

# Points of Light

**Enemy Density System v 0.21**

**For those who want something else from random encounters!**

## **Encounters should be fun and meaningful.**

Nearly everybody can agree that encounters in 4<sup>th</sup> edition D&D take up a significant amount of time. This eats into time that could be spent developing the plot or role playing. That is not bad, necessarily, given that combat is one of the important conflict resolution systems 4<sup>th</sup> edition D&D is designed around.

But, the game world is usually a dangerous place, and the idea behind it is frequently reference as civilized places being “points of light” in an otherwise dark and dangerous land. In theory, you should be getting into combat almost constantly just walking from one town to the next. But that would be tedious. But if you don't do that, and only have story related fights, then the result is a) the party can spend all their resources winning that fight in short order, and b) the land doesn't really seem that dangerous.

The idea behind creating this system is to reduce or eliminate “random” encounters, but still maintain a feeling of danger. To abstract out the tedium of constantly fighting, but still have consequences for wandering through or being in dangerous areas. And most importantly, to make sure that story related fights (the important fights) still feel dangerous and threatening.

Basically, it adds risk as well as resource consumption so a DM can focus on *story* encounters without having the party “go nova” on every encounter thrown at them in a non-encounter rich section of the game.

Additionally, for those groups who use combat encounters to gain experience and levels, this adds a method for attaining those precious XP without slowing down the game for an otherwise inconsequential skirmish.

Finally, I warn you now that, due to some distractions, an obviously malformed sense of humor, and an unreasonable amount of fatigue, this write up has adopted a few silly acronyms. Consider yourself warned.

So, with that lengthy justification for my hubris, I present you to the Points of Light - Enemy Density System.

## Threat Level - TL

All areas are designated a Threat Level based on the enemy density. This is a number from TL1 to TL30.

A TL1 would indicate that it is a safe area, and only story based encounters occur. There are some areas that are this safe, but even in most towns you will have at least some chance of being targeted for a mugging, getting involved in a bar fight, or otherwise encountering some trouble. None the less, there are places like this out there.

A zone designated as a TL20, on the other hand, is one where if you do not take actions to avoid a fight, you will find yourself in one. There are hostile things of all sorts everywhere, and some will pick fights with you. Mathematically, if the party is carefree and does nothing to avoid a fight, they have a 95% chance of taking part in a random encounter while in a TL20 zone. Of course, a party can take actions that would help it avoid a fight. But we can address that later under Modifying Action Outcome.

## Roll of Fickle Luck - RoFL

To determine if you have run afoul of enemies during your time in any area You will need to make a Roll of Fickle Luck. Two hours after entering an area, setting up camp, or engaging in battle, have a party representative make a roll to see if the party was fated to encounter enemies. Additionally, an RoFL must be made every six hours after that, while remaining in the zone. Roll 1d20, and compare the roll to the area Threat Level. If the roll fails to hit the TL, the party has run into a PoLE.

## Points of Light Event - PoLE

A point of light encounter occurs when the party's RoFL fails to hit the TL of the area the party is in. The severity of the event is determined by severity of the miss. (see table)

Hits	PoLE	Cost	L Value*
TL	Nothing of note.	None	No value
TL-5	A minor skirmish or two. Fairly insignificant.	1d4-1 surges each	L-1 to L
TL-10	We have an actual fight on our hands	1d4 surges each	L to L+1
TL-15	Woah, where was <i>that</i> hiding?!?!	1d4+1 surges each	L+1 to L+2
TL-20	I <i>told you</i> we shouldn't have come here.	1d4+2 surges each	L+2 to L+3

Table 1: \*L is based off the party level, not the zone Threat Level

For example, if the party is in a TL18 zone, and the party representative rolls a 2, not only does this fail to hit an 18, but even fails to hit an 18 – 15, otherwise known as 3. So the only thing it does hit is a TL-20, or a -2. If the party was just wandering without care, this would have them accidentally wander in on an organized war party or possibly a irritable dragon.

## Modifying Action Outcome - MAO

The party's fate is not entirely luck. Actions can (and should) be taken to effect how your encounters with the hostiles of the area happen to go, and whether or not you are attacked against your will. Your fate is in your hands, just not entirely. Your party can use skills that would reduce the chances of a PoLE adversely effecting you. All manner of skills

may be used in this fashion, so long as they would give plausible reason for you to not get in a fight. This results in your Modifying Action Outcome. Basically, trouble is looking for you, and you don't want it to find you unprepared. To determine the amount that a MAO can help your party, weigh the appropriate skill against the DCs of the zone's TL. If the skill check hits the easy DC of the zone's TL, then you get a +1. The moderate DC nets you a +2, and the hard a +4. Add together all the bonuses and that is the party's MAO. Any rewards to the party are given based on the RoFL, but the cost to the party is based off the RoFLMAO.

So lets use the prior example, again. Your party representative rolled a 2 in a TL18 zone, but you were on your guard ever since entering this zone. The Warden used nature [moderate DC: +2] to find a secret path, the whole party managed to be a bit more stealthy [lowest DC in the group managed to hit easy: +1], the Ranger used Perception [hard DC: +4]to scout ahead, and the Warlock intimidated some of the foes into running [moderate DC: +2]. This cost the party some time, as they had to move at a reduced speed, but they have decided the bonuses outweigh the cost.

Add all of the bonuses up to determine the party's MAO [2+1+4+2=9]. Now apply the MAO [+9] as a bonus to the RoFL [2], generating the party's RoFLMAO [11]. In this case, the RoFLMAO does not hit the TL of the zone, but it does hit the TL-10. So while you gain XP rewards based on a L-2 to L+3 encounter, you only suffer the penalties of a L to L+1 encounter, or 1d4 surges lost from each character.

## **Leveraging of Life - LoL**

You may, at any point spend a Daily Attack Power or Action Point to prevent the loss of up to 2 surges. If you have no surges left, you must spend a Daily Attack Power or Action Point, or take a surges worth of damage for each point of surge debt you find yourself in. The lowest this can take you is to  $\frac{1}{4}$  your maximum hit points.

Optional – For games that award XP based on combat

## **Deciding and Now Choosing Events - DANCE**

There are some who would rely on random encounters to gain enough experience to advance in level. And we can use the PoL system in much the same way as any other random encounter system to help advance these levels. Basically, instead of grinding through a number of encounters, they will be grinding through a number of PoLEs. But what if these PoLE grinders could take actions to make that grinding more effective? That is where DaNCE comes in. Deciding and Now Choosing Events is a way for a party to seek out trouble and get the drop on it. If, instead of going out for some mere PoLE grinding, a party was to engage in a PoLE DaNCE, the party could get in a few hours what would have taken days.

When you DaNCE, you use your skills in a way that is very similar to MAO. Basically, the party takes actions that would help them locate an enemy to kill. For example, using nature to track, using stealth to ambush, etc. If the skill check hits the easy DC of the zone's TL, then you get a +1. The moderate DC nets you a +2, and the hard a +4. You then add these to the zone's Threat Level to produce the Effective Threat Level. If the ETL is enough, the L value of the PoLE becomes larger, while the cost remains the same.

For example, lets say you are in a TL10 zone and you roll a 10. You hit the TL and therefore there is no cost to you. But, you are here to hunt wumpi. So, when you set out, your Ranger made a perception check to find tracks [moderate DC; +2], your Rogue makes a thievery check to set up a trap for the wumpus [hard DC; +4], and the Bard makes a bluff check to act as bait [easy DC; +1] so as to lure a wumpus into the now trap ridden clearing.

As a result of all of your elaborate DaNCE, your reward is based off a ETL of 17. Your PoLE is one degree larger, and therefore you gain XP equal to an encounter somewhere between L-1 and L. Congrats.