

Chapter One: Abilities

The Range Debate

There has been some debate over the rolling method to use for the DARK SUN setting. Though most D&D settings would use the standard 3 to 18 range for abilities, the original DARK SUN material had an enhanced range for character abilities, ranging from 5 to 20.

However, the 3rd edition of D&D material has balance as one of its systems chief concerns, since the entire challenge versus experience reward system is based on the matching of characters against objectives, whether they be monsters, traps, or specific goals. Unbalancing either part of this matching would destabilize the entire d20 system and the course of the game itself.

So, since raising the ability range of players might upset the balance of the system, by tipping the scale in favor of the PCs, special consideration had to be made on the topic of abilities.

The Decision

It is my opinion, after much debate, that enhanced abilities of DARK SUN characters are both justified by the setting and the d20 system.

First of all, as it was explained in earlier DARK SUN work, the conditions set forth by the world of Athas have taken its inhabitants through a brutal selection process, ensuring that only the strong, the quick and the clever survive. This is truly reflected by the enhancement of abilities, since abilities affect all character's being, raising slightly both the minimum and the maximum range for athasian characters.

Second, the athasian setting offers difficulties for characters which are not accounted for in standard calculations of challenge ratings, such as lack of technology and magic, or unwelcoming social and environmental setting. These factors are not normally found in standard D&D settings, therefore heightening the challenges athasian characters face in the context of their setting.

This can be demonstrated by the Point Distribution Method for determining abilities provided in *D&D Player's Handbook*. The more the campaign is challenging, the more points are available for PC abilities, without upsetting, it seems, the balance of the game, as long as the challenge of the campaign is of the appropriate level.

Moreover, it can further be illustrated in some fashion by the Forsaker Prestige Class (detailed in the *Masters of the Wild* supplement) which, in exchange for forsaking magic, has the character receive not only ability enhancements, but fast healing, spell resistance, damage reduction and more. Though these abilities reflect the benefits of taking a prestige class, the sum of these abilities also reflect the importance of forsaking the use of magic in a D&D setting and compensate it by many abilities that are inherent to the character.

In a world where magical items or magical healing are scarce, where characters are in a constant danger of death by dehydration, where heat hinders actions, where metal equipment is rare and heavy armor is unpractical at best, where magic-users are feared and hunted, in short, in the DARK SUN setting, PCs will need to tip the scale to *establish* balance, not throw it off.

Rolling Method

PCs roll 5d4 six times, totaling the results for each roll, then applying each total to a different ability as the player sees fit.

This method has PCs get abilities ranging from 5 to 20, with a small chance of getting either a 5 or a 20, with an average of 12-13. Note that this is the same average as a “4d6 drop lowest dice” method.

Note that adding more dices to the ability roll does have the effect of bringing each results closer to the average, an effect which some PCs or DMs might prefer or dislike. Other rolling method might be considered, but consider that a method like 3d6+2, for example, has a greater statistical chance of generating higher scores than the 5d4 method, which you might want to avoid to not tip the scale too much.

Standard Point Buy Method

PCs dispose of a certain amount of points which they use to determine their attributes by purchasing each score for a certain amount of points given determined by a specific cost as indicated on the following table.

Table 1-1: Ability Scores and Point Costs

Score	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Cost	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	12	14	17	20	24

The choice of expanding the table to include all ability values allow players to choose very low scores for their character, though the *D&D Dungeon Master Guide* had ability scores start out at 8 on their table. This is more a matter of personal choice than actual logical reasoning. The entire point system is therefore modified according to this expanded table.

The choice of the cost is related to the given bonus of each score, raising when reaching 16 and costing more for each point of score bonus. The choice to place this raising cost at 16 is inspired by the standard D&D method which raised the cost when reaching 15, allowing characters of the DARK SUN setting to purchase slightly higher scores more easily.

The DM has to decide the amount of points the PCs dispose of to purchase their ability scores depending on the difficulty of the campaign he assumes to run. Examples of amounts of points corresponding to challenge levels are given in the following table.

Table 1-2: Point Amount by DARK SUN Campaign type.

DARK SUN Campaign Type	Amount of Points
Low-level	42
Regular	46
Challenging	50
High-Powered	54

Here the point amounts were determined by according to the desired average of each challenge by comparing it with the average obtained with the use of the standard Point distribution Method provided in the D&D *Dungeon Master Guide*.

In the standard method, characters could obtain an average of 12 in a regular campaign. If they purchased a score of 18, they were left with four scores of 10 and one 8, for example. Tougher campaign allotted them 4 more points per category to spend on attributes.

In the method used here, characters of a regular campaign can purchase an average slightly under 13, which is slightly higher than a regular D&D game, though it still grants the same bonus (+1). Should a character pick a score of 20, he is left with 22 points, giving him four scores of 10 and 1 score of 7, which means he gets a 1 point higher modifier for his maximum ability and 1 point lower for his lowest ability, when compared to the standard system. Tougher campaign grant 4 more points to spend.

As such, this systems allows characters to get scores 2 points higher than standard D&D game, and an average of only 1 point higher, which reflect the idea of higher abilities.

However, you might note that the best possible total of modifiers given by this system (total of all ability modifiers) for regular campaigns is equal to that of the standard D&D method, this total being +6 (from six 12s opposed to four 12s and two 13s).

Note that these tables do not correspond to the standard D&D tables for the Point Distribution Method and they supersede them when creating PCs for a DARK SUN campaign.

Rerolling

Since the average ability scores of athasian PCs are slightly higher than that of the standard D&D PC, the underpowered character values are also raised. Your ability scores (before changes according to race) are considered too low if:

- Your highest score is 14 or less.
- Your total of all ability modifiers equals +2 or less.

Note on Charisma

Though the nature and description of each ability is not subject to change from the d20 system, note that the definition of AD&D charisma clashed somewhat with the concept of D&D 3e charisma. As such, many of the races and creatures of the DARK SUN setting will now have greater charisma scores that the original works of DARK SUN would lead some to believe.

Also note that the importance of the “strength of personality” aspect of D&D charisma over the “physical appearance” aspect of AD&D will be particularly important in a setting which uses the D&D psionic system.

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