

THE BOSS PHASES SYSTEM

how to build a boss your party talks about for years

Your party has five turns for every one the boss gets. That's why your carefully built villain dies in round two — not bad luck, just math. Phases fix the math without fudging a single die.

A phased boss is really three smaller bosses wearing one body. Each phase has its own behavior, its own arena state, and its own answer to the question "what does the party fear right now?" When one phase breaks, the fight *changes* instead of ending.

THE CORE RULE

Split the boss's total HP into three pools. When a pool empties, the current phase ends immediately — even mid-turn — and the transition effect triggers. Damage overflow carries into the next pool, so players never feel cheated out of a big hit.

THE THREE-PHASE FRAMEWORK

PHASE	HP POOL	THE BOSS IS...	THE PARTY FEELS...
1 — The Mask	40%	Controlled. Testing. Holding back on purpose.	Confident. "We've got this."
2 — The Truth	35%	Revealed. New form, new attacks, arena shifts.	Alarmed. Plans start breaking.
3 — The Desperation	25%	Cornered. Reckless. Willing to burn everything.	Desperate right back. Every turn matters.

phase 1 should be slightly too easy. that's the trap — let them get comfortable.

LEGENDARY RESISTANCE, REBUILT

Instead of "3 per day," give the boss **one legendary resistance per phase**. Players watch it burn, know a window is open, and know the next phase brings a fresh one. Resource tension every phase, zero bookkeeping.

ACTION ECONOMY PER PHASE

PHASE	LEGENDARY ACTIONS	LAIR ACTION	MINIONS
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1 — The Mask	1/round	—	2–4 weak
2 — The Truth	2/round	Initiative 20	—
3 — The Desperation	3/round	Initiative 20 & 10	—

PHASE TRANSITIONS

The transition is the moment players remember. It should take under thirty seconds at the table and change at least one thing the party was relying on.

TRANSITION TRIGGERS (PICK ONE PER PHASE)

TRIGGER	HOW IT WORKS	BEST FOR
HP Threshold	Pool empties → phase ends	Straight fights, default choice
Object Destroyed	Party must break a phylactery, crystal, or anchor to force the phase	Puzzle-minded tables
Round Timer	Phase advances at end of round 3 no matter what	Ritual interruptions, ticking clocks
Story Beat	A named NPC falls, a lie is spoken aloud, the sun sets	Campaign-finale bosses

TRANSITION EFFECTS (D8)

D8 WHEN THE PHASE BREAKS...

- 1 The floor collapses into a lower chamber — everyone falls, fight continues below
- 2 The boss shatters the party's light sources; the arena goes dark except the boss's glow
- 3 Reinforcements pour in — but they're terrified of the boss too
- 4 The boss destroys its own weapon and becomes something worse without it
- 5 Anti-magic pulse: all concentration spells end, magic items flicker for one round
- 6 The arena floods, ignites, or freezes from the edges inward — shrinking safe ground
- 7 The boss consumes a minion, treasure, or hostage to fuel the next form
- 8 Time stutters — the boss repositions anywhere in the arena and acts first

TELEGRAPH OR IT DIDN'T HAPPEN

Every transition needs a one-sentence warning the round before: cracks spider across the floor, the boss's voice doubles, frost creeps up the walls. Players who spot the telegraph feel clever. Players who ignore it can't call it unfair.

WORKED EXAMPLE: THE HOLLOW KING

A campaign-finale boss for four to five characters of 10th level, built entirely on this system. File the serial numbers off and reskin freely.

PHASE 1 — THE GRACIOUS HOST

HP pool 120 · AC 17 · 1 legendary action · trigger: HP threshold

The Hollow King fights politely from his throne, animating suits of armor (2–4 minions) while making conversation. He compliments good tactics. He apologizes when he hits someone. **Signature move:** *Royal Decree* — one PC must obey a one-word command (Wisdom save negates).

PHASE 2 — THE CROWN COMES OFF

HP pool 105 · AC 15, +10 ft speed · 2 legendary actions · lair action at init 20 · transition effect: #2, lights die

He removes the crown, and the face under it is a hollow of pale fire. The throne room's torches snuff out.

Signature move: *Hollow Gaze* — each creature that can see him at the start of its turn takes psychic damage unless it looks away (disadvantage on attacks against him that turn). Suddenly the party must choose between seeing and safety.

PHASE 3 — WHAT WEARS THE KING

HP pool 75 · AC 13, immune to being frightened or charmed · 3 legendary actions · transition effect: #7, he consumes the throne itself

The thing inside stops pretending. It moves wrong. It targets whoever healed last turn. **Signature move:** *Unmaking Touch* — melee attack that suppresses one magic item's properties until the end of the fight. It is trying to take the things they came in with.

the phase names do half the work. name each phase before you stat it.

THE FIVE COMMANDMENTS OF PHASE DESIGN

- **Each phase removes something the party relied on.** Light, range, a buff, safe ground, an item.
- **Each phase adds one new verb.** One new move per phase, not five. Players need to learn it under pressure.
- **Phase 3 is shorter than you think.** 25% of HP with the party's resources drained is plenty. End on a high, not a slog.
- **Let the boss talk differently each phase.** Polite → honest → feral. The voice change lands harder than the stat change.
- **Write down what actually happened.** The improvised line, the clutch save, the moment the table went silent — that's the material your next arc is built from. (This is the part Loreify does for you while you run the fight.)

FROM THE PUBLISHER

AUTOMATE YOUR SESSION NOTES

You just ran a three-phase boss fight. Somebody swore revenge, somebody lost a magic item, and somebody made a promise they'll forget by next session.

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