

Chapter Eight

Variant Rules

This chapter presents several variant rules for the d20 system that can be used in a DARK SUN campaign. Most of this material is based on *Unearthed Arcana* variant rules, though many of them have been adjusted somewhat. Also, this sections offers two new variant combat rules: Wounding and Critical Stikes.

A complete list of applicable DMG and UA variant rules follows. Rules marked with an * are modified and detailed in the following sections:

Dungeon Master Guide Rules

- Striking the Cover
- Automatic Hits and Misses
- Clobbered
- Massive Damage based on Size
- Damage to Specific Areas
- Instant Kill
- Critical Misses (Fumbles)
- Skills with Different Abilities
- Critical Success or Failure
- Power Components*
- Free Form Experience*
- Nonmagical Psionics*

Unearthed Arcana Rules

- Level Check Turning
- Favored Environment (option for rangers)
- Whirling Frenzy (option for barbarians)
- Character Traits
- Character Flaws
- Spelltouched Feats
- Weapon Group Feats
- Defense Bonus*
- Armor as Damage Reduction*
- Slower Magical Healing (HR)
- Death and Dying
- Combat Facing*
- Metamagic Components*
- (vitalizing)*
- Players Roll all the Dice

Defense Bonus

As they get more powerful, characters get better at protecting themselves in combat. Warrior type characters learn how to parry incoming attacks more easily while stealthy characters become better at dodging blows.

Because of this distinction, the class Defense bonus is divided into two separate bonuses: Defense and Dodge.

Defense

Defense represents the character's ability to block, deflect or parry incoming attacks. It is the same type of bonus to Armor Class granted by a shield.

To benefit from this bonus, the character must have a ready weapon or ready shield in hand and not be flat-footed or otherwise denied her Dexterity bonus to Armor Class. The character may use this bonus with natural weapons if she has any, but in that case the bonus is halved (rounding down, minimum 1). She cannot benefit from this bonus while fighting unarmed (unless she has the improved unarmed strike feat, in which case she is considered as having natural attacks).

Additionally, this bonus is also reduced by 1 (minimum 1) if you are wielding a simple weapon with which you are not proficient, or reduced by 2 (minimum 1) if you are wielding a martial or exotic weapon with which you are not proficient.

Defense bonuses always stack with other bonuses to Armor Class. However, defense bonuses do not improve AC against touch or incorporeal attacks. Also, unlike most other AC bonuses, defense bonus cannot protect you against range attacks.

Dodge

This bonus functions exactly as other dodge bonuses.

Determining Bonuses

Table 8-1 determines the amount of defense and dodge bonus gained for each level for each class.

If a character multiclassed, she gains additional bonuses equal to one point less than the values given for that class.

For creatures without class levels, use column A and the creature's HDs as her level. Note that natural weapons only grant half of the normal defense bonus to AC.

TABLE 8-1: DEFENSE AND DODGE BONUS

Level	A	B	C	D	E
1	+1/+1	+1/+2	+2/+1	+3/+1	+2/+2
2	+1/+1	+1/+2	+2/+1	+3/+1	+2/+2
3	+2/+1	+2/+2	+3/+1	+4/+1	+3/+2
4	+2/+1	+2/+2	+3/+1	+4/+1	+3/+2
5	+2/+1	+2/+2	+3/+1	+4/+1	+3/+2
6	+2/+2	+2/+3	+3/+2	+4/+2	+3/+3
7	+2/+2	+2/+3	+3/+2	+4/+2	+3/+3
8	+2/+2	+2/+3	+3/+2	+4/+2	+3/+3
9	+3/+2	+3/+3	+4/+2	+5/+2	+4/+3
10	+3/+2	+3/+3	+4/+2	+5/+2	+4/+3
11	+3/+2	+3/+3	+4/+2	+5/+2	+4/+3
12	+3/+3	+3/+4	+4/+3	+5/+3	+4/+4
13	+3/+3	+3/+4	+4/+3	+5/+3	+4/+4
14	+3/+3	+3/+4	+4/+3	+5/+3	+4/+4
15	+4/+3	+4/+4	+5/+3	+6/+3	+5/+4
16	+4/+3	+4/+4	+5/+3	+6/+3	+5/+4
17	+4/+3	+4/+4	+5/+3	+6/+3	+5/+4
18	+4/+4	+4/+5	+5/+4	+6/+4	+5/+5
19	+4/+4	+4/+5	+5/+4	+6/+4	+5/+5
20	+4/+4	+4/+5	+5/+4	+6/+4	+5/+5

" / " These bonuses represent the defense and dodge bonus, respectively.

A Use these bonuses for adepts, aristocrats, commoners, druids, experts, psions, traders, wizards and all types of monsters.

B Use these bonuses for bards, rogues and wilders

C Use these bonuses for barbarians, clerics, monks, psychic warriors, rangers and warriors

D Use these bonuses for fighters

E Use these bonuses for gladiator

Armor as Damage Reduction

When using the defense bonus variant, you may also wish to use Armor as Damage Reduction as well.

In this system, armor (not shields) no longer grant armor class bonuses, and instead grant their AC bonus value as a Damage Reduction. Natural armor also behaves in the same manner.

When using this system, simply use the full armor or natural armor bonus of the creature as a DR of the same value with no means to overcome it. (DR X/-).

Like other forms of damage reduction, it does not stack with other types of damage reductions, but stacks with similar types of DR, such as natural armor and normal armor, or damage reductions granted by some

class abilities, spells or powers which also come in the form of X/-.

Shields do not grant damage reduction however, and grant defense bonus instead.

Combat Facing

As the rules presented in UA, but add the following.

Defense and Dodge bonuses and Facing

Even when you are aware of opponents on your flanks or in your back, it is very difficult for you to defend yourself properly against such attackers.

You may only apply your defense bonus to attacks coming from your front arc or from flank arcs where you have a shield or a weapon, and can only use your shield bonuses, if any, against the appropriate flank. You can never use your defense bonus in your rear arc.

You may use your class dodge bonus against opponents in your front or flank arcs, but you cannot apply this bonus against attacks from the rear. Other dodge bonuses, from feats, abilities or spells, still apply, however. Also, the Combat Awareness feat lets you use your class dodge bonus against those opponents.

Facing an Opponent

Sometimes, you might want to make sure to keep facing an opponent so that she does not come up from behind to attack you.

As a move action, you can designate one opponent that you will keep facing automatically until your next turn, or until you decide to stop facing her. Each subsequent face change is done as an immediate action, and you can stop facing that opponent as an immediate action as well.

Your opponent may attempt a Tumble check in order to break your facing however, but in that case, the DC is 20 if she can circle around you, or 30 if she has to go through your space to do it.

Out of Turn Face Change

Once per round, when you get an attack of opportunity, you may make one face change in the direction of that attack, if you wish to do so. No matter how many attacks of opportunity you can do, you may never change facing out of turn more than once per round.

Wounding

Using the standard d20 system, there is no tangible difference between having 1 or 50 hit points, beside the former being closer to the end for the character than the latter. When reaching 0 hit points, the character becomes disabled, and below, dying or dead. However, while she is still healthy (having positive hit point numbers), damage does not really affect the character. This system offers a more realistic approach to damage and hit points.

When a character reaches half her hit points or less, she becomes wounded. A wounded character receives a -2 penalty to effective Strength and Dexterity scores, and can no longer run or charge.

When a character reaches one quarter or less of her hit points, she becomes crippled and receives a -6 penalty to her effective Strength and Dexterity scores, and she moves at half normal speed.

When you regain a sufficient number of hit points, you also reduce each of these conditions appropriately. Rest has no effect on your recovery, other than allowing you to recover hit points more rapidly, and thus negate these effects.

Nonlethal damage

Nonlethal damage does not produce these effects. Only real damage does so. Characters may still become clobbered or staggered with nonlethal damage, however.

Critical Strike

The standard critical hit system of d20 basically has critical hits occur mostly by luck. Unless a character takes the Improved Critical feat, characters never gain a better chance of scoring a critical threat because of skill. Combat abilities only come into play when confirming the critical hit, but the base chance of scoring a threat, and a critical hit, remains the same, no matter the what level the character is.

This system allows for more capable warriors to score critical hits more often based on how well they strike their opponents.

Whenever you hit a target's AC by 10 point or more, you score a critical threat, which must be confirmed normally. However, if your weapon has a greater threat range, reduce this number by the amount by which the threat range is extended. For example, if you wield a longsword (threat range: 19-20), you need to hit an opponent by 9 points or more to score a critical threat. Feats or abilities which also increase your threat range reduce this number accordingly.

Vitalizing

Using this variant, casting spells and manifesting powers is physically taxing on the character and his own endurance limits the number of spells she may cast each day. However, she also has the potential for a greater number of spells or powers each day by pushing her own stamina.

Using this variant with psionics is very easy. When the manifester reaches half of her power points or less, she becomes fatigued. If it reaches a quarter or less, she becomes exhausted.

However, the character may meditate for one hour to regain up to one third of her power points. Another hour of meditation will bring this total to two thirds. However, she cannot regain her full amount of power points unless she sleeps (or rests, for kreen) for 8 full hours, regaining all of her lost power points.

Spellcasters can also use a variant of this system by adding their spell slots together to form a spell pool. Each spell slot is worth its spell level and added together to determine when a character becomes fatigued or exhausted.

Note however that this spell pool does not affect spellcasting, and spell slots are still used for spellcasters.

When the character rests, she regains points in her spell pool that allow her to regain lost spell slots. The lower-level spells slots are always regained first.

0-level spell slots are regained at a rate of 1 per hour of rest, no matter how many are spent or how many of them you can cast each day.

Mundane fatigue

Mundane fatigue does not affect the ability to cast spells or manifest powers. However, fatigued gained by casting spells or manifesting powers can aggravate mundane fatigue conditions. For example, if a fatigued character manifests enough powers to reduce his power point totals below half of her maximum, then she becomes exhausted instead.

Metamagic Components and Power Components

All special components available in a DARK SUN should take into account the unique nature of the setting, as standard matriel components for spells.

Also, when crafting magical items, similar components might be used to decrease the cost of the crafting instead of providing other benefits. In fact, it is greatly encouraged that the cost of the raw materials be entirely representative of special ingredients and components required by the spells needed for the crafting.



Finally, similar components might exist with psionic equivalents, even if psionic do not normally require material components, since psionic items require components.

Nonmagical Psionics

See Chapter 11: Psionics

Free Form Experience

Instead of being a variant system, it is highly recommended that this form of experience attribution be the standard guideline for attributing experience for players. Monster CRs should only be used as a general guideline for encounters.

In fact, since equipment (and especially magical equipment and help) is much more difficult for players to acquire, the CR system is thrown off on Athas.

Also, challenges and dangers comes in many other forms than monsters or traps on Athas, and these encounters should be rewarded as well.

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