

RECOVERY AND POWER BALANCE IN OPEN-ENDED CAMPAIGNS

In 4e, characters have a mix of At Will, Encounter, and Daily Powers. Encounter powers are recovered with a Short Rest after an encounter, and Daily powers require an Extended Rest – and only one extended rest may be taken per day.

This works well for campaigns where adventures follow the standard D&D module approach: the GM constructs linked groups of tactical encounters, and the players fight their way through them in some fixed or variable order.

In this paradigm, the players can take extended rests when they like. GMs often regard it as cheating when players rest to regain all their powers after each encounter.

This may be a problem, but it's not the problem this document is intended to solve. That it *does* solve that problem is just a happy accident.

The problem this document is intended to address is similar, however, and is frequently encountered in those campaigns where the above adventure structure doesn't apply.

For example, say your campaign is an intrigue-heavy, and in any given session, a fight might not occur. When it does occur, PCs are fully rested and know they can unload everything they've got. It's not abusive to rest after every encounter, because in a game where days pass without a fight, this is *normal*, expected, and even sensible.

In such games, the balance of the game is shattered: Daily powers effectively become Encounter powers, PCs can take on more powerful monsters than the system expects, and gain experience points more easily.

This document suggests two solutions to this problem:

High Power Campaign: embrace the fact that players have all their powers available in every encounter, and alter encounter difficulty to cope with it.

Standard Power Campaign: modify the extended rest mechanic to maintain the standard power level across open-ended campaigns.

THE STANDARD POWER CAMPAIGN

This method is suggested for GMs and groups that prefer to keep the power balance roughly as the rules suggest, while accounting for campaigns which don't necessarily have 4-8 fights per day.

This system replaces the Extended Rest with a Refreshment, while Short Rests work the same way. It operates on the following important assumption:

Daily powers are an important resource and shouldn't be spent frivolously. The group should try to keep these for their most dangerous fights, though will have to use them sometimes against normal foes when the dice go bad.

REFRESHMENTS

The players may, at any time, call for a Refreshment. Once they have done this, **they may not call for another** until they gain an Accomplishment. (This isn't as strict a limit as it seems; see next column).

A Refreshment provides all the benefits of an Extended Rest – recover all hit points, healing surges, encounter and daily powers, reset magic item powers, and set Action Points to 1. A Refreshment usually takes the same amount of time as a Short Rest. It doesn't need to take up a lot of game time, since unlike Extended Rests, players don't have the freedom to take them as many times as they like.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

When the GM creates his adventure, he will define one or more *Accomplishments* as described below; these are particular moments in the adventure that mark the player-characters progress and success.

When an Accomplishment is awarded, the players receive one of two benefits:

- If the team has used their Refreshment, it is recharged, and can be used again later in the adventure. (They may use it immediately if they wish.)
- If the team still has their Refreshment available, they gain an immediate, free Refreshment.

In this way, the players ability to take Extended Rests is defined by their progress in the adventure.

How Many?

For every 1-4 normal encounters above four, the adventure needs one Accomplishment. In addition, for each Hard encounter above the first, the adventure needs another Accomplishment.

The GM designs an adventure in which the players are expected to travel to a crypt (1 normal wilderness encounter), and clear out the crypt (5 normal encounters plus one hard encounter). In the crypt, they may discover ties to corruption in town, and return to destroy it (1 normal and 1 hard encounter). With 7 normal and two hard encounters, the DM needs to define two Accomplishments.

When To Use?

Accomplishments should be used to mark a team's progress during an adventure. A good way is to link them to the completion of sections of the adventure, or award them on completion of quests.

Accomplishments should be achievable before the end of the adventure – don't link them to a quest that can't be completed without also completing the adventure.

In the crypt adventure, the GM creates a quest: the dwellers in the crypt have taken prisoners, and the team is hired to rescue them. The PCs can rescue these prisoners without completely clearing the crypt, so that's an excellent moment for an Accomplishment.

Also, clearing out the crypt might not end the adventure – there's that corruption back in town. So the GM decides that destroying the commander of the crypt dwellers is an Accomplishment – since it's a Hard fight, the players will no doubt agree.

BONUS ACCOMPLISHMENTS

It's often a good idea to include an extra opportunity to gain an Accomplishment, which isn't tied to the adventure. The players may have to overcome a Hard encounter or a series of lesser encounters unrelated to the main adventure. Because these are distractions, there should be an extra benefit gained from following this distraction.

*The GM decides to add an extra encounter to the crypt. There is a shrine to Bahamut, defiled by the new residents. It is a Hard encounter to clear (and the players may ignore it), but if they succeed, they pass an Accomplishment, **and** receive a blessing from Bahamut: a bonus Action Point.*

Bonus Accomplishments may sometimes be hidden in some way, rewarding players clever enough to find them.

AFTER THE ADVENTURE

Player-characters gain the benefit of a Refreshment in the downtime between adventures. If they succeeded, they gain the benefit during the victory celebrations. If they failed, or abandoned the adventure, it takes longer – at least a week and probably longer, before the PCs are able to lick their wounds and recover their spirits.

If the PCs ended the adventure as prisoners, this allows the GM to place the characters wherever he wants, before they inevitably recover and escape...

LONG ADVENTURES

Some adventures are very long, likely taking months of play to complete. The GM should break these up into sections or chapters, and treat the end of each Chapter as described above in After The Adventure.

AD-LIBBED AND OPEN-ENDED ADVENTURES

This Refreshment system works well with GMs who like to create ad-libbed or open-ended adventures.

In this system, there are no preset Accomplishments. Instead, the GM assigns them whenever events of play seem to require it, and grants an immediate Refreshment whenever an adventure arc is concluded. At its simplest, the GM can give an Accomplishment after each hard encounter or after 4-5 normal encounters, whichever comes first.

Example: the players are happily exploring a town, and get in a fight with a local crime lord. Since it's a Hard encounter, the GM gives them an Accomplishment upon conclusion.

OPTION: 'DAILY' POWERS

In this system, Daily powers aren't really daily. If this bothers the group, they should be renamed 'Desperation Powers', 'Signature Powers', or something similarly evocative.

OPTION: SHORT RESTS AND LEADERS

This section isn't required for the Refreshment rules.

Multiple Rests: Once a Rest has been taken, another can not be taken until the party's abilities have been tested. It is usually obvious when this happens – another fight, or skill challenge, or something equivalent to an encounter.

While rules lawyers may try to game the above, it should be obvious among sensible players what the intention is.

Leaders: Clerics and Warlords have the ability to boost the effect of healing surges. Each PC may benefit once from such powers per Leader character, each rest.

So, a party of five, including a cleric and a warlord, take a rest. The first healing surge spent by each character gets the Cleric's Healing Word bonus; the second surge gets the Warlord's Inspiring Word. If any more surges are spent, no further benefit is gained.

OPTION: ALTERNATIVE ACTION POINTS

An action point spent during combat provides all the usual benefits, *and* at the start of your next turn, recover your Second Wind *and* one expended Encounter power.

Thus, it is best to use an action point later in an encounter.

As usual, you may only use one action point per encounter.

During a Short Rest, you may spend an action point to regain the use of an expended Daily Power.

Recovering Powers: Once you have recovered a given encounter or daily power, you may not regain that power again until after your next Refreshment.

Example: Erik the Fighter spends an action point to regain the use of his Boundless Endurance Daily power. Later in the day he uses it again, and now cannot recover it until his next Refreshment. But he could spend an action point to recover a different daily power.

THE HIGH POWER CAMPAIGN

If the campaign is structured so that players only get into one fight every session or so, or even less, you might as well make it a big one!

ENCOUNTER CONSTRUCTION

Make each encounter a big, interesting set-piece battle.

Make the encounter a Hard one, of 2-3 levels above the PCs. Individual monsters might be 5 or more levels above PCs.

Go out of your way to make the terrain interesting and useful – rickety rope bridges over chasms,, animated statues of vengeful gods, lava pits that the players might push their enemies into and vice-versa, and so on.

Let the players have an ordinary Normal level fight every now and then, to let the players show off their characters powers. Just don't expect such a fight to be a challenge.

DAILY POWERS

These should be used each encounter, since they'll automatically be refreshed by the time the next one occurs.

ACTION POINTS

Give players action points for succeeding in quests and adventure objectives, such that they may start a fight with between one and three action points.

Action points should not vary much, if at all, from player to player – action points are awarded to the *team*.

ENCOUNTER POWERS

When you spend an action point, you get all the benefits. At the start of your next turn, you also recover your Second Wind, and all spend Encounter Powers. Up to three points may be spent during a single encounter.

Alternative Method

Characters gain one action point per Encounter Power they possess. When they spend an action point, they recover their Second Wind and one encounter power. The same power may not be recovered twice in the same encounter.

MAGIC ITEM POWERS

Whenever an action point is spent, treat this as a milestone: the player gets one extra Daily Item power usage, but can't use a power that has already been used.

CONSEQUENCES OF USING THIS SYSTEM

This method makes PCs more powerful, which means they'll walk over most opposition unless the GM puts them up against harder fights. But those harder fights will be very 'swingly' –the players might achieve great victories or suffer crushing defeats.

This will be fine for many groups, but some groups will like to have some kind of 'reset button' mechanism to cope with those bad fights. For instance, easy access to raise dead, or a standard assumption that enemies knock out, rather than kill, heroes. That way, when the players suffer a TPK (Total Party Kill), the players know their characters will start the next adventure at some sort of disadvantage – prisoners of slavers, or whatever.