get much closer to Joe than her skeleton is, even if she could, because that would put her in harm's way if he wheels and stops to fight. She starts the round in Point Blank, so she pauses to use a standard action to channel negative energy to hurt Joe, then commences running again using her magically enhanced speed. A roll of 9 plus half her Move (+12 = 21) drops her back to Medium range, even without any sandbagging on her part!

The chase continues in this vein. Joe might keep running trying to make the surface, or might stop and try to take out the skeleton with one shot, and then go mano-a-mano with the unarmored Natasha. His pursuers, however, might be able to get in enough hits to bring him down before he can lose them.

Advanced Chase Rules

The basic chase rules cover the simplest chases, but more sophisticated chases can bring a lot of color and enjoyment to your game.

Fatigue

Characters running under their own power (or mounts running under theirs) may become fatigued and be left behind by the chase. Chase participants can run (or swim, fly, etc.) without a problem for a number of rounds equal to their Constitution score. For each round of running at full speed beyond that, a Constitution check (DC 10, +1 per additional round) is required at the end of the participant's turn. When you fail this check, you become fatigued and must stop running. A character who has run to his limit must rest for 1 minute (10 rounds) before the fatigue passes and they can run again. During a rest period, a character can move no faster than a normal move action. Characters with the Endurance feat get a +4 on this Constitution check as usual.

Pushing It

A character moving under their own power (running, swimming, etc.) can try to push harder and add their STR bonus to their Move modifier for a round. A character choosing to do this must make a DC 15 Fortitude save or be treated as if they've been running an additional round for purposes of fatigue. This effect is cumulative – a runner who has pushed themselves every round for 8 rounds and has failed 3 of the Fort saves is treated as if they've been running for 11 rounds for purposes of their Constitution check DC to become fatigued.

A chase participant can push a mount or animal-drawn vehicle in similar ways. A rider can use the Spur Mount special action of the Ride skill (DC 15) to gain a +2 on their Move check and a driver can use the Push task of Handle Animal (DC 25) for a +2 on their Move check. For these cases you may use the mount fatigue rules specified under Spur Mount in the Ride skill or the fatigue rules detailed within these chase rules, whichever you find easiest to manage.

Purely magical transport (*fly* spells, etc.) can not be pushed.

Assisting

Yes, you may use the Aid Another action in a chase. At the cost of using an action (and therefore halving your own Move check), you may make a DC 10 Move check to give another chase participant in your position a +2 bonus on their own Move check.

Hiding

Sometimes, a person being pursued in a chase will want to try to dodge behind something and hide without completely losing all their pursuers on the chase track. You can create a diversion using Bluff as usual or try to find cover or concealment sufficient to allow a Stealth check. In most terrain, if you are two positions or more in front of a pursuer on the chase track (Short range), it's possible to find some cover or concealment sufficient to use for such a check. Closer than that, a diversion, Hide In Plain Sight, or something else is usually necessary to create enough concealment to Stealth before a pursuer is right there behind the same obstacle with you.

Maneuvering

It may be the case that either those being chased want to lead their pursuers in a specific direction (like "to the river" or "where my buddies are waiting"), or those chasing have a specific directional agenda (like "keep them away from Mount Doom" or "herd them towards the trap"). In either case, the maneuvering required to determine a specific direction compromises speed by some degree. If one of the groups in a chase want to affect the direction of the chase, then they must make an opposed Move check against the other during the chase leader's turn. Roll once per group using the highest Move on each side. Whoever wins gets to set the direction, but at the cost of a -4 penalty to their Move modifier that round.

For example, Joe the fighter wants to run for the surface, but Natasha and her skeleton want to oppose that. They roll opposed Move checks and Natasha wins – they get between Joe and the tunnels leading up, but at the cost of Joe gaining some distance from them.

Multiple Participants

These chase rules work in an obvious manner when there is a single leader. Some judgement is required when that's not the case.

If, for example, an angry dragon is chasing your entire party of PCs, there may be one leader but the other PCs aren't really pursuing them so much as trying to become the leader themselves. This dynamic also applies to races.

The general rule to apply is that people in positions of the chase track are moving relative to each other as if they were in their own chases. So if the dragon and the slowest PC are in the Long position compared to the chase leader, they are both at the Leading position with respect to each other. Another PC in the Medium position compared to the chase leader is similarly at Point Blank range from those other two.

If one PC passes the leader and gains the lead, the dragon and PC in the Long position on the chase track become "Lost" relative to him – that PC gets away! But the rest of his colleagues are still in the chase, in their existing positions relative to the dragon.

A group being pursued can always decide to split up by any participant running off in some direction other than the leader's and becoming a leader in their own chase. If no one chooses to pursue those splitting off from the chase, they become Lost; if they do, you simply split the chase into multiple sub-chases with their own chase tracks.

If the group doesn't want to split up, use relative placement on the chase track as discussed previously to resolve actions via groups of participants. A group of PCs and an orc warband racing to get to a cave first all roll Move in turn; the leader may change several times as that chase progresses. Participants wanting to interact with (especially violently) with one another simply use relative chase track positions to determine how far they are from people other than those Leading. An orc in the Long chase track wanting to throw a handaxe at a PC in the Medium position on the chase track is only one position away, and therefore effectively in Point Blank with respect to them.

Obstacles

In a chase, there are many different kinds of obstacles and complications that can come up. A lot of the fun of cinematic chases is in the obstacles and maneuvers the participants engage in to get past them.

Every round, check for the presence of an obstacle to the chase participants. The chase leader can decide to deliberately look for obstacles and head for them; in this case, double the chance of an obstacle coming up that round.

Chance of Obstacle by Terrain Type

- Urban or Dungeon: 50%
- Jungle, Underground or Ruins: 40%
- Forest, Hills, Mountains, or Swamp: 30%
- Desert, Plains or Coastal: 20%
- Aquatic/Water: 10%

Avoiding Obstacles

In general the checks to pass these obstacles are DC 15. If you fail the check, you drop back one level on the chase track; if you fail the check by 5 or more you also take 1d6 points of nonlethal damage from a collision or similar mishap. Each obstacle will have a primary skill or skills to be used to bypass it.

If you are farther back in the chase, you have more time to react and/or avoid obstacles altogether. Chase participants in the Point Blank chase track position or later may use listed secondary skills to bypass obstacles, but at a DC of 5 higher (usually DC 20). For example, dodging a fruit cart in the city might be an Acrobatics DC 15 check to vault over or power-slide under it, but a DC 20 Knowledge: Local check could indicate that a pursuer is familiar with that cart and that there's just enough clearance between it and the shop wall to dodge around it instead. Participants at Short range may make secondary checks at DC 15 or even use other relevant skills at the GM's discretion. Participants farther back can usually avoid optional obstacles – the GM determines which obstacles everyone has to cross (for example, the leader swam across a river) as opposed to easily avoid if they are trailing enough (the usual fruit carts). Don't forget to apply encumbrance and armor check penalties to these obstacle avoidance checks.

Random Obstacles

Much like with random monster tables, you should come up with obstacles relevant to where your PCs are located. You can select specific obstacles to present to them, or if you choose you can roll on a random chart like the following. Paizo has a Chase Cards Deck that can be used to generate obstacles for city, dungeon, and forest terrains. You want to make sure and have a variety of obstacles so that chases do not become repetitive.

Example Urban Obstacle Table

1. Debris (Primary: Acrobatics, Secondary: attack and break an object with hardness 5 and 10 hp) – stack of barrels, a gate, street vendor's blanket, etc.
2. Barrier (Primary: Acrobatics or Climb, Secondary: Knowledge(local)) – fruit cart, unexpected turn
3. Wall (Primary: Climb) – traditional "end of alley" wall, fence, balcony, scaffold
4. Gap (Primary: Acrobatics, Secondary: Perception to see it and go around) – ditch, open manhole, pit
5. Traffic (Primary: Acrobatics, Secondary: Intimidate, Overrun vs CMD) – pedestrians, mule team, orc pirates
6. Squeeze (Primary: Escape Artist) – crawlspace, hole in wall
7. Water (Primary: Swim) – river, wharf, pool, fountain
8. Terrain (Primary: Acrobatics) – gravel, mud bank, slick cobblestones
9. Trouble (Primary: Stealth, Secondary: mass murder) – town guards, wandering monsters, warboys
10. Building (Primary: Strength check (to break or burst), Secondary: Disable Device) – an external or internal door, window, large piece of furniture, or other construct in the way

Helpful Chase Flowchart

The chase participants act in initiative order, either their initiative from an existing combat or a newly rolled initiative order.

1. Start the Chase. The person who starts it becomes the leader.
2. Determine Position. Place other chase participants in their starting position on the chase track.
3. Leader Acts.
   a. Determine Direction – The leader sets this unless there's maneuvering afoot. Make the opposed maneuvering check and modify participants' Movement modifier accordingly.
   b. Determine Obstacle – Roll to determine if there is an obstacle this round, with a doubled chance if the leader declares that they are looking for one.
   c. Pre-Movement Actions – Resolve any actions the leader wants to take before moving as normal and reduce their Movement modifier by the appropriate amount.
   d. Move - If they are attempting to push themselves or a mount to greater speed, resolve that attempt now and apply the result to their Movement modifier. Then the leader rolls their Move Check to set that round's Chase DC.
   e. Evade – The leader rolls to avoid the obstacle presented this round, if any. If they fail, all pursuers move up a position on the chase track.
   f. Post-Movement Actions – If the leader decides to attack or perform another action after moving, resolve it. It's OK to decide it at this point, just dock the Chase DC by the relevant amount that their Movement modifier is reduced by.

g. Fatigue – Resolve and track fatigue and rounds spent running.
4. Pursuer Acts. Next pursuer in the initiative order gets to act. Their actions look a lot like the leader's, except that they aren't deciding whether to try to provoke an obstacle or not, and have more choices in terms of how to avoid obstacles based on their chase track position.
5. Repeat step 4 for all pursuers and go to step 3 when the leader (or a new leader)'s turn to act arrives.

Inspiration

Exciting chase scenes form the backbone of many enjoyable movies, games, and other fiction. Here's a sampling to gain inspiration for your own chase scenes.

- The Assassin's Creed video game series and the Prince of Persia game series feature extensive chasing and free-running as part of their action.
- Mad Max: Fury Road - the entire movie is one long and two short chase scenes.
- District B13 is a 2004 French action movie which was one of the first to introduce parkour chases and fights as a major element.
- Many James Bond movies, most notably Casino Royale's construction site chase, The World Is Not Enough and The Spy Who Loved Me's ski chases, and many more.
- The Bourne Identity and its sequels are similarly full of complex chases in urban environments.
- Raiders of the Lost Ark – the opening boulder-chase scene is a great example of a chase with constraints and a non-living pursuer!
- North by Northwest – the chase across Mount Rushmore is a great example of a low-speed chase with a lot of Climb obstacles.
- The Great Train Robbery – one of the most exhaustive horse chase scenes filmed.
- Stagecoach – like that bit with stagecoaches mixed in.
- Ben Hur's chariot race/melee is a great example of a chase being staged as a semi-sport, semi-combat.
- Westworld – fleeing across a theme park pursued by a killer cyborg, who could ask for more.
- Various martial arts movies – Project A has a great Jackie Chan chase scene through the alleys of Hong Kong.
- Many of the Terminator movies are effectively one long chase with intermittent breaks in the chasing.