Winning and Losing

Option 1: The Grind

- You win by successfully working your way through a series of 'dungeons' culminating in the most difficult dungeon of all (Dungeon Level 20).
- Winning therefore has two primary objectives. First, survive through each lower level dungeon as a prerequisite for moving on. Second, accumulating sufficient XP and other in-game currency to be able to adequately address the more difficult dungeons.
- In this option, the lower levels are quite a bit easier, and the goal on these levels is to make sure you're gathering adequate intel, magic items, and experience points so that is things get harder you're prepared
- The difficulty could also be set to increase in waves. For example: Dungeon levels 1-3 are easy, 4 is moderate, and 5 is difficult. Then level 6 is easy, 7-8 are moderate, and 9-10 are difficult. Etc.
- Variations on this option have formed the foundation for generations of video games (varying largely in how much 'story' gets layered on top of the fundamental dungeon delving mechanic), and is probably easier to handle in a game where the two sides are not symmetrical in terms of their abilities (the Players have a different set of options available to them than the DM).
- Pros:
- A well-established history of video games and old-school D&D to draw from for inspiration.
- Pacing is easy to handle (it gets harder 'each time')
- Works well with the traditional DM/Player divide
- Cons:
- Can turn into a grind
- The predictable nature of the pacing can steal some tension from the game
- It's the style that's been done the most

Option 2: Sudden Death

- In this option, there is no fixed end point, rather the game ends when certain 'sudden death' conditions are met
- These conditions could include story-related items that make sense in the fictional context: killing the lich king; awakening the prince; locating the lost crown of power
- OR, they could center around a meta-mechanic that was then retconned into the fiction: such asdevelop a lead in levels (if you're supposed to be exploring a level 3 dungeon, and you are level 6, with a 3 level lead, you win)
- If Option 1 is a football game that's going to go 4 quarters regardless, then Option 2 is a mixed martial arts match, where at any point you can roundhouse kick your opponent in the head and knock him out.
- Some sort of a 'timer' element would have to be introduced to keep the pressure on (maybe an AW threat clock that can both advance and retreat? when it runs out you lose? when it drops to zero you win?)
- Pros:
- Could be the most adrenaline pumping option, as the difficulty is highly variable, unpredictable, and winning or losing could happen at any time
- Eliminates 'the grind'
- Almost certainly the more original option to take in a tabletop RPG
- Cons:
- Works better when the sides are symmetrical: unclear as to how it would function in a DM/Player split
- Works better when the competition between sides is the focus of the game (the DM is encouraged here to not be a neutral arbiter, but rather be an active, strategizing opponent)
- fictional win conditions are difficult to define, and as characters level up can change in difficulty (defeating a lich is impossible for level 3 characters, but easy for level 20 characters)
- Would almost certainly require some more complex probability crunching on the part of me, the game designer, that might not be my forte or area of interest