



RUNNING A MAZE OR LABYRINTH WITH CARDS

Using a deck of cards, we will simulate the act of trying to navigate a winding and disorienting labyrinth all while being pursued by the vile monster tasked with its protection. Created by [/u/ Amazing Wizard](#)

GOALS

Make running a Maze less tedious while capturing the feeling of being lost and running from a stalking threat. Players should be engaged and have the ability to use their skills or stats to affect the outcome. The system should be scalable to create different levels of difficulty and to keep the experience challenging. Plus it should be quick enough that running through the labyrinth again doesn't feel like a chore, and could even feel easier if their characters have leveled up.

THE DECK

5 RIGHT PATH CARDS

These cards represent characters making the correct choice when entering an intersection, pushing them closer to the exit. When revealed, the Party scores one (1) point towards exiting the labyrinth, they need 5 to find the exit.

5 DEAD END CARDS

These cards represent characters taking the incorrect path, requiring them to double back and adding to the frustration of navigating the labyrinth. When revealed, Dead Ends stay in play until they fill the river, where they are then removed, and an additional monster card is added to the discard pile.

2 MONSTER CARDS

These cards represent the monster in the labyrinth drawing closer to the party. When revealed, the DM scores one (1) point toward a monster encounter. They need two (2) to start an encounter. At this point, the party enters combat using their pre-rolled initiative, and the DM rolls for the monster's initiative and slots it in. When the party successfully defeats the monsters, the monster card is removed from the deck, lowering the chance to encounter it again.

3 TRAP CARDS

These cards represent... Traps! Players use their skills to avoid the hazards laid throughout the labyrinth. When revealed, the DM may roll on a Trap table to see what kind of trap the party has encountered (or a hand-picked trap, DMs choice).

A total of 15 Cards. You have a 33% chance of drawing a Right Path, and Dead End, a 20% chance of drawing a Trap, and a 13% chance of drawing a Monster.

You should prepare more cards than what appears in the deck as there are some actions that can add more cards to the deck, changing the odds of those card types.

THE RIVER

The River can only have 3 cards in it. The river represents the potential directions the party can go in. The active player picks one card to be revealed from the river each turn and that card is then resolved. Dead Ends stick in the river, limiting the space for new

choices. If you have one Dead End in the river, you only draw 2 cards to fill it, and 1 card if there are two dead ends. Once the card is resolved, the river is discarded (except for dead ends) without revealing the other choices.

ROUND STRUCTURE

Each Party member takes a turn choosing a path to take in the maze. This happens in the initiative order established at the start of the maze. There are 4 phases in each turn:

DRAWING PHASE

The DM Draws cards and places them face down in the river until the river has three cards.

ACTION PHASE

The Party Member can choose an action from the available actions and use them. Once an action is used, it can not be used again until all other actions are used. These actions are global, meaning if one party member uses the STR action, no one else can until all other actions are taken.

CHOOSING PHASE

The Party Member decides which card they want to flip over.

The card is flipped over and its effect is resolved.

THE CLEANUP PHASE

Once a card is flipped up, and its effect has resolved, discard all cards except dead ends to the discard pile and start a new turn.

If you run out of cards in the deck, shuffle the discard pile to create a new deck.

END OF ROUND

A round ends when each party member has taken a turn.

If there are no actions left to use, the actions unlock and are available again for the next round.

ACTIONS

There are 5 actions that can be taken by players. Once one is taken, it can not be taken again until all actions have been used and the round ends.

If you have 4 players, roll 1D6 twice and remove each result from the list of available actions. If you have 5 players, roll 1D4 once and remove the result from the list of actions. This ensures that you have fewer actions than party members, forcing players to make choices about who will use which action and creating miss-aligned results where the last action is one most party members might be poor at. This creates a critical thinking task but also creates some drama, maybe your unwise fighter manages to make a truly remarkable Careful Consideration about the party's next move, and that leads them out of the maze!

When performing an action, the active player makes a Skill Check using the stat listed next to the action's name. The DC the player is trying to beat is the Labernyths DC noted in the DMs Labyrinth table. On a success, the player follows the instructions for the Action they used, and that action is marked as Unavailable until all other actions are used.

Action Name and Stat	Action Effect
Forge A Path (<i>STR</i>)	Add 2 additional Right Path cards to the discard pile from outside the game.
Scout Ahead (<i>DEX</i>)	Reveal the top card of the deck in addition to a card in the river, choose one.
It's Elementary! (<i>INT</i>)	Draw 3 cards from the deck, choose 1, and put it on the bottom of the deck. Shuffle the remaining cards and place them on top of the deck.
Careful Consideration (<i>WIS</i>)	Reveal 2 cards in the river this turn and choose one.
Boost Moral (<i>CHAR</i>)	Remove a Dead End card in the river from the game. Draw a new card from the deck and place it face down in the river.

RUNNING THE LABYRINTH

Players roll for initiative when they enter the Labyrinth, this will be used to establish turn order and to lock in combat order if a monster is encountered. You should establish a DC for your Labyrinth to set how difficult it is to traverse. When a player performs an Action or tries to disarm a Trap they will need to roll greater than or equal to the Labyrinths DC to determine success.

Using the Initiative established at the start of the encounter, each player then takes turns performing actions, and revealing cards from the deck. Each turn the River is cleared (except for Dead End cards) by the DM and new cards are drawn until the river has 3 cards in it.

Every time a player successfully performs an action, mark off on the action table which action they used, denoting that the action can't be used until all other actions have been performed.

In order to escape the Labyrinth, the party must meet the victory condition noted in the Labyrinth Table. Typically this condition is to reveal 5 Right Path cards.

If the party reveals 2 Monster Cards, combat is initiated and the party faces the beast that has been tracking them through the Labyrinth. Once they defeat that monster, you remove a monster card in the deck from the game.

If a trap card is revealed, roll on the Labyrinth Trap Table to see which kind of trap they find. The active player can then attempt to disarm the trap. They will roll a D20 and any applicable skill to try and beat the Traps DC. If failed, the effect of the trap happens.

EXAMPLE LABYRINTH TABLE

ENCHANTED FOREST MAZE						
DC	Deck Size	Monster Cards	Trap Cards	Right Path Cards	Dead End Cards	Victory Condition
13	15 Cards	2	3	5	5	5 Right Path Cards or Kill the Monster
Monster Table			Trap Table (1D6)			
Roll	Effect		Roll	Effect		
1-6	Minotaur (Link)		1-3	Slowing Trap DC: Maze DC - 1 Fail: Add a Dead End card to the river after it clears.		
			4-5	Poison Dart Trap DC: Maze DC + 1 Fail: Each player makes a (Maze DC + 2) Dex save. Failed players take 1D12 poison damage.		
			6	Sleep Dust Trap DC: Maze DC Fail: Add a Monster card to the top of the deck. Disarming player falls asleep skipping their next two turns. As an action, the party can wake the player, giving them their turn back.		

IN CONCLUSION

Running a maze in D&D can be cumbersome. This deck-based system allows you to get the feel of running a maze, without the tedium of actually doing it. The rules seem complex on paper but in actual gameplay, it's rather simple. Players have two choices to make on their turns (Play an Action, Pick a Card), but the actions can challenge their critical thinking, and a keen player can manipulate the deck to push their party to the exit.

Theming the Maze is rather simple. You create a list of traps with simple effects like the ones above, and you create a table of monsters the party could encounter. This could be a hulking custom monster meant to challenge the whole party, or it could be a pack of wild animals offering a variety of combat encounters at a dice roll.

The DC and Actions (as well as the CR of the monsters) allow the players to "show off their skills" while also firmly planting the threat level of the Labyrinth. You have a number of nobs you can twist and turn to change the flavor of your maze. Is your party trying to escape Neverwinter while avoiding the armed guard? Create pools of monsters and add them to your Monster Table! Theme the traps as carts and pedestrians in their way as they dash through the streets. Add more monster cards to the deck, and reduce the victory condition to make it feel like the City Guard is finding them at every turn. Or you can take a maze you built for lower levels, and crank up the DC, making the threat level of the Maze higher overall.

In our first play session using this system I was able to convey the rules of the card game in less than 5 minutes, and the encounter in total didn't last more than 15 min. The party encountered traps and failed to disarm them, nearly encountered the Monster, but managed to play their actions right to ensure they made a quick escape to the center of the Labyrinth! Much discussion was had about what actions to use, and optimal situations were found to execute those actions to maximum effect. Because of how simple it was to set up and run, I know that I would have no issues making the party run through it again if needed.