

# Handling Illusions in SWADE

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Text in blue is definitions and rules that I've added to the RAW for illusions.

Illusions should be a fun way for the players to be creative, but some GM's dislike them because of the headaches they cause, in large part because the GM doesn't know how to figure out when to allow his NPC's to disbelieve them in a way that doesn't overpower the game and short-circuit his plans, or underpower the illusions and disappoint the players. With a standardized set of guidelines, maybe they can become a fun and balanced part of the game.

In the following, to make an illusion of a living creature **“act correctly”**, I'm adding a rule that to do that, **the caster must “concentrate”** (a no-roll, non-Free Action that generates a MAP) to send it commands. Just like constructs need to be told what to do, but then carry out that command semi-autonomously, **illusions need to be told what to do, but then carry out that command semi-autonomously**. Since verbal commands would defeat the purpose of an illusion, the commands must be sent mentally thru concentration.

The rules for disbelieving an illusion are given in SWADE as : “Those who contact an *illusion* or doubt it's real make a Smarts roll as a free action”. **I would like to offer a more exact definition of what “contacting” an illusion entails, and to define when to doubt what you're seeing is real.**

It's pretty clear that merely looking at or hearing an illusion does not automatically give you a Smarts roll. So I'm **introducing the concept of “careful study”**. **Careful study requires a Free Notice roll, and on a success the character immediately gets a Smarts roll**. And PC's can't declare that they're always studying everything carefully, so neither can NPC's. Players must be able to justify **why** they're choosing to study carefully.

Regarding “contacting” an illusion, I prefer the term **“interacting”**. As a rule of thumb, **you interact with an illusion upon attacking it (if you would hit it), touching it, targeting it with a spell, poke it with a stick, or doing something else that one might do with a real creature or object**. But interaction works both ways – **if the illusion of a monster or NPC attempts to attack you (and would hit you), touch you, or apparently target you with a spell, it is interacting with you**. But now what if a caster creates an illusion of a large monster in order to Intimidate you without attacking you? **So, if the illusion tries to influence your behavior in any way, it is also “interacting” with you.**

Now on to the rules :

**You get a Smarts roll after making a Notice roll because you can justify “careful study” such as :**

- \*There's reasonable suspicion (possibly with Knowledge rolls) = *if by only **observing**, you can **state** anything that seems to be wrong, any **specific reason** why what you see couldn't be real* (see examples below)
- \*You **witness** an interaction not acting correctly (a comrade's sword passes thru an ordinary animal)
- \*Someone other than the caster tells you it's an illusion (and they've already disbelieved)

**You automatically get a Smarts roll when you and the illusion “interact” which happens when :**

- \*You **interact** with it (as described above), **and** it acts as it should
- \*It attempts to attack you (and would hit), touch you, or appears to cast a spell at or on you, etc.
- \*It tries to influence your behavior in any way (Intimidate, Fear, Persuade, tempt, etc.) – see below for details
- \*Opposed skill rolls *might* constitute interaction, depending on the actions taken (see below)

Note that the **first time any** of the above seven conditions occur, the observer gets another Smarts roll.

### **You get a Smarts+4 roll when presented with “proof” which includes :**

- \*You **interact** with it, **and** it doesn't act correctly (your sword passes thru an ordinary animal)
- \*Being told by the caster it's an illusion
- \*Being a spellcaster and making an Arcane skill roll to identify the illusion spell as it is cast

### **From these, we can derive 8 guidelines to cover disbelieving illusions :**

- You are casually observing, and it's acting correctly : no Smarts roll
- You are casually observing, and it's not acting correctly (reasonable suspicion, bad interaction) : reason to study carefully (Free Notice roll), and if you succeed you immediately get a Smarts roll
- You are interacting, and it's acting correctly : Smarts roll
- You are interacting, and it's not acting correctly : Smarts+4 roll
- Being told by the caster (Smarts+4 roll) or someone else (reason to study carefully) that it's an illusion
- Making an Arcane skill roll as you watch the illusion spell being cast : Smarts+4 roll
- Merely talking to an illusion should not trigger a Smarts roll. But in order for the illusion to talk back sensibly to someone, the caster must hear what's being said to the illusion, and be concentrating to make it reply accordingly. If the caster does not concentrate, then the illusion is “interacting incorrectly” : Smarts+4 roll. If the illusion is not required to respond (“hey you, move on”), no Smarts roll.
- Influencing your behavior (without contact), such as Intimidation, Fear, seduction [Persuasion], etc. : the caster must make the appropriate Skill roll to make the illusion act in the correct manner; the target gets an opposed Spirit roll as usual. Success means he gets a Smarts roll to know it's an illusion, failure on the Spirit roll means he reacts appropriately to the attempted influencing and no Smarts roll.

### **Some examples of “reasonable suspicion” :**

- \*Person : "I've been in this room many times before, now it's smaller than it should be" (because an illusory wall is hiding the PC's) or "...and there was never a bookshelf there before"
- \*Person : "I saw him go into this room, followed him immediately, and there's no doors or windows, and he's gone" (maybe he's behind an illusory wall, or maybe the illusory wall is hiding a door)
- \*Animal : "that thing doesn't smell like it should" (by RAW, an illusion of a creature has no smell)
- \*Arrows are coming out of that boulder or thru that wall (this is not “proof”, because magic can do many strange things – but see below)
- \*You approach an illusion of a flame Barrier, but don't feel any heat coming from it (this is “observation”, it wouldn't be “interaction” unless you entered the area of the flames)

It's possible that the observer might need a Knowledge roll of some sort to justify the reason, such as a creature isn't giving off some kind of always-on, at-a-distance effect (heat, fear, stench, etc.) that you know it should be (Knowledge/whatever's-appropriate-for-the-creature)

### **Some examples of “proof” :**

- \*Your arrow or sword goes thru the image of a creature you're attacking (note that if the image was that of an incorporeal creature, you'd get a Smarts roll for interacting, but you'd expect a normal weapon to pass thru it, so you would not get a +4)
- \*A gust of wind (Elemental Manipulation) cast at an illusory fog does not blow it away
- \*An illusory creature takes a swing at you and would hit, but its sword/paw/whatever passes right thru you

What if a spellcaster or knowledgeable person **sees you casting a spell** (but does not identify it), and **knows for a fact that there's no such spell that can produce the effect that appears?** For example, you create a hallway full of pointed wooden spikes coming up from the floor, and with a successful Arcana or Occult roll the observer knows there's no such spell. Again, in this case the observer gets a Smarts+4 roll. But note that **seeing the spell being cast is important** – the same person rounding a corner and seeing a hallway full of such illusory spikes would not know how they got there, and so would not (yet) have any reason to even make a roll.

These Knowledge rolls can come in handy to separate extensive player knowledge from their PC knowledge for determining "reasonable suspicion". Likewise, they can serve as a guide to the DM for determining when his NPC's can justify careful study.

To keep things fair, **DM's must be careful to not allow their NPC's Smarts rolls unless there's justifiable reasonable suspicion.** Most creatures would pass right by illusions *that are already in place* without giving them a second thought, unless they were on alert for intruders, chasing the PC's, or searching the room anyway, etc. Even most animals or low-Smarts humanoids (like Orcs) might not consider having a floor of pointed sticks or a wall of stone suddenly appear from nowhere while they're chasing the PC's as being unusual – after all, that's what magic does (to an untrained mind). Such creatures would just deal with what's in front of them, and would often not even get a Smarts roll (barring the specific circumstances of the situation that might provide reasonable suspicion). Because of Summon Ally and Teleport, it is not unusual for a humanoid or creature to suddenly pop into existence in front of someone, so no automatic Smarts roll.

On the other hand, **careful study might also just happen naturally.** A PC might decide to watch an illusory guard's movements to determine the best way of sneaking past him – well, now he's carefully studying the image. Or, a PC might want to check the insignia on the guard's uniform to determine his rank or whatever – again, the PC must carefully study the image to do that. So DM's must be careful to notice when careful study "unintentionally" happens.

It might be tempting to add that using Skills against illusions always constitutes interaction, but here's a counter-example : sneaking past that illusory guard from above does not really interact with it, since it doesn't know what's going on around it – the PC would roll, and the DM would roll, and the PC would just automatically win! The PC didn't really do anything that would affect the illusion. On the other hand, if the player rolled snake-eyes on his Stealth making a loud noise, and the guard **didn't** react to him, that might provide reasonable suspicion...