Open Dungeons RPG™

DN Guide

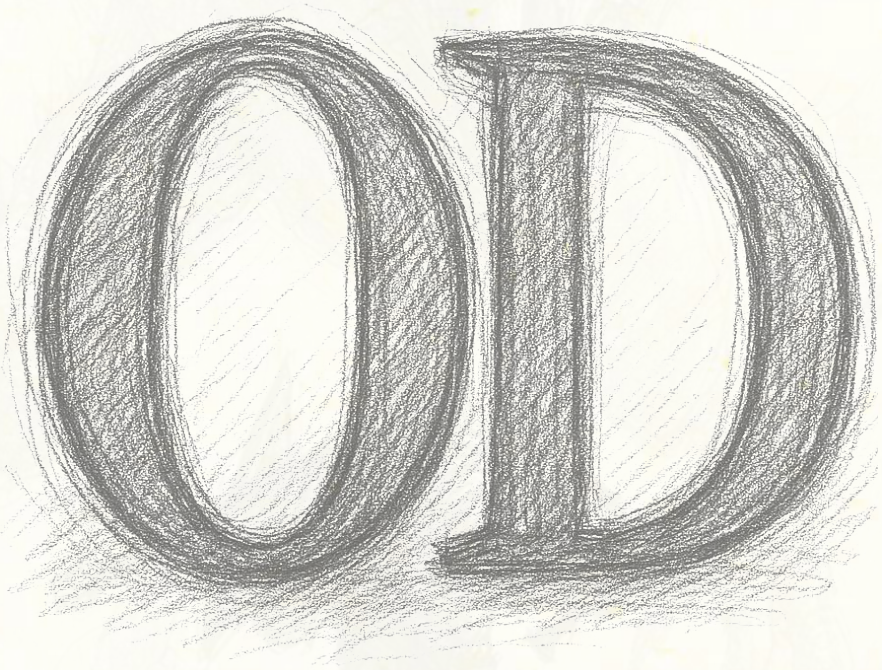


Open Dungeons RPG™

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DN Guide



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Running a game is simpler than you think. You have an imagination and this guide. Your job isn't to memorize systems - it's to make calls that keep the adventure moving.

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What Makes a DN Different

The Dungeon Narrator isn't just running a game - you're the final authority on how the world responds to your players. Traditional games follow the books closely, looking up the hundreds of rules, maybe bending a rule here or there. You? You're writing the missing details in real time for their table.

Here's the shift: A traditional adjudicates rules. A DN interprets reality.

When a player says "I want to shove him off the cliff with my shield," the other games flips through combat maneuver charts. The DN thinks: How big are they? How braced are they? What's the player's momentum? What feels right for this moment?

You're not bound by these books - you're guided by them. Open Dungeons books are your foundation, not your ceiling. But with that freedom comes responsibility. Every ruling you make sets a precedent. Every "yes" or "no" teaches your players what kind of world they're playing in.

The Three Pillars of DN Authority

First, rulings over rules. When the books don't cover it, you decide. Fast. Confidently. You can always refine it later. Picture this: Your player wants to use their rope and grappling hook to swing across a chasm while the goblin archers fire at them. There's no "cinematic rope swing" table in the books. So you make the call. Maybe it's an Dexterity Chance Roll, TN 15 (TN: Target Number is a value of difficulty that a player rolls 1d20 + ability bonus to roll equal to or higher for success). Done. Game continues. The moment doesn't break while you hunt for the "correct" answer because there isn't one. There's only your answer, and that's enough.

Second, consistency over creativity. A brilliant ruling that contradicts your previous call breaks immersion harder than a boring but reliable one. Think of it like physics in your world. Gravity doesn't change based on what would be cooler in the moment. Neither should your core mechanics. Your players are building mental models of what's possible. Don't pull the rug out from under them.

Third, consequence over spectacle. Players remember how their choices mattered, not how many dice they rolled. When the fighter uses their shield bash to knock the cultist into the summoning circle, disrupting the ritual, that's memorable. Not because you let them roll a big damage die, but because their tactical thinking changed the entire encounter. You're not here to dazzle them with effects. You're here to make their decisions count.



The DN's Real Job

You know what players actually want? They want to feel like they're in a living world that reacts to them logically. When they pour oil on the floor and light it, they want the enemies to slip or burn. When they befriend the blacksmith, they want better prices or a tip about the bandit camp. When they ignore the warning signs and charge into the dragon's lair at level three, they want to face real danger.

Traditional games sometimes protect players from their own choices. DNs let the world respond authentically. The dragon doesn't scale to their level. The dragon is what it is. If they're smart, they'll run, negotiate, or come back stronger. That's not punishment, that's respect. You're treating them like people in a real world, not characters in a balanced video game encounter.

Here's an example that shows the difference. A player wants to intimidate a guard by grabbing his spear and snapping it in half. A traditional game checks the rules for breaking objects, calls for a Strength check against the spear's hardness rating, and adjudicates mechanically. A DN thinks about the story. Is this player character strong enough that this would be impressive? Is this guard the type to be cowed by displays of strength, or will it make him call for backup? What does this spear mean to him - is it standard issue or a family heirloom? The ruling becomes: "Sure, you can snap it. Strength Chance Roll. If you succeed, he's rattled but also now weaponless and desperate. How do you want to handle this?"

See the difference?

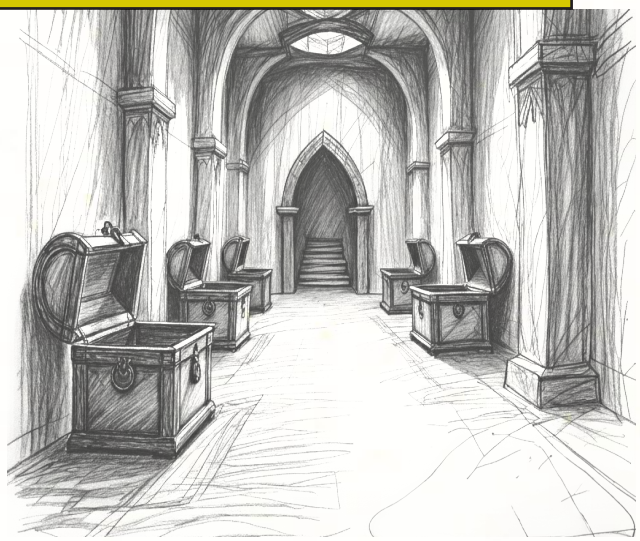
The DN ruling creates forward momentum and consequence. The mechanical ruling just tells you if the spear breaks.

When to Channel Your Inner DN

Any time a player says "Can I..." and the answer isn't clearly in the books, you're in DN territory. Any time the rules would produce a result that feels wrong for the fiction, you're in DN territory. Any time you need to decide how the world reacts to something unexpected, you're in DN territory.

That's most of the game, by the way. The books cover the common cases. You cover everything else, which turns out to be where the magic happens.

Inflation: The Silent Campaign Killer



Let's talk about gold and magic items. New DNs love being generous. Who doesn't want to see their players' faces light up when they find a flaming sword or a chest of 10,000 gold pieces?

Here's the problem: You just broke your economy and your tension curve.

Why Gold Inflation Hurts

Money matters when it's scarce. When players have 50,000 gold and nothing meaningful to spend it on, you've removed an entire pillar of decision-making. Should we buy the healing potion or save for better armor? Can we afford

to bribe the guard? These questions disappear when everyone's swimming in coins.

Your party is third level. They defeat some bandits and you give them 2,000 gold. Now they walk into town, buy the best armor available, stock up on healing potions, bribe every guard they meet, and still have money left over. When they reach the dragon's hoard three levels later, the 5,000 gold feels like pocket change. You've taught them that money is meaningless.

Compare that to this. Same bandit fight, but they find 150 gold total, plus a silver locket worth another 50 if they can find the right buyer. Now in town, they have real decisions. The fighter can afford the chain mail upgrade OR a week at the inn OR a healing potion. Not all three. Suddenly they're planning, prioritizing, even arguing about group resources.

How to Fix Gold Inflation

Make gold harder to transport. That bandit hoard of 5,000 copper pieces? That's 50 pounds of copper. Are they really carrying that out? Create meaningful gold sinks like titles that grant social access, bribes that open new quest lines, or rare services like magical identification. Remember that most NPCs have never seen 100 gold in one place, so let them react with awe, suspicion, or greed when the party flashes wealth.

Here's the real trick. If your players are broke, buying information from a street urchin costs them their lunch rations and maybe a promise to help the kid's sick sister. If they're rich, they toss a gold coin and move on. Which interaction was more interesting? Scarcity creates story.

Why Magic Item Inflation Hurts

Every +1 sword you hand out devalues the next one. You end up in an arms race where you throw bigger threats at overpowered players, which makes the world feel video-gamey and absurd.

Level one, you give the fighter a +1 longsword because it feels cool. Level three, the paladin needs something equivalent. Level five, the original sword feels weak, so you upgrade it. Soon, everyone expects magical everything. Your goblins now need to hit harder to threaten them, so you're throwing hobgoblin champions at a party that should be fighting regular hobgoblins. The power curve spirals out of control.

How to Fix Magic Inflation

Treat magic items like they're actually magical. Rare, named, and storied. When the party finds Whisperwind, the ancestral blade of the Thornheart family, that's an event. It has history. Maybe even personality. The fighter who wields it carries a legacy, and maybe someday the Thornhearts will come looking for their stolen heirloom. That's a weapon that matters.

Consider consumables over permanent buffs. A ring of Fireball is exciting and useful, but it's gone after three uses. Players love finding these because they feel powerful without permanently inflating the power curve.

Let players quest for specific items. If the wizard wants a staff that enhances ice magic, let them hear rumors of the Frost Sages in the northern peaks. Now you've got a side quest, some lore, a dungeon to explore, and at the end, a meaningful reward the player specifically wanted. That staff means something because they worked for it.

The Alternative Economy

What if instead of gold and magic, you rewarded reputation? The party that saved the merchant's caravan gets recognized in every shop in the district. "Oh, you're the ones who fought off those bandits! Let me show you the good stuff I keep in the back." That discount is worth more than gold because it's personal.

Information can be treasure. Maps to hidden

locations, secrets about NPC motivations, blackmail material, prophecies. When the party finds the old wizard's journal and learns that the kindly mayor is actually a shapeshifter, that's not gold and that's not a magic sword, but it just changed everything.

Resources tell stories. A loyal NPC who owes them a favor. A safe house where they can lie low. A trained animal. A boat that opens up coastal adventures. These rewards change what's possible, not just the numbers on the character sheet.

Story progress itself is reward. The real treasure was stopping the ritual before the demon manifested. The real treasure was saving the village. The real treasure was earning the king's trust so he'll listen when you warn him about the coming invasion.

Here's how this looks in practice. The party defeats a necromancer terrorizing a region. A generous DN gives them his treasure hoard: 10,000 gold and three magic items. A savvy DN gives them the village's gratitude, which means free lodging whenever they return, a contact who sends word when trouble brews, and a reputation that spreads. Three sessions later in a different city, someone recognizes them: "You're the ones who killed the Dreadmoor Necromancer! Please, we have a problem you might understand..." The reward from that first quest just generated a new quest hook organically.

That's an economy that doesn't inflate. It expands.

Consistency: The Immersion Contract

You make a ruling in session three. A player falls 10 feet during a fight, and you quickly decide it deals 1d6 damage. Everyone nods, the rogue takes four damage, the game continues. No problem.

Session seven. Different player, different context, but someone falls 10 feet. You say 2d6 damage because you forgot your earlier ruling, or because this fall feels more dramatic, or because you've been thinking the first ruling was too generous.

Congratulations. You just told your players the world doesn't follow consistently. It follows your mood. Immersion, cracked.

Why Consistency More Than Correctness

Your players aren't memorizing the eight rulebooks. They're learning your world through pattern recognition. When you rule that shield bashes can shove enemies backward, they start planning tactics around it. The fighter positions themselves between the archer and the cliff. The wizard readies an action to cast Grease right before the shield bash. They're thinking three moves ahead because they trust the mechanic.

Then you change your mind. Maybe you decide shield bashes are too strong, or you forgot you allowed it before, or you read something in the books that made you second-guess yourself. So the fighter tries their signature move and you say "actually, shields can't do that." The player feels cheated, and rightfully so. You taught them the rules, then changed them midgame.

The ruling doesn't have to be perfect. It has to be yours, and it has to be reliable. Think of it like gravity. Your world's gravity might be slightly different from Earth's - maybe people can jump a bit higher, or falling is slightly more forgiving. That's fine! As long as it's always that way. Once players internalize that "in this world, we can jump six feet high," they'll plan around it. They'll leap across gaps, jump onto tables during tavern brawls, and suggest acrobatic solutions. Your consistent ruling just enriched their tactical options.

But if gravity changes between sessions, players stop trusting the ground beneath their feet. Literally.

How to Stay Consistent

The first and most critical step is to write it down immediately. Keep a “House Rulings” section in your DN notes, either a dedicated page in your notebook or a running document on your device. The moment you make a call on something not in the books, jot it down. Don’t wait until after the session when details get fuzzy. Right there at the table: “Shield bash contested Strength roll, winner chooses to push or be pushed, loser moves five feet.” Date it if you’re thorough. Include context if it matters. This isn’t busywork - this is building your world’s physics engine.

Review between sessions. Before each game, skim your rulings log. Refresh your memory. If you realize a ruling was unbalanced or exploitable, don’t spring a change mid-session. Announce it at session start: “Hey, remember shield bashes? I’ve been thinking they’re a bit strong. Going forward, contested check but the defender gets +2 if they’re braced. Sound fair?” Players respect iteration when you’re transparent and give them time to adjust.

Let players track it too. Encourage note-taking. When someone says “But last time you said we could do this,” they’re not challenging your authority - they’re helping maintain the world’s integrity. Thank them. Check your notes. If they’re right, own it: “You’re absolutely right, good memory. We’re doing it that way.” If they’re misremembering, show them your notes: “I’ve got it written here as working differently, but let’s double-check after the session if there’s confusion.”

When you must change a ruling, explain why. Players understand that you’re learning and balancing on the fly. What they can’t stand is arbitrary reversals. “I ruled last time that you could jump 15 feet because I forgot to account for armor weight. Going forward, heavy armor reduces jump distance by half. Fair warning for everyone.” That’s honest. That’s respectful. That keeps immersion intact because you’re explaining the physics correction, not just changing your mind.

Tier your rulings in your notes. Mark some as “temporary call, revisit later” versus “permanent house rule.” When you make a quick call under pressure, add a question mark or “temp” tag. Between sessions, think it through properly. Then either commit to it or revise it before it comes up again. This keeps you from accidentally cementing bad rulings while also letting you make fast decisions during play.

DN Guide Game Notes

Repelled

Affected creatures must spend their turn moving as far away as possible from the source. At the end of each of their turns, they can attempt a Mind save to break free from this effect.

Attrition and Fighting

Characters may seem powerful early on with fresh spells and abilities, but after multiple encounters - say the 4th fight in a dungeon - resources deplete. The fighter’s shine dulls, spell slots run dry, and hit points tick down. This is where tactical positioning and clever thinking matter more than raw power. Yet this might be where the cleric and thief finally get their moment.

Managing Attrition

To minimize attrition, space out encounters generously and provide healing resources - potions, healing scrolls, spells, bandages, and mending supplies. Allow characters time to tend wounds between fights so they enter fresh. Include safe zones where the party can recover without pressure.

To maximize attrition, chain encounters relentlessly with minimal downtime. Make healing resources scarce or costly. Force the party to choose between using their healing magic offensively or defensively. Stack enemies that target different party types so everyone bleeds resources. Remember - a single night's rest only returns 25% HP, so attrition compounds fast. This forces desperate decisions and exposes vulnerabilities.

The key is matching your attrition level to what your party needs - new groups benefit from accessible healing while experienced players relish the resource puzzle of a brutal gauntlet.

Resting - Hit Point Recovery

Hit Point recovery occurs organically with a full night's rest of 6 or more hours.

The amount recovered depends on the conditions of rest:

Unsafe Rest (cavern, dungeon, camp, etc.): Recover 25% of your maximum HP after a full night.

Safe Rest (inn, stronghold, etc.): Recover 25% of your maximum HP + (Constitution Bonus x character level) after a full night.

Downtime (one full week without adventuring): Recover all lost HP.

What is a Creature?

Any living being that exists within the world - from the smallest bat to the mightiest dragon, from common horses to humans. Creatures possess stats, can take actions, and interact with the game world. This includes NPCs, monsters, animals, and player characters.

What is a Humanoid?

A creature is Humanoid if it has a roughly upright or semi-upright, bilaterally symmetric body plan; possesses manipulative appendages capable of wielding tools and weapons; and demonstrates social intelligence sufficient for language and stable societies.

Examples: Humans, elves, orcs, goblins, centaurs, insectoid peoples, lizardfolk, goat-folk, etc.

Borderline Cases

Mixed forms like centaurs qualify if the upper body can fight, craft, signal, or otherwise operate tools. Alien anatomies qualify if they can reliably grip or control tools through claws, tendrils, palps, or telekinetic focus. Constructs or undead qualify only if they possess their own language and culture rather than acting as mindless extensions of another will. Shapeshifters count only while in a qualifying form. Animals that use simple tools are not Humanoid unless they have true language and organized societies.

Rules Effects

Humanoids can use standard gear that fits their frame. Unusual bodies may require custom sizing at the DN's discretion. Communication: Humanoids can speak or sign languages. Pure telepathy qualifies if it supports complex language. Targeting: Abilities affecting "humanoids" apply to any creature currently meeting this definition.

DN Guidance

Decide on culture and tool-use first, then anatomy. If the answers are yes to language, yes to reliable tool use, and yes to organized society, treat the creature as Humanoid.

Divine Effects

Certain epic or divine effects exist beyond a spell's influence. A spell typically covers mundane, normal rolls - attack, chances, save rolls - where normal magic applies. However, when a target faces truly cosmic or reality-bending forces, the DN can rule that even powerful spells fall short.

For example, image a magic that lets you reroll a missed sword swing, a failed poison save, or a botched climb check. But it won't override a god's word, the collapse of an entire plane, or a fate-sealed effect woven into the campaign itself.

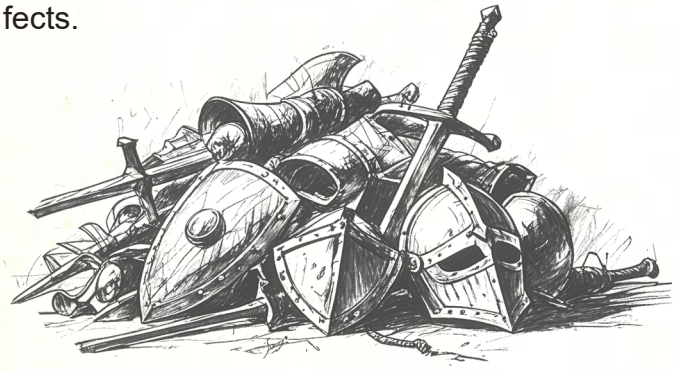
DN Guidance: Use the Divine Effects preserve the weight of truly momentous events. Let spells shine against ordinary challenges, but reserve divine and epic effects as narrative anchors that can't be casually overridden by mid-level magic.

Damage Reduction

Unless a rule states otherwise, DR reduces all Physical damage types: Bludgeoning, Piercing, Slashing, Fire, Cold, Lightning, Thunder, Acid, Force, Radiant, and Necrotic.

Magic weapons and spells do not bypass DR unless a rule specifically states otherwise.

DR does not reduce Psychic, Poison, Disease, Curse or Suffocation damage, or similar effects.



Magic Items

Unlike ordinary equipment, magic items retain their enchantments indefinitely unless specifically dispelled, destroyed, or used up. Magic, however, does not make an item indestructible. A potion is still a liquid in a simple glass vial that can crack or shatter. A scroll is still parchment that can tear or burn to ash. Magical armor can be eaten away by acid just as easily as mundane steel. Enchanted blades can chip or snap if struck with enough force. If a magic item's physical form is broken, burned, corroded, or otherwise ruined, its enchantment is lost along with it. The only exceptions are true artifacts or other legendary relics, whose durability is tied directly to their immense power.

Coins

Common coins are nearly identical in size and weight, regardless of metal. Unless you, the DN, decide otherwise for a particular realm or culture, assume 100 coins weigh 1 pound.

A warrior dragging home thousands of coins from a dragon's hoard quickly learns that treasure can weigh more than their armor. For this reason, seasoned adventurers and merchants often convert bulk coin into gems, stamped trade bars, etc. These hold immense value with a fraction of the weight - far more practical for those who travel light or deal in fortunes.

Torches

A standard torch burns for about one hour, shedding bright light out to 20 feet and dim light another 20 feet beyond. In open air or torchlit halls, it's enough to keep the dark at bay - barely.

Wind, moisture, and magic can shorten a torch's life, while careful hands and a shielded flame might make it last a little longer. DNs don't need to track every minute; let the torch serve as a narrative clock - a flickering countdown as shadows creep closer.

When that flame finally gutters out, the silence of the dark feels earned.

Lanterns

A well-made lantern burns longer and brighter than a torch, its flame protected by glass and metal. A hooded lantern casts bright light out to 30 feet and dim light for another 30, burning roughly 6 hours on one flask of oil. An open bullseye lantern focuses that light into a 60-foot cone, ideal for exploring or signaling across dark spaces.

Lanterns are steadier in wind and rain but heavier to carry and slower to ready. Oil can spill, glass can crack, and the telltale glow can betray a party's position long before their footsteps are heard. A wise DN uses lantern light as both comfort and liability - a beacon in the dark that can guide or give away.

Potions

Potions come in small corked vials, often etched or color-coded for easy identification. Each fits neatly into a belt pouch or bandolier slot. Treat them as minor items for encumbrance purposes - light, but fragile. Breaking a potion in a fall or fire can be a fun narrative twist (use Probability).

Drinking a potion takes one round. Its magic takes hold immediately and lasts for the duration listed in the potion; a potion with no stated duration resolves at once. A potion is spent the moment it is drunk, whether or not its full effect was needed.

Scrolls

Scrolls are resilient and practical. They can be rolled or folded without harm, stored in tubes or pouches, and weigh little unless bundled in large numbers. DNs may describe ancient scrolls as newer partchment, as magic infusion sustains the life of the material its written on.

Probability Roll

When the outcome of an event isn't tied to skill or reaction - such as whether a potion vial breaks, a rope snaps, or a lantern tips over - use a **Probability Roll**. You, the DN, decides the likelihood. Common examples: 50% or TN 10, and DN or player rolls once to resolve it.

Probability Rolls keep play fast, fair, and grounded in chance rather than player stats.

Usage Tip:
You can roll percentage dice for simplicity or use a TN roll for percentage d20 if you want consistency with other mechanics i.e. 50% chance, roll a 10 or greater on a twenty-sided die.

Tip: You, the DN, determines when a probability roll is necessary.

Common Probability Rolls

Torch blown out by wind : 25%

Potion vial breaks on hard fall : 33%

Lantern glass cracks when dropped : 50%

Rope snaps under strain : 20%

Scroll damaged by water : 40%

Bowstring frays or snaps : 15%

Why Spellbreaker negate any spell level?

Magic, no matter how powerful, is inherently fragile. A foreign force that disrupts its pattern could cause it to collapse. Interfering magic can cause the spell to unravel, regardless of its strength. When that structure is disrupted, the spell fails - power does not protect it. Spellbreaker works on spells because disruption, not power, determines magical failure.

Holy vs Unholy

In any world - not just Open Dungeons - the ideas of holy and unholy are shaped by who's holding the torch.

A cleric devoted to an Unholy Power rarely sees themselves as evil. To them, their rites are sacred, their visions pure, their miracles proof of divine favor. What one temple calls blasphemy, another calls devotion. These words - holy and unholy - are not truth, but perspective.

As Dungeon Narrator, frame morality as culture and belief, not absolute law. A paladin of the Sun may burn heretics in the name of purity, while a death-priest might comfort the dying with genuine compassion. Both see them-selves as righteous.

When faiths collide, let the story explore conviction, doubt, and consequence. Ask each player what their character believes "holy" means - then let the world, and its gods, test those beliefs. Or, when words fail and faith hardens into pride, let them settle it the old way - with might and magic, to see whose truth survives.

Let conviction turn to clash. Beliefs bend, blades rise, and spells fly. Sometimes the only way to prove divine favor is to fight for it.||

Weary Condition
When you become Weary through exhaustion, forced marching, magical effects, etc. you suffer a -2 penalty to all Save Rolls. Rest and recovery remove this condition: a full nights rest of 6 or more hours.

What is Exhaustion?
If the DN wants to use Exhaustion: Exhaustion occurs when a character is exposed to extreme conditions such as intense heat, prolonged exertion, etc. Each failed CON Tough Save adds 1 level of Exhaustion. Each level reduces current HP by 1. Exhaustion levels stack. All Exhaustion levels are removed after 6+ hours of rest in a sheltered area.

High Level Encounters

What an Encounter Really Is

An encounter isn't just rolling initiative. It's any challenge that drains party resources. Combat against giants or dragons demands immediate resources. Hazards like traps, lava flows, and cursed zones force creative problem-solving or resource spending. Social trials - bargaining with demons, navigating a vampire court - test negotiation and sometimes expose weaknesses. Exploration challenges like forced marches, freezing weather, or food shortages grind down morale and supplies.

Each encounter nudges the resource dial down. Hit points tick lower, spell slots empty, potions get consumed, morale frays. Your role as DN is deciding how hard to push that dial.

Encounters at High Level

By 7th through 9th level, a single monster falls fast to focused fire. That's expected and fine. Real challenge emerges from layering threats together.

Multiple foes change the math entirely. A frost giant commanding two lieutenants and a wolf pack forces players to manage targets, not obliterate one thing. Layered threats hit differently too - giants hurling boulders while shamans cast hold person means players choose which threat to address first, and something always gets through.

Environmental strain adds pressure that numbers alone can't. Icy cliffs create positioning hazards. Avalanche risk forces saves. Exhaustion from harsh conditions compounds damage. Time pressure sharpens everything - when that ritual completes at dawn, there's no

long rest to reset, so every resource spent now matters.

Your job at high levels isn't designing one unbeatable monster. It's combining threats so players feel genuinely stretched across multiple fronts.

The Real Killer

Attrition is the slow bleed of resources across a day of encounters.

An ogre warband costs the wizard a spell use. A troll ambush forces the cleric to spend serious healing magic. A trap triggers and the thief takes 10 HP. None of these solo encounters should be lethal. But stacked together before a final rest, they create desperate circumstances.

By the time the party reaches the frost giant, they're half-spent. Even a fight many would rate "medium risk" becomes deadly when it's the fifth or sixth challenge of the day. This is where high-level play truly shines - it stops being about single battles and starts being about whether the party survives the entire gauntlet.

Think in Sequences, Not Singles

Don't ask yourself: "Can this fight kill them?" Ask instead: "If they fight this, then that, then this other thing before resting, will they feel the pressure?"

Build your day as a chain. A warband skirmish burns basic resources. A dangerous climb forces fatigue saves and movement choices. A magic-draining zone strips spell flexibility. Then the boss fight hits when they're already compromised. Each link in the chain targets different resources so nothing feels random - it feels inevitable.

Mix Encounter Types

Start with combat to establish stakes. Add a hazard that forces saves or clever thinking. Include exploration strain like weather or exhaustion. Drop social pressure where negotiation matters. Then return to combat when they're worn thin.

Variety keeps narrators engaged and prevents the "roll initiative, roll initiative, roll initiative" monotony. It also trains players to conserve different resources for different threats.

Give Signs of Strain

Let players see the wear. Describe what exhaustion looks like. "Your shield arm trembles. Blood freezes in your gauntlets. The giant laughs, unhurt." Show scarring from earlier fights, dwindling numbers, hesitation where confidence existed before.

This builds mounting tension without fudging rolls. Players understand they're losing without feeling cheated.



About Magic and Spells

Magic Items Use by Class

Magic items do not require attunement.

All classes can use rings, potions, magical armor (with respect to their class limitations), jewelery, etc.

Who Can Use Scrolls?

Only wizards and clerics can read scrolls.

Those without spellcasting ability (i.e fighter, thieves) cannot activate a scroll's power.

Who Can Use Wands?

Wands hold stored spells that respond to will and training.

Only Wizards can use any wand.

Who Can Use Staves?

A staff acts as an extension of a caster's will.

Only wizards and clerics may unlock any magicial or spell casting staves.

Who Can Use Rods?

Rods are relics of great potency.

Only wizards and clerics can command them.

Magic Stacking and Nature of Magic

Powerful magic spells and magic items cannot be stacked, not because it is volatile, but because it is the very nature of magic to dissipate under such circumstances. Like water heated to its boiling point, lesser enchantments simply evaporate when a greater one is present. Two smaller magics can build together, but when power grows past the threshold, the weaker effects fade away, leaving only the strongest enchantment behind.

Destination Stacking

No more than 2 magical effects (spells or items) can apply to the same destination. A destination is any single stat or value, such as AC, attack bonus, damage bonus, a specific Save Roll, a skill, an ability score, etc. All versions of the same thing count as the same destination. This limit also applies to area effects.

Spell and Magic Limitations

Within a destination, you can benefit from up to 2 modifiers, but only if each one is +2 or lower.

If any single modifier to that destination is +3 or higher, only that highest modifier applies and nothing else stacks with it for that destination.

This rule also applies to penalties, not just bonuses. Helpful and harmful modifiers compete within the same destination. If any single modifier is +3 or higher, or -3 or lower, only the strongest modifier applies, and all smaller modifiers to that destination are ignored.

Examples of Stat Stacking

A spell +2 AC and an amulet +1 AC stack for a total of +3 AC. Two effects of +2 or lower to the same destination can stack.

A spell +3 AC and a ring +2 AC do not stack. You get only +3 AC total. The +3 effect suppresses the smaller one.

You cannot use a potion +2 AC, a spell +2 AC, magic armor +2 AC, and a magic sword +1 AC all to AC. That is 4 effects trying to reach the same destination. Only 2 may apply. If more than 2 effects would apply, the creature chooses which 2 apply. Max allowed is 2 magical effects per stat if none are +3 or higher.

A potion of +4 Constitution and a spell +3 Constitution do not give +7 Constitution. You take only +4 Constitution, since a modifier of +3 or higher blocks other stacking on that destination.

Magical Resistance vs. Immunity

These terms define how creatures interact with harmful magic. If you're Resistant to a damage type, you take half damage from that source. If you're Immune, you take no damage at all. Know the difference, it could save your life.

Magical Backlash

Magical Backlash occurs when a spell, magic item, enchanted zone, or specific rule explicitly says it can cause backlash.

When a target rolls a natural 20 on a Save Roll using 1d20, the save succeeds no matter the Target Number, and the magic fails completely against that target. Magical Backlash applies, the escape is so complete that the spell may twist, rebound, spill over, or accidentally affect the caster instead. The DN decides the exact result at that moment based on the spell and situation.

When you suffer Magical Backlash, you take a -1 penalty to your Constitution score (Backlash on CON doesn't stack). The duration depends on your class: Wizards recover after completing their morning studies, while Cler-ics must finish their morning meditation to clear the effect (see Character Builder).

Touch or Target Range

Includes Self: Any spell with a range of "Touch" or "Target" can be cast on yourself. You're always within your own reach.

Trigger Spells

Some spells have a "Trigger" designation, meaning you can cast them as an instant reaction, interjecting them into the action as it unfolds.

Spell Interruption

If your spellcasting is interrupted, you lose that spell for the day. The magical energy dissipates, and you cannot cast that particular spell again until you've studied or meditated.

Saving Rolls

When you cast a spell that allows a save, each target rolls once against that specific casting, no matter how many objects or effects the spell creates. One roll, one result.

Example: you cast Searing Lances - if you attack 1 target with all three lances of searing light, the target makes only 1 Save Roll

Magical Healing

Magical healing works differently from mundane medicine. Healing spells channel magical/divine/arcane energy directly into the target rather than accelerating biological processes. The magic bypasses natural recovery entirely. Wounds close through its power, not cell regeneration.

It may not function on creatures lacking life force, such as undead, constructs, or certain magical beings. It's fundamentally different from natural healing, which does rely on the body's own systems.

Combat Timing

In combat, 1 Round is about 5 seconds. 1 minute equals to about 12 Rounds. This conversion matters for spell durations, ritual casting, and any timed effects that bridge

narrative and tactical play.

Turn and Round

A Round is when all in combat has had a Turn.

A Turn is what you do with your 5 seconds i.e. hide, attack, cast a spell, etc.

Day Cycles

A day runs from 6:00 AM to 5:59 AM the following morning. This defines when daily abilities reset, when spell preparation can occur, and when “per day” effects refresh.

Weary Condition

When you become Weary through exhaustion, forced marching, magical effects, etc. you suffer a -2 penalty to all Save Rolls. Rest and recovery remove this condition: a full nights rest of 6 or more hours.

Night Vision (True Night Sight): You see normally in natural darkness as if it were daylight. This works outdoors at night and in unlit areas underground. However, magical darkness still blocks your sight completely. Normal obstacles like fog, smoke, and solid barriers affect you as usual. If range for Night Vision is unknown, and is needed, DN uses 60 feet as a default.

Twilight Sight: Outdoors at night, you see in twilight, dusk, dawn, or under a clear full moon as though it were daytime. This ability doesn’t function indoors, underground, or in total darkness. It requires some ambient lighting from twilight, dusk, dawn or full moon to work.

Dark Sense: In complete darkness, you have a 40% chance to sense that something is near within a 30-foot radius. You can attempt this once per hour, or whenever the DN calls for a check. Success gives you vague awareness, presence and rough direction only, not precise location, number, or identity. This sense doesn’t count as sight and doesn’t automatically grant combat advantages unless the DN rules otherwise. It won’t pierce walls or barriers.

Thermal Vision: You perceive heat contrasts, warm bodies, hot metal, cooling surfaces, even in total darkness. You can identify living creatures and recent tracks by temperature differences, but fine details, colors, text, and subtle features remain indistinct. Thick stone, metal, glass, heavy insulation, or uniform temperatures can block or confuse thermal vision. Magical darkness doesn’t stop heat detection, but solid walls and barriers do. If range for Thermal Vision is unknown, and is needed, DN uses 60 feet as a default.

Vision Adjudication Notes: Magical darkness defeats even Night Vision and Twilight Sight, though Thermal Vision may still detect heat signatures and Dark Sense can ping presence within its rules. When multiple vision modes apply, use whichever gives the clearest result. Don’t stack bonuses. Visual illusions fool Night Vision and Twilight Sight. Thermal Vision may see through heatless images. Dark Sense ignores purely visual tricks.

Lower Realm Creatures

Throughout this guide, references to “undead, demonic, infernal, fiends, and other creatures from the lower realms” all describe beings originating from or connected to dark planes of existence. These creatures can share similar vulnerabilities and resistances.

See DN Guide for further information about realms.

Magic and Spell Resistance

Magic Resistant and Spell Resistant are the same thing. These terms are interchangeable and refer to the same defensive property.

Wizard Spell Learning

Wizards can learn new magic by recording

and studying scrolls, spellbooks, glyphs, and other magical writings. This allows wizards to expand their repertoire beyond the spells they gain through level advancement. This spell knowledge that is gained occurs in between adventures. Maybe up to several adventures, depending on complicated the spell is. DN discretion.

Spell Scaling

When a spell scales with your level, the new value for the increased effect overwrites the original stat bonus. The scaling replaces the base value entirely rather than adding to it.

Damage Type Descriptions

If you read fire damage, thunder damage, force damage, or similar descriptive terms in a spell, it's still physical damage and DR (Damage Reduction) applies. These words are used as descriptive flair and guidance for the DN to help narrate the effect. The damage type describes how the spell manifests, but mechanically it functions as physical damage unless stated otherwise.

Duration Per Level

When a spell lists duration as "plus X minutes per caster level," this refers to your current level, so adding from earlier levle advacement applies.

Example: A 3rd level spell, Arcane Refuge you obtain at 3rd level states: "Duration: 15 minutes, plus 5 minutes per caster level." So at 3rd level it automatically protects you for 30 minutes (15 minutes + 3rd level).

Mindless Undead and Mind Saves

Even though mindless undead like zombies or skeletons have no Intelligence or conscious thought, the Save Roll system in OD represents magical resistance or spiritual recoil, not mental reasoning. So a WIS Mind save isn't about thinking, it's about whether the magic "takes hold" of their animating essence.

Mindless undead do not think, but they may still roll WIS Mind saves when affected by magic targeting their animating essence or spiritual presence. This represents the strength of necromantic energy, not mental reasoning.

Adventures Made Easy

Step One: Ask Two Questions

Every adventure begins with just two sentences:

What's the problem?

How is it resolved?

Write one sentence for each. That's your skeleton.

Step Two: Add Flesh

With your problem and resolution in hand, start adding the muscles and skin: encounters, NPCs, traps, maps, and locations. Some detail should connect back to either the problem or the resolution, but always making the journey challengeing

Example:

Problem: A farmer wears a cursed amulet and becomes possessed, raising the undead. Resolution: The adventurers must return the amulet to its resting place.

From that seed, you already have a quest: confront the farmer, deal with undead, recover the amulet, travel to a desert ruin, and return it to break the curse.

Step Three: Scale to the Party

Add details suited to the group's level - weak skeletons for beginners, or giant desert scorpions and hordes for veterans.

That's It.

Two questions, two sentences, and you have the foundation of an adventure.

From there, go deeper - add maps, encounters, NPCs, monsters, traps

Bring It to Life

Ready for a tale of demonic possession, undead hordes, and a quest that will lead into the heart of an unforgiving desert? Meet your antagonist: a gnome farmer who discovers an amulet of untold power in the river's depths. Tempted by its allure, he becomes a vessel for a malevolent demon, and dark energies ripple through the land, summoning the dead.

Your adventurers must confront and subdue the farmer, face the risen undead, and claim the amulet. Their journey then leads across rolling hills into the desert, where an ancient ruin swallowed by shifting sands holds the amulet's true resting place. Along the way they'll battle both natural and supernatural foes until they uncover whether the curse can be broken and peace restored.

Finally, always remember: scale your challenges to the party's level. Make sure each encounter, trap, or mystery feels like a step toward resolving the core problem.



Two Sentences Adventures Example

The Vanished Village

Problem: An entire village disappears overnight.

Resolution: The adventurers must track the missing villagers to a hidden cavern and bring them home.

The Poisoned Well

Problem: The town's only well turns toxic overnight, and those who drink from it grow violently mad.

Resolution: The adventurers must descend into the well's depths and destroy the corrupted water elemental lurking below.

The Drowned Cathedral

Problem: A sunken cathedral rises from the lake after a hundred years, and the dead priests inside seek vengeance on the descendants who abandoned them.

Resolution: The adventurers must enter the flooded halls, confront the wrathful spirits, and consecrate the altar before the cathedral sinks again at dawn.

The Drowned Armada

Problem: A fleet of ghostly warships rises from the ocean depths each night, attacking coastal villages and dragging ships beneath the waves to join their cursed crew.

Resolution: The adventurers must board the flagship during its nightly rise, battle through the drowned sailors and their spectral captain, dive to the sunken treasure hoard that binds them to the mortal world, and destroy the cursed admiral's crown before the entire fleet becomes powerful enough to march on land.

The Shattered Moon

Problem: A piece of the moon breaks off and plummets toward the world, threatening catastrophic impact.

Resolution: The adventurers must ascend to the Astral Plane, find the ancient titan responsible, and force it to restore the celestial body.

The Lich's Bargain

Problem: A lich ended a devastating war in exchange for the king's firstborn child, and now the king wants to break the pact.

Resolution: The adventurers must storm the lich's hidden sanctum and destroy the artifact binding its immortal soul before the child is claimed.

The God Who Forgot

Problem: A god loses their memory and wanders the mortal realm, causing reality to warp and fray wherever they go.

Resolution: The adventurers must restore the god's divine essence by collecting fragments of their power scattered across multiple planes.



Deities and Clerics

While this guide doesn't prescribe a specific pantheon, the multirealms is vast and every deity that has ever been worshipped - whether in legend, myth, or tale - exists somewhere within it. When a cleric calls upon divine power, they're channeling the will of something greater.

Your world can draw from any source of divine inspiration. Ancient mythologies, forgotten gods from obscure traditions, or deities from other game worlds you've enjoyed - they're all fair game. If a player wants their cleric to serve Thor, a invented harvest goddess, or even a deity from another game system they love, the answer can be "yes."

What does their deity value? Honor, knowledge, nature, trickery, death, life?
How does worship manifest? Daily prayers, acts of service, spreading the faith?
What would displease their god? Breaking oaths, destroying nature, showing mercy to enemies? What boons or trials might their deity send? Divine visions, tests of faith, miraculous interventions?

The beauty of keeping deities open is that your table becomes a melting pot of divine concepts. One cleric might serve a stern god of justice while another follows a mischievous trickster. Let your players bring their favorite divine concepts to life, and weave those threads into your world's fabric.

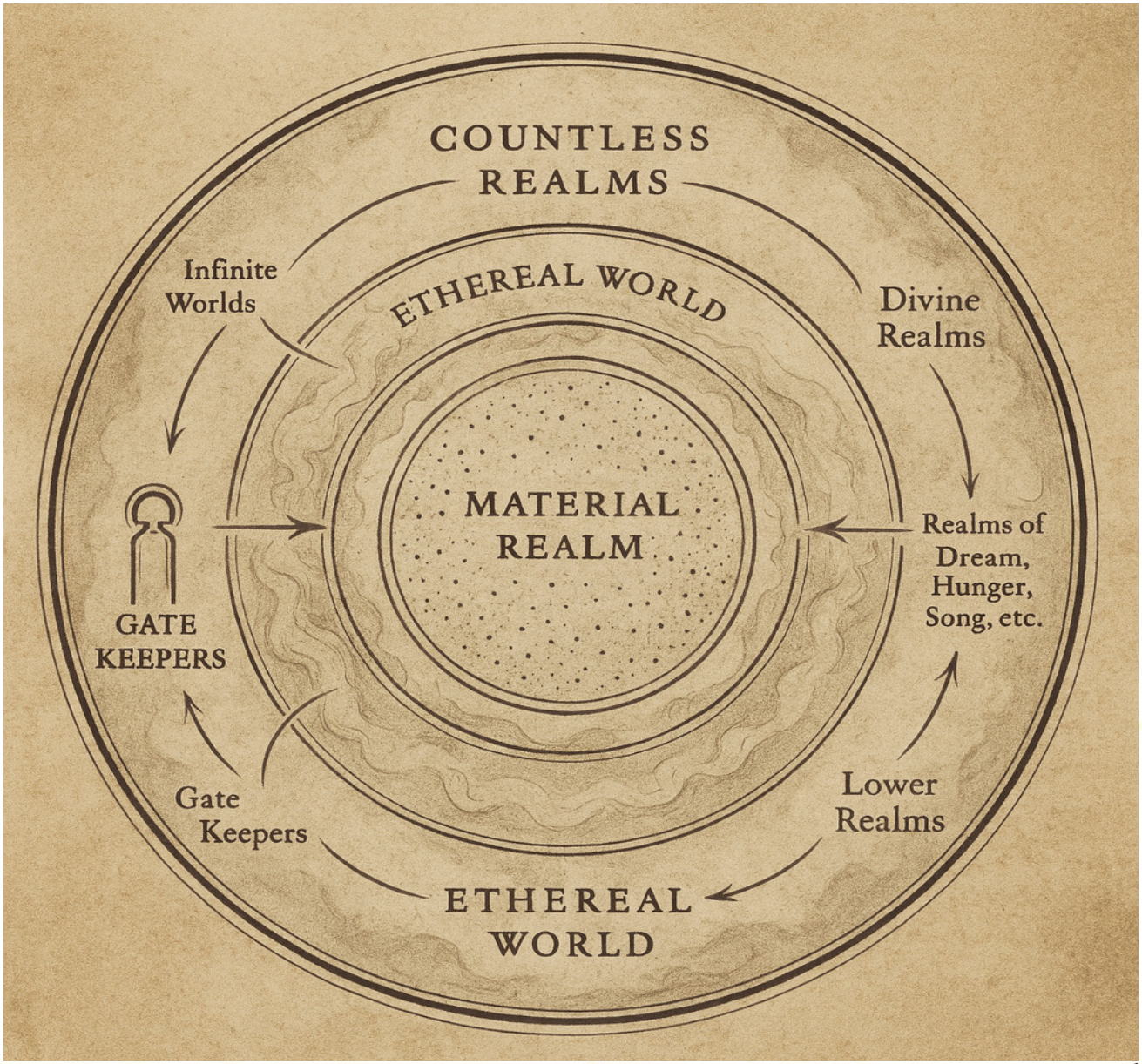
Remember: Gods are powerful, mysterious, and rarely straightforward. Even good-aligned deities might ask difficult things of their followers. The divine operates on scales mortals struggle to comprehend.

Cosmos and Realms

All that exists - seen or unseen - belongs to the Realms, the great structure of creation that binds every power, spirit, and soul. The Realms are not separate universes but layers of one existence, each resonating at different frequencies of reality itself.

At the center lies the Material Realm, where mortals live and shape destiny. Surrounding it flows the Ethereal World, a misty membrane between all things. Beyond stretch the Countless Realms - home to gods, demons, forgotten powers, and stranger things still.

Though mortals speak of “upper” and “lower,” these are convenient lies. There is no heaven above or hell below. There is only resonance - states of being defined by intent, truth, and the nature of existence itself.



The Material Realm

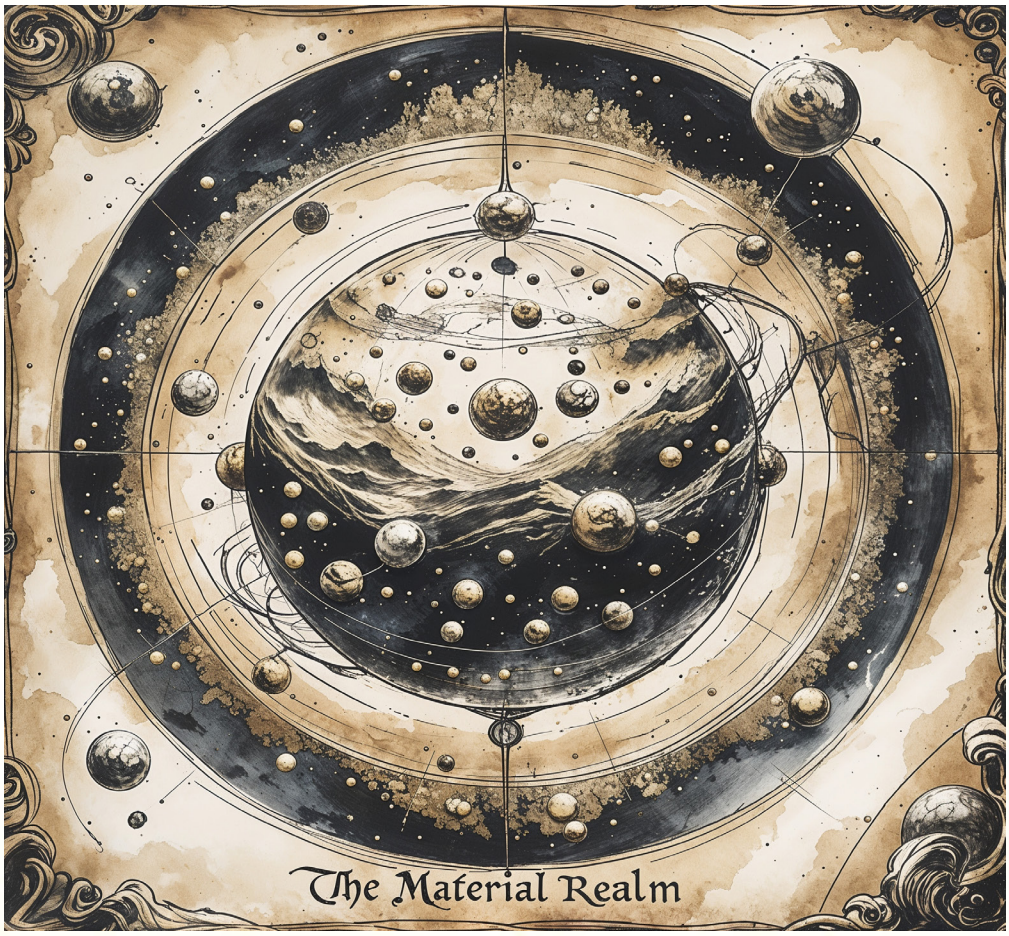
The Material Realm is not one world but infinite worlds.

Every campaign setting exists here. Every planet, every kingdom, every dungeon and distant shore. From mist-shrouded domains of horror to sun-scorched wastelands where demirealms lie, from your homebrew kingdom to any world borrowed from myth or legend - all of them exist within this central sphere of reality.

These worlds are separated by vast cosmic distances, magical barriers, or simply the membrane of the Ethereal itself. Some are connected by portals, ley lines, or ancient vortexes. Others remain isolated, known only to their own inhabitants. A party traveling through a portal from their home world to a realm of eternal twilight is moving laterally within the Material Realm - hopping between worlds, but never leaving the sphere itself.

The Material Realm is where physics holds sway, where cause and effect govern most outcomes, where mortality binds every soul to flesh and time. It is the stage upon which all mortal drama unfolds.

The Material Realm is your playground. Every world you create, every setting you borrow, every plane of existence your players visit during their adventures - if it has solid ground, breathable air, and follows the basic rules of reality, it belongs here. The beauty of this structure is that you're never locked into one cosmology. Your world can exist alongside countless others, and your players can discover connections between them if and when you choose.



Demirealms

Demirealms are self-contained pockets of reality - fragments where the Material and Ethereal overlap. They obey most physical laws but are tinted by dream, magic, or divine influence. A demirealm might be a scorched desert always high noon, a haunted fortress that drifts in mist, or a valley where time slows because a god once died there. These places are real; their boundaries can shift too, and their rules can bend. Some persist for centuries, others dissolve when the will or power sustaining them fades.

For the Dungeon Narrator: demirealms are tools - bridges between the known world and the mysteries beyond. They let you stage planar stories without leaving the Material entirely. A demirealm can feel familiar yet uncanny: a world-within-the-world where the laws of resonance, emotion, or intent briefly take precedence over physics.

The Ethereal World

Surrounding the Material Realm on all sides flows the Ethereal World - a weightless, shifting veil between realities. It is not a realm of its own so much as the medium that separates and links all others, like an ocean surrounding islands of existence.

The Ethereal is where thought, memory, and dream have physical presence. Landscapes form and dissolve according to will, fear, and emotion. A traveler walking through the Ethereal might see ghostly echoes of the Material world, half-formed nightmares drifting past, or crystallized memories from civilizations long dead.

Magic flows through the Ethereal like blood through veins. When a wizard teleports, their body dissolves into mist and crosses this boundary before reforming elsewhere. When a soul dies, it drifts through this space before reaching whatever lies beyond. When a cleric calls upon divine power, the prayer travels through the Ethereal before touching their god's domain.

The Ethereal touches every realm - Material, Divine, Lower, and all the Countless places between. It is the path that allows spirits, magic, and travelers to cross between realities.

And within the Ethereal dwell the Gate Keepers.

Astral Travel

Some call the higher reaches of the Ethereal the Astral. Here, distance and gravity lose meaning, and motion is guided by will alone. Travelers drifting in this space describe it as endless silver mist or a sea of slow stars - a current of pure thought connecting all realms.

To journey "astrally" is to move not through matter but through intent, sailing the upper layers of the Ethereal where the mind becomes the vessel.

The Gate Keepers

Ancient custodians beyond mortal comprehension, the Gate Keepers exist within the Ethereal World, stationed where the boundaries between realms grow thin.

Each Gate Keeper embodies a threshold - not merely a physical gateway, but a metaphysical junction. Life and Death. Sleep and Wakefulness. Form and Spirit. Time and Eternity. Ignorance and Revelation. Dream and Waking. Truth and Illusion.

Their purpose is not to forbid passage, but to test the readiness of those who would cross. They are neither good nor evil - their duty is equilibrium. Some manifest as radiant beings of geometric perfection; others appear as monstrous reflections of fear, doubt, and con-

sequence. Many take no visible form at all, existing only as pressure, as presence, as the sense that you are being weighed and measured by something vast.

Passage through a Gate Keeper requires more than strength. It demands alignment of intent, understanding of the realm you seek to enter, or simply the resonance necessary to survive what lies beyond. A soul bound for the divine halls must carry enough faith, virtue, or favor to pass the threshold. A mortal seeking to enter a realm of pure chaos must prove their will can endure the dissolution of form.

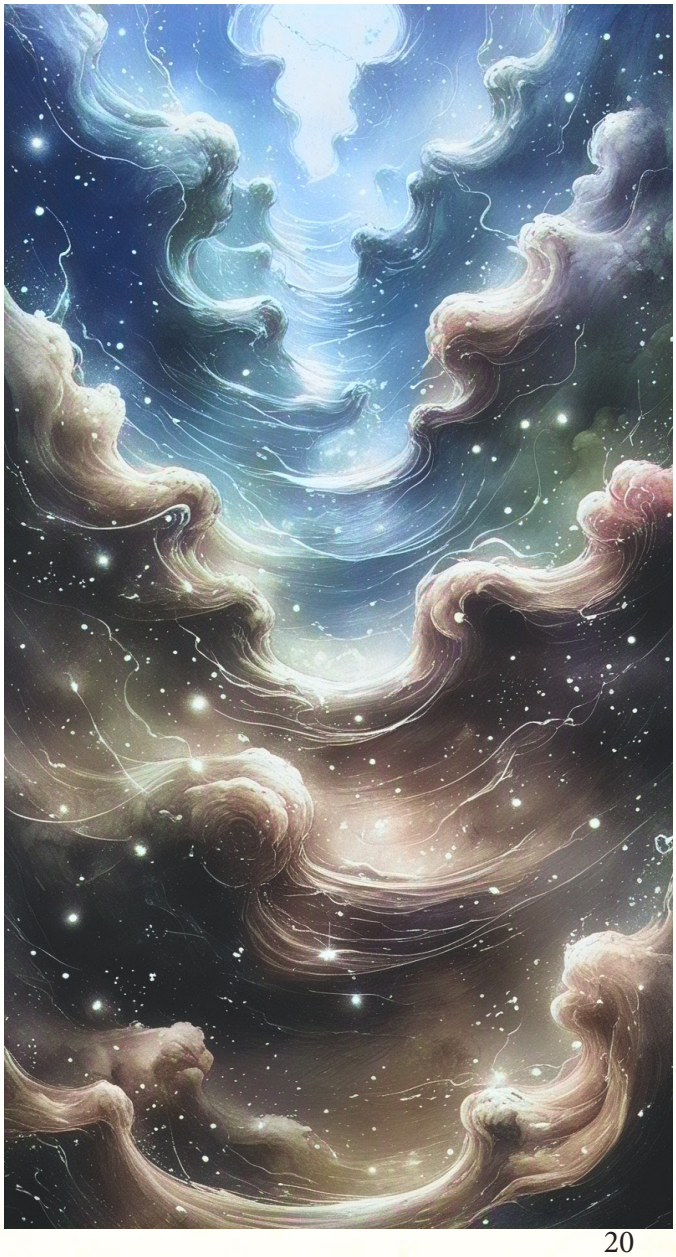
Some Gate Keepers are visible only in dreams. Others appear at sacred places, or in moments of death, resurrection, or teleportation gone astray. Most mortals will never knowingly encounter one - but every spell that crosses planes, every soul that departs the body, every journey into the realms beyond passes through their unseen judgment.

For the Dungeon Narrator: Gate Keepers do not exist to block travel, only to preserve balance. They are the invisible custodians ensuring that when a soul, spell, or traveler crosses between realms, the transition doesn't tear them apart. In most cases - teleportation circles, divine spells, planar portals, or astral projection - the required resonance is already provided by the magic itself. The spell, relic, or deity guiding the passage acts as the "key," allowing the Gate Keeper's judgment to pass silently. The players might sense a fleeting pressure, a whisper of awareness, or a shimmer in the air, but their journey continues unhindered.

Gate Keepers become active only when a crossing is unsanctioned or unsafe - when a mortal attempts to move between realms without proper resonance, faith, or preparation. Even then, the encounter is not a barrier, but a moment of revelation. It may manifest as a vision, a question, or a symbolic trial that defines what kind of traveler the character truly is. The purpose is to make planar travel feel profound, not punitive. The cosmos acknowledges their passage, but does not deny it unless they themselves are not ready.

Gate Keepers should feel rare, significant, and unsettling when encountered. They are not combat encounters (though they can become one if a player foolishly attacks). They are tests, riddles, or moments of cosmic reckoning.

A Gate Keeper might ask a question that has no right answer, only a true one. They might reflect the worst fears of the person trying to pass. Or they might simply observe, allowing passage to those whose souls resonate correctly - and barring those who do not. Use them sparingly, but make them memorable.



Countless Realms

Beyond the Ethereal lie innumerable planes - some vast and eternal, others fleeting as a half-remembered dream.

Mortals call some of these the “Divine Realm” and others the “Lower Realms,” but these are crude labels born from limited understanding. In truth, there is no ladder between heaven and hell. There are only states of resonance, layers of existence defined by their nature, their intent, and their relationship to truth itself.

The realms mortals call “upper” tend to be radiant, ordered, creative - places where belief shapes reality and divine will manifests as law. The realms mortals call “lower” tend to be shadowed, consuming, chaotic - places where hunger devours form and corruption spreads like rot.

But even this binary is a lie of convenience. Between these extremes exist countless other realms that defy easy classification.

All Mythologies Are True: In your game, every deity that has ever been worshipped - whether in mythology, in other game systems, or in your own imagination - exists somewhere in the Countless Realms. Thor and Zeus can both be real. Anubis and Hades can both rule domains of the dead. Your cleric can serve a god from Greek myth while the party’s paladin follows a deity from your homebrew pantheon. They simply dwell in different corners of the infinite divine expanse. This gives you total flexibility - pull from any source, mix and match, or invent your own. The cosmology supports it all.



The Realism Gradient

Here is the secret truth of the Realms: the closer you move toward what mortals call “lower,” the more physical and dense reality becomes. The closer you move toward what they call “upper,” the more reality becomes conceptual, subjective, and shaped by belief.

The Material Realm sits in the middle - balanced between the two extremes. Cause and effect govern most outcomes here. Physics holds sway. A sword cuts because it is sharp, not because you believe it should.

But as you descend into the Lower Realms, reality becomes even more rigid, more bound to suffering and entropy. Stone grows heavier. Darkness becomes tangible. Hunger is not metaphor but law. The deeper you go, the more the world resists change, resists hope, resists anything but slow collapse.

And as you ascend into the Divine Realms and beyond, reality becomes fluid. Intent shapes form. Truth manifests as light. A god's word becomes law not because of force, but because their will resonates so powerfully that the realm itself agrees. Mortals who venture too far into these places find themselves unraveling - their thoughts solidifying into landscapes, their fears and hopes taking shape around them, time losing meaning as past and future blur together.

This is why the Gate Keepers test travelers. Not every soul can survive the shift in resonance. A mortal crossing into a realm of pure divine law might find themselves judged by their every thought. A traveler descending too deep into the Lower Realms might discover their body growing heavier, their hope dimming, their very will to continue fading under the weight of that place's nature.

The Ethereal World is the buffer - the place where this gradient can be felt and navigated. It is why magic flows through it, why souls travel within it, and why the Gate Keepers dwell there, ensuring that only those who can endure the shift are allowed to pass.

When Do Realms Matter?

For most campaigns, the Realms are background cosmology - the structure that explains where divine magic comes from, where souls go when characters die, and why certain spells allow planar travel. Your players don't need to understand the full structure unless they start asking questions or their adventures take them beyond the Material world.

The Realms become important when:

• A character dies and their soul must travel to their deity's domain

• The party attempts planar travel or uses teleportation magic

• A cleric performs a resurrection or speaks with their god

• The story involves demons, celestials, or other extraplanar beings

• The players discover a portal to another world or plane

• You want to introduce cosmic stakes - wars between gods, breaches in reality, or threats that span multiple realms

Movement Between Realms

Lateral Movement (Within the Material Realm): When characters use a portal, ley line, or vortex to travel from one world to another within the Material Realm, they're moving horizontally through the Ethereal. This is relatively safe - the destination is still Material, still bound by physics and mortality. The journey might be disorienting, but it won't unmake them

.

Resonance Shift (Leaving the Material Realm): When characters attempt to leave the Material Realm entirely - entering a god's domain, descending into the Lower Realms, or venturing into one of the Countless Realms - they must pass through the Ethereal and,

potentially, encounter a Gate Keeper. This is dangerous. The resonance of the destination realm might be incompatible with mortal existence. This is why powerful spells exist - they allow the caster to navigate the Ethereal safely and arrive at a compatible destination.

For the Curious DN

For a full exploration of the Realms - their histories, hierarchies, and hidden corridors - consult the *Open Dungeons™ Realms Guide*.

This companion volume expands upon the brief cosmology here, offering deeper lore, optional rulings, insight into how magic flows, monsters, myth, and inspiration for those who wish to walk farther between worlds.

Treasure and Class

Not all treasure shines the same way to every hero. A swordsmith sees perfection in steel; a cleric sees sanctity in relics; a thief sees opportunity in anything not nailed down. The Dungeon Narrator should think of treasure as character-specific myth - rewards that echo a class's nature, not a table of random gold.

Treasure should speak to who the heroes are, not just how strong they've become. Each class interprets value differently: fighters crave tools of conquest, thieves admire the rare and forbidden, wizards hunger for forgotten insight, and clerics seek proof of their faith.

Class Tuned Rewards

Fighter (Ranger, Knight, Paladin, Barbarian):
Favored Treasures: Fine weapons, ancestral arms, armor that bears history.

Hooks by Subclass:
Ranger: Trophies of the hunt, weapons carved from the beasts they've slain.
Knight: Heraldic relics, tokens of honor, blades bound by oath.
Paladin: Holy arms, relic armor blessed by divine resonance.
Barbarian: Totems of battle, beast hides, weapons forged in storms or blood..

Thief (Rogue, Bard, Assassin):
Favored Treasures: Jewels, unique trinkets, items of charm or deception.

Hooks by Subclass:
Rogue: Lockpicks of legend, daggers with whispered names, shadow-slick coins.
Bard: Instruments of myth, stories etched in gold or song.
Assassin: Blades of silence, vials of perfect poison, disguises from forgotten guilds.

Cleric (Druid, Witch, Warlock, Monk)
Favored Treasures: Relics, blessings, natural wonders.

Hooks by Subclass:
Druid: Seeds of eternal bloom, living stones, relics born of the wild.
Witch: Charms, bones, moonlit artifacts that remember secrets.
Warlock: Pact tokens, cursed relics, objects branded with their patron's sigil.
Monk: Symbols of enlightenment, sacred beads, relics found through trial and silence.

Wizard (Sorcerer, Alchemist, Enchanter)
Favored Treasures: Tomes, crystals, arcane focuses.

Hooks by Subclass:
Sorcerer: Relics infused with bloodlines, elemental fragments.
Alchemist: Bottled spirits, eternal metals, philosopher's residues.
Enchanter: Living charms, bound memories, mirrors that dream.

Treasure by Context

After a major class triumph, tailor the reward to the hero's nature.

A Fighter might uncover a weapon steeped in legend; a Thief could unearth a relic from forbidden hands; a Wizard might awaken a crystal that hums with their name; a Cleric could receive a blessing carried by faith or fate.

Keep gold secondary. Wealth supports adventure - it doesn't define it.

Rotate the spotlight: not always, but try to ensure each player gains something that reflects their calling and deepens their myth.

Avoid symmetry. Not all heroes find treasure at the same time - the uneven rhythm of reward makes the world feel alive and real.

Worldbuilding for DNs

You don't need to build the world all at once. The world already exists - your players are simply walking through the part they can see.

Start small: a village, a temple, a ruin. Give each place one detail that breathes - a scent, a sound, a secret. Let the rest unfold naturally when the players turn toward it. The world should feel larger than what's described, but never heavier than what the table can carry.

When you invent something on the spot, don't chase perfection - chase consistency. Once you name a place, person, or god, anchor it in tone and consequence. If the players meet a fisher who worships the Tide Mother, that god now exists. Let her name echo in prayers, murals, or distant shrines. Small ripples make deep worlds.

Worldbuilding is not a lore dump - it's a rhythm. Reveal, withhold, reveal. What the players don't know yet is the most powerful tool you have.

Your goal isn't to design a universe - it's to maintain illusion of continuity. When the players ask about the far north, you don't need a map - you need a reason they might want to go there.

For Futher Understanding

To truly grasp what it means to be a Dungeon Narrator, nothing teaches faster than play itself. Consider running the free adventure from Open Dungeons™ - *Echoes Beneath the Stone*.

This short introductory quest leads a new party through the essentials of exploration, tension, and consequence. It's written to highlight pacing, reward, and the balance between mystery and clarity - the very principles in this guide.

Run it once by the book. Then run it again, your way - learning how to make the same world feel alive twice.

Level 10 - Apex of Mortals

Level 10 is the highest level attainable in Open Dungeons. At this point, a character has reached the limits of mortal power. There are no more levels to chase. Advancement ends here, your character retires...unless your DN decides the character story does not end here.

Level 10 represents the end of mortal growth. It is the moment where a character becomes the strongest they can ever be in the Material Realm. But in truth, Ascension marks something far more significant. It is the point where mortal resonance presses against the limits of reality itself.

A character who reaches this height is no longer shaped only by the world. The world begins to shape itself around them. Their dreams may drift into the Ethereal World. Their instincts sharpen in ways they cannot explain. Strangers pause as if sensing something familiar within them. None of these signs are loud or dramatic, but they signal a growing pressure that a mortal life cannot hold forever.

For the DN, Ascension is not just a level up. It is the hinge between the mortal story and the mythic one. You decide how that moment reveals itself. It might erupt at once during a decisive victory, carried on a ripple of light or a sudden stillness that only the Ascended can fully perceive. Or it may



unfold gradually, with no clear moment of change, only the quiet understanding that the character has stepped beyond what the Material Realm can comfortably contain. Some characters may resist it, trying to anchor themselves to the life they knew, but even resistance cannot stop what Ascension eventually requires.

What an Ascended mortal becomes depends... . Many rise toward the Ethereal, their spirit half unbound from flesh. They remain present in the world, yet their steps carry weight in unseen places. They may encounter Gate Keepers not as distant watchers but as peers, or feel drawn to thresholds where Realms brush against one another. Over time, these figures often fade from the Material Realm, leaving behind only stories, relics, or rare moments where their presence is felt but not seen.

Others remain within the world and become something larger than a hero. A cleric might serve as the living voice of a deity within a single city, not a god themselves but the closest a mortal may come. A warrior might become a figure of fear and respect, a ruler who bends armies not with magic but with the sheer force of their presence. A rogue may disappear entirely from common sight, weaving influence across nations from shadows that only the wise know to fear. These Ascended do not leave the world; instead, the world begins to orbit them.

Ascension gives you several ways to conclude a character, group or campaign. A group may finish soon after reaching Level 10, their final deeds shaped by the gravity that now surrounds them. Others may take on one last great tale - a journey that feels mythic not because the numbers have grown, but because the characters themselves have become rare figures in the world. Or you may allow them a quiet ending, stepping into the unseen spaces between Realms where their stories continue in ways that no one else can follow.

Ascension is not a gateway to new power tiers or supernatural invincibility. The world remains dangerous. Dragons, old magic, and the anger of deities can still end an Ascended life. There are no new levels past ten, no new rules to complicate the system. Ascension changes the story, not the mechanics.

Ascended characters should not return as adventurers. Their time as heroes is complete. But they may appear as patrons, legends, quiet guardians of certain roads or ruins, or rare figures who offer guidance - or warnings - to new parties. Their echoes enrich the world without overshadowing those who now stand where they once stood.

The cause of Ascension is not a single force but a convergence of many. The cosmos does not choose a mortal, nor do the gods grant it as a blessing or curse. Ascension happens when the inner resonance of a character outgrows the boundaries of the Material Realm. Their will, deeds, experiences, and the weight of their story press against the limits of mortality until the world can no longer contain them. Some believe the gods take notice at this threshold, others claim the Ethereal naturally pulls such souls away, and a few insist that reality itself bends rather than break. But the truth is simpler: Ascension occurs when a mortal becomes too great for the shape they wear, and the cosmos - whether it wills it or not - must make room.

Ascension is the fullest expression of a mortal life. It marks the moment where a character’s inner resonance becomes too great for the shape they have worn, and the DN decides where that resonance leads. Whether their end is triumphant, tragic, or quiet, Ascension is not about becoming more. It is about becoming final.

Power Surge

When a character reaches Level 10, they undergo a final transformation.

Restrictions Lifted - All armor and weapon restrictions are removed. Any class may wield any weapon or wear any armor. A cleric may march into battle in full plate. A wizard may stride forth in gleaming steel, channeling magic unhindered.

Surge of Vitality - The character's maximum Hit Points increase by 25% (round up).

Ability Elevation - All ability scores below 16 are raised to 16. Any ability score of 16 or 17 increases to 18.

Magical Backlash Immunity - Magical Backlash no longer occurs. Spellcasters wield magic without risk of catastrophic failure.

Masterful Competence - All Chance Rolls now have a Target Number of 5. All Save Rolls now have a Target Number of 5. Anyone who tries to cast magic on you or against you does not gain the level-based negative roll against your Save Rolls. Their caster level gives no penalty to you.

Thief Mastery - All Thief skills (Backstab, Pick Locks, Remove Traps, Pick Pockets, Move Silently, Hide in Shadows, Climb Walls) succeed on a roll of 19 or less on 1d20 (95% success rate).

Initiative Supremacy - Any type of declared initiative will always favor the Apex Mortal.

Unarmed Combat Mastery - Each class gains a bonus to unarmed combat: DR does not apply.

Apex Abilities

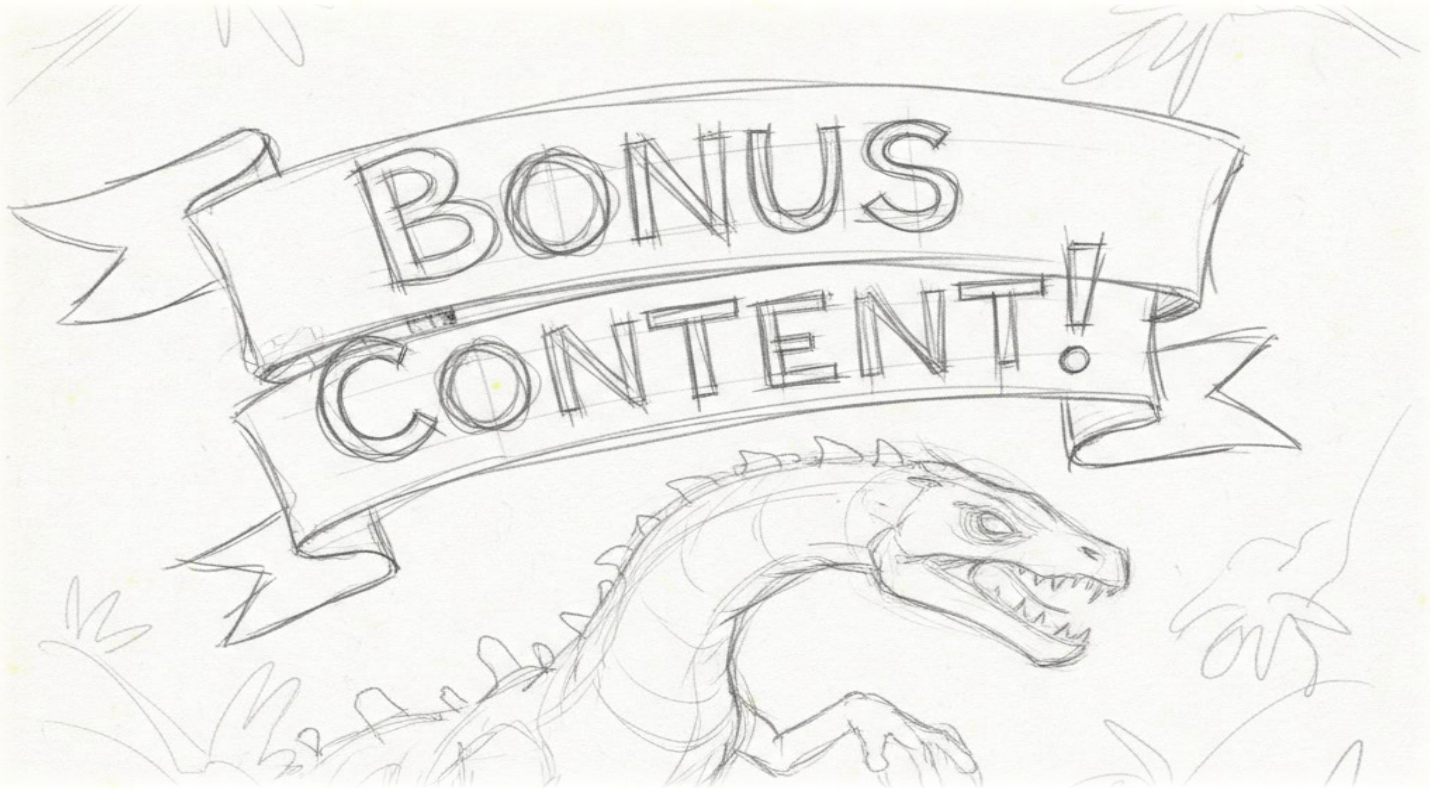
Each class gains a unique capstone ability that activates instantly, usable once per day:

Wizard - Wish Spell - The wizard may cast a Wish spell, reshaping reality within the bounds of mortal power. The Dungeon Narrator adjudicates if need be.

Cleric - Divine Summons - The cleric can call upon their god for direct intervention with 100% certainty. Their deity's Aspect will either appear, or send an Envoy of near-equal power.

Fighter - Life Surge - Even when reduced to 0 Hit Points or unconscious, the fighter may instantly restore themselves to full Hit Points. This ability can bring them back from the brink of death.

Thief - Vanish - You disappear from the encounter entirely. Not invisible. Not hidden. Removed. You reappear 1 hour later up to 3 miles away, at half your maximum Hit Points restored.



Bringing Monsters to Life

Monsters are more than numbers on a page. Each creature in Open Dungeons has a stat block to guide play, yet their true power comes from the Dungeon Narrator's imagination. Every detail - from sharp teeth to a strange number of eyes - invites you to shape how they behave in the world.

What do they look like? Does their fur or hide blend into the environment? Are they scarred, diseased, radiant, or puzzlingly pristine?

How do they move? Fast and skittering? Heavy and lumbering with the sound of cracking stone? Drifting, floating, or phasing through shadows?

What stands out? Extra eyes or ears might reveal unseen threats or ignore stealth attempts. Oversized claws might break shields or leave jagged rents in stone walls. Strange colors or glowing organs might hint at venom, radiation, or magic.

Why do they fight? Hunger? Territory? Vile purpose? Self-defense?

Creatures behave with instinct or intent. Let those motivations guide their tactics.

Not every feature is written into the rules - and that is a feature, not a flaw. The art is part of the storytelling. If the illustration shows barbs along the back, a trembling jaw, or ritual symbols etched in bone, feel free to reflect those traits in your narration.

If a detail seems meaningful, you can apply it in a simple, fair way:

Grant a small bonus to perception when a creature has numerous sensory organs.
Give them an unexpected movement advantage if they appear agile or spider-like

Describe elemental sparks or fumes as warning signs of what their attacks can do.

Let the environment respond to their presence - footprints that burn, whispers carried by wings, frost spreading along the cave wall.

You don’t need new rules for every visual cue. A small threat can be terrifying if the narration carries weight.

Once you describe a trait, treat it as true. Consistency builds trust - and fear. If you decide the triple-eyed brute sees through shadow, players will remember that and adjust their tactics. You don’t need to over explain it - keep details grounded in the moment.

Create encounters that feel alive.

A monster should inspire feelings - dread, panic, wonder, curiosity. Let their design fuel your creativity. Let their behavior show the players what they are dealing with. Even a simple beast can become unforgettable with the right imagination behind it.

Every monster begins as a shadow in the mind. Bring them to life.
In every dark thought, a creature waits to be named.
What you describe becomes real.

