

Defend the Innocent: Enemies are focused on taking out an NPC that the players must protect.

Stop the Ritual: The party has X turns to stop A Bad Thing from happening.

Achilles' Heel: The enemies are nearly impervious to conventional tactics except for a specific, crippling weakness that the party can exploit. Maybe they quested for a scroll that can be read every 3 rounds to render the enemy unable to use certain powers or be vulnerable to normal attacks for a round. Or, maybe it's simply figuring out a terrain feature, like flooding the chamber.

By The Power of Greyskull: The battle has a powerup to help make an otherwise unwinnable fight winnable, or defeat creatures more powerful than the party's current level. Maybe there is a nearby weapon, secured in an armory or on a magical web, that empowers one to resist vampiric charm, or a wellspring that regenerates spell slots.

(Don't) Kick the Dog: The party doesn't want to hurt one of the enemy, perhaps because he's mind controlled, brainwashed, mistaken, or they've been hired to take him back. The enemy has no problem hurting them.

The Floor is Lava: Safe ground to stand on is ever-changing and dangerous. Maybe the ceiling of the ruined temple is collapsing, and each turn some rubble falls on a chunk of the battlefield, with only a round of warning before it does. This forces players who may be content to try and hold a position to move, potentially taking opportunity attacks or losing advantageous positioning.

Hold the Line: The battle is a test of endurance; the party has to survive X rounds against a seemingly overwhelming force before the tides of battle turn in their favor. The more avenues the players have to hold, the more they'll be stretched thin.

They Live: Enemies rise from the dead, have a second wind, or tap into some source of rejuvenation once defeated, and must be defeated again, this time with extra abilities.

Mêlée à Trois: A battle between 3+ equally antagonistic parties where the motivations for everyone involved is "the enemy of my enemy is *also* my enemy".

Prove Your Worth: The battle includes a third party that is judging the players, or that they need to somehow influence to their side. This could be a gladiatorial combat where the group needs to win over the crowd, or maybe a sub-trope of the Melee a Trois where the party has found themselves caught between enemies and a group of potential future allies, or maybe the maybe the party has stormed into the throne room to protect the king from his evil vizier and need to fend off the guards long enough to make their case. This is a roleplaying encounter mixed in with combat.

Hot Potato: The battle involves some kind of MacGuffin that can't be held by one person for too many turns and has to be traded off. Maybe the Orb of Baa'dGhai needs to be kept away from the enemies who want to summon the Dark Lord, but every round the players hold onto it they suffer a stacking debuff.

Reinforcements Incoming: Whether it's a Broodmother summoning more whelps, or battalions of soldiers arriving to the battlefield, this is a battle where the number of enemies can become overwhelming if not kept in check, and AOE attacks get an opportunity to shine.

Enrage Timer: Each turn the enemies become stronger than the previous turn, so a fight that starts easy can quickly become overwhelming if the party tries to hoard their resources.

Romeo and Juliet: Enemies that are linked in some way and must be defeated within X rounds of each other or they will heal their counterpart.

Solve the Puzzle: The Ur-trope, there is some sort of puzzle that has to be solved before the battle can conclude. Maybe the party needs to find a group of hidden runes scattered in different corners of the battlefield to reveal the password to open the door that allows them to escape from a zombie horde.

Team Deathmatch: The party is pitted against one another. Perhaps they are buying time, having to make the match look convincing until the opportunity arises to enact a particular plan.

Team Deathmatch, VIP: A party member must avoid going to 0 HP. This could be a barbarian proving they're strong enough to remain standing in a ritual battle, or a cleric is channeling the force of their god to push away darkness that will otherwise

consume the party. This can be a good way to put the spotlight on a particular character.

Capture the Flag: An inanimate McGuffin is your goal. Maybe once the party defeats the warlord, her minions try to grab the body for future resurrection. Maybe the goal is to steal a magical gem that's guarded by a horde of eternally animating skeletons. Maybe two competing parties are trying to capture an artifact and arrive at opposite sides of the room.

King of the Hill: A location must be controlled so that "run away" isn't possible. This might be a bridge, so that getting there first gives an advantage to holding it, but speed alone may not be enough as enemies want to control or destroy the bridge. Maybe the party must protect a person in a house (think *Home Alone*) against an assassination attempt by a guild or a theft. Maybe the party must remain inside a ritual circle to disrupt the summoning of a dark god, and enemies are trying to pull or shove them out.

Wave Defense: Variation of above to throw enemies at waves so the party's action economy is not overwhelmed, and the battle lasts longer than a typical three rounds. Maybe the goal is to defeat a certain number of enemies, or hold out for a certain number of rounds.