

UNDUNGEON

The points of light have faded. Darkness overtook the land and once prosperous towns and hearty villages now lay deserted or suffer the depredations of evil. In a wicked twist of fate mankind has been driven to the very place that was once home to the scions of malice.

Underground.

Now humanity and her allies cling onto life below the surface, fighting a constant battle between *Those Above* and *Those Below*. Legends sing of the few brave heroes who led them into the darkness, clearing safe passage and an area they can call home. Where once was darkness, torches line the walls and this generation's heroes make dangerous forays *Upside* for food and supplies while guards remain ever vigilant against attacks from below.

This is survivalist role-playing in the world of D&D where the table are turned. The good guys live in the first few levels of the Dungeon while the monsters invade for food, sport or worse. The heroes are responsible for the safety of the Delve; they can organize construction of barricades and traps as well as set guard routes and watch points. Regular trips *Upside* are necessary for food and wood, but these trips are fraught with peril. Heroes may also delve deeper, either to prevent incursion from below or to expand the living area for their Delve's population.

Welcome to **Undungeon**.

Undungeon and Delves

Some say that the first use of Undungeon was a poor joke by a nameless Bard – the world above was undone, so we entered the undungeon. Others say that it refers to the reclaiming itself; these are Dungeons no more, but Undungeons which support life and freedom, the opposite of a Dungeon's original purpose.

Either way, Undungeon is used to describe those areas of the Underdark reclaimed by the surface races. Exactly how far it spreads, no one knows.

Delves are individual locales, analogous to surface hamlets, villages or towns. Most Delves are entirely isolated, and may even believe that they are the last true pocket of civilization on a conquered world. Others may have heard tales of other Delves through legend, or know of them through the journeys of the Far Roamers.

Rarest of all are the Delves which know of and regularly make contact with other Delves through trade routes made safe through the tireless work of countless brave souls. It is possible that these Great Delves are the best hope for the mannish races to thrive once more.

Life in The Dark

Picture a realm where children play up and down corridors and colourful tradesmen peddle their wares from market stalls, where guardsmen remain ever watchful of thieves and worse, and eager youths trade blows with wooden swords in open spaces.

Now imagine that above them is not the sky, but packed earth or solid stone, the children carry candles as they play, the tradesmen are selling mushrooms & roots, and those wooden swords are worth a King's Ransom.

Of the common goodly Races only Dwarves, Eladrin, Elves, Half-Elves and Tieflings possess Low-light Vision, and none possess Darkvision. The oft repeated phrase "Light is Life" is repeated as a mantra, a near-sacred guide to live by. The majority of the Delve's occupants are regular folk (Level 0 Minions) who daily put their trust in those who protect them from The Dark. That's not to say their lives are entirely bleak and full of fear – far from it. Where there is life, there is a reason to celebrate and give thanks. Taverns serve Root Beer while patrons tell tales and share songs of the lost world Upside, and each generation adds to the tales with heroes of their own.

The Undungeon thrives on hard work. Farmers toil for mushrooms & roots while Herders tend Deep Cow (small, Halfling-sized cows, bred to eat roots) herds for food, leather, tallow and bone. Crafters make finely detailed wares and Runners cross the Delve with nothing but a dagger to protect themselves. Noisiest of all are the metal-, bone- and stonemiths who create everything from the weapons and armour of the Deepwatch to the very rooms, foundations and pillars of the Delve itself.

Light is Life

Candles are used by all as a measure of time, wealth and distance. A Candle costs (and is equivalent to) 1sp and are marked at 1/10th intervals into divisions called Candlemarks. Candles can be split at the Candlemarks to equate to 1cp in worth, and the intervals can be partially melted and re-joined to form whole candles. Particularly ornate, large or elaborate candles cost significantly more.

Most traders use Candles as currency – indeed, the majority of poorer citizens will only use Candles and may never see a copper or silver piece their entire life, much less a gold one.

The wealthier Delve residents use candles as a measure of their wealth, using hundreds of them to light their homes where just a handful of dried root torches would serve the same function, literally burning their wealth for all to see.

Each candle lasts exactly 10 hours, and each interval therefore 1 hour. Those who can afford it keep a Time Candle burning by the hearth which is replaced every 10 hours as a measure of the passing hours. Those that cannot instead regulate their days by the numerous Delve Candles which are maintained by the mysterious and all powerful Candlekeepers.

Distance is also measured by Candle – 1 Candlemark equals 3 miles (the distance a man can walk in 1 hour), and a whole candle is equals to 30 miles of travel. Smaller distances are measured in fractions of a Candlemark, and regular travellers use intricately carved candles which denote divisions down to a hundredth of a Candlemark (about 50'), or even less.

“What use is a Gold Piece? Can I burn it? Can it light my way? Can it tell me how far I have walked, or what time it is? No sir. Give me ten candles, and keep your worthless trinkets. Light is life.”

The Deepwatch

Protecting the Delve is the sacred duty of the Deepwatch. More than guards, these are the brave souls who stand first in line against any threat to the safety of the Delve. They spend many years in relentless training, forswearing their own family as they take the Deepwatch Oath. The Delve has no room for prisons, or time for prisoners, and the Deepwatch act as judge, jury and (if need be) executioner.

Life as a member of the Deepwatch is unpredictable. One moment you can be cuffing a pickpocket around the ears and the next facing off against a rogue Owlbear who has blundered through the marketplace walls.

The majority of the Deepwatch are Human Guards (MM162/MV171) though individuals (possibly the PCs or significant NPCs) can come from any class. More than a few Deepwatch members are Paladins who have taken the protection of the Delve as their holy blessed duty, and some Deepwatch members favour a Wand or Staff over a swordplay. How you fight matters less than the fact you are willing to fight at all.

The Deepwatch traditionally wear black floor-length cloaks of heavy fabrics. Higher ranking Deepwatch members gain a cloak which appears to blend the wearer into his surroundings (counts as an Elven Cloak (PHB250) in all respects). No other badge of office is given, or required, as all Deepwatch members are expected to be treated equally, both inside the organization and without.

“The Deepwatch are my brothers. These walls are my home. Threaten either, and it will be your final act under this earth. This, I swear. Light is life.”

The Far Roamers

While the Deepwatch's duty is to protect the Delve, the Far Roamers' duty is to explore and expand. Where most residents of Undungeon consider darkness to be the enemy, and lair of all the evils in the world, the Far Roamers see it as a place to be tamed. Beating in their hearts is the same spirit of hope and adventure which guided the first heroes who led the people underground.

Unlike the rigid Deepwatch, the Far Roamers are a loose organization who share a belief that their Delve needs to expand in order to survive, and this means brave pioneers must face the darkness head-on, step into it with courage and make it safe for the light to spread.

As befitting an organization whose members walk daily into the lion's den, the Far Roamers welcome anyone who is willing (or mad enough) to join. A sizeable number of their membership comes from the races with Low-light vision. Perhaps they feel better able to pierce the veil of darkness, or yearn for a space to truly call their own in the claustrophobic confines of the Delve.

Unlike the Deepwatch, there's no such thing as a "typical" member with all races and classes being well represented. The Ranger class can claim to be more common than any of the other classes, but even that is only by a small margin. Far Roamers share no common sigil or uniform. Even so, it's easy to identify a Far Roamer for what he (or she) is. As most Delvers would put it, they all share "a certain madness behind the eyes."

There's a motto among Far Roamers: "If you have to travel alone, take someone with you." Far Roamers might be viewed as insane by the majority of Delve residents, but even they are not crazy enough to go solo into the Dark. Most Far Roamer expeditions involve several members with a wide variety of skills and talents.

Far Roamers is an ideal organization for an adventuring party who wish to use the Delve as a base of operations with regular forays into the wider Underdark. Their role as pioneering explorers who make fresh areas of the Dark safe for expansion is prime role-playing fodder for an eager adventuring party!

"Light is life, Darkness is hope."

Incursion

The greatest fear shared by most residents of a Delve is not the Darkness that surrounds, but the Darkness which enters. Residents of Undungeon regularly face threat of invasion by wandering bands of Orcs, Goblins and worse, and more than one Delve has been entirely destroyed by a Dragon keen to claim the land as her own.

While the Deepwatch form the first line of defence against incursion, Delves are typically created with defence in mind. Stone pillars are rigged to collapse and bring down ceilings in the event of invasion, and carefully prepared traps (see below) await any unwelcome visitor. The Deepwatch carry out regular Incursion Drills which prepare the populace against invasion. These serve to ensure that the corridors are cleared quickly in order for the Deepwatch to mobilise and any possible entry points are sealed. Some residents are trained to prepare and reset traps or act as Runners while others spread flammable material on the floor along expected monster routes. If there's one thing that Dungeon Monsters don't like, it's walking through fire.

Few Delves take the Far Roamers into account when it comes to preparing themselves against Incursion. They see them as too unreliable to be trustworthy during an invasion. In some ways, this is to the Far Roamer's advantage as they can act with freedom outside the Deepwatch's rigid plans and strike where they are needed. Delves has been saved thanks to the timely and imaginative intervention of the Far Roamers – much to the chagrin of the Deepwatch!

"A door that cannot stop an Owlbear is not a door worthy of the name."

Upside

Above the ground and under the sky is *Upside*, a fearsome place where the undead roam without limit and foul Demons and worse hold court. Ancient human cities burn and the land itself heaves in protest.

In short, it's most definitely not a good place to be – at least, not until Paragon Tier.

Legends speak of the treasures of *Upside*, of mighty weapons and armour that will be a boon to any Delve, of tomes of knowledge and power, and more. Whispered tales even speak of *Upside Havens*, sanctuaries of light above ground where the residents live in (comparative) safety amid the vastness of evil.

Such tales are generally frowned upon by sensible folks who say they are nothing more than rumours spread by followers of Demons who use such words to lure the foolish to their doom.

Or are they?

Expansion

For a Delve to survive, it needs to expand. Most Delves began as little more than traditional Dungeon Delve (three encounter zone) areas that have been cleared by a group of heroes. While this area was made safe, that small pocket of space became home to a few hundred frightened souls. Expansion was an urgent priority back then, and the lessons learned in those first harrowing months have become mantras for subsequent generations.

“Identify, attack, secure.”

There is little point attacking until you know the enemy, and even less point in securing an area that is not yet purged of monsters. This mantra encourages steady, methodical progress and cautions against hotheads who are keen to enter the Dark without first knowing what to expect. At the same time it is expansionist, and a well organised Delve is adept at sending out Far Roamer scouting parties to one area while another is being cleansed and a third location is being made secure for habitation. If the order is adhered to, Delves can expand with startling speed. Some may say that they have to, as one misstep in the Underdark can unleash a force which can decimate a Delve’s living space.

“Roamer first, Roamer second, Deepwatch third.”

The Far Roamers serve two essential roles in the expansion of the Delve. They act as forward scouts, seeking and mapping fresh areas that can be annexed to the existing Delve. When these scouts report back, the Roamers send a larger, well trained team to clear out the initial inhabitants. Only when this is complete do the Deepwatch enter and ceremonially claim the area for the Delve.

Younger and more foolish Far Roamers sneer that the Deepwatch are cowards who only turn up when the monsters are gone, but in truth the Deepwatch have the toughest job of all. It’s one thing to clear an area, but an entirely different matter to keep it clear, especially while protecting the craftsmen, masons and other workers who are striving to turn the place into safe accommodation.

Traps and Hazards are constructed around the Delve in order to capture food or prevent monster incursion. Traps cost a number of *gp* equal to their XP value (or XP multiplied by ten in Candles) to construct – a Level 1 trap costs 100gp, level 2 120gp, level 3 150gp, etc.

Traps automatically kill or capture (50% chance of either) Minions who fail their trap checks, but other creatures are likely to simply smash through them, taking hit point damage if they fail their trap checks. Traps are therefore only really effective as deterrents or boundary markers, likely to be respected by weaker intelligent monsters (“Goblins keep out!”), but ignored entirely by more powerful dungeon denizens.

Undungeon Adventures

The Undungeon can be used in several ways:

- A Delve could act as a base of operations for your party, a comparatively safe zone where the team gain new Quests from NPCs. This is a good setup if you like the flavour of Undungeon but prefer to use published adventures. Have the NPCs be residents of the Delve, and set other dungeons several Candlemarks away. Add wandering monsters en route to taste.
- Delves could act as small pockets of civilization in a huge mega-dungeon, providing the heroes with safe areas where they can rest, refuel and restock before setting out once more. The party could be intrepid explorers signed up with the Far Roamers, or simply free souls out to explore and discover the treasures of an ancient age.
- The heroes have been sent out by an isolated Delve to see if they truly are the Last Delve. How they find other Delves (and get back to tell the tale is an over-arching Major Quest is your story, waiting to be told.
- Defend the Delve! Your heroes are members of the Deepwatch or Far Roamers who happen to be in the area. Lay down some dungeon tiles or draw a map to represent a part of the Delve. You have just enough time to prepare 1d6 Traps before the monsters arrive. Can you fend off wave after wave of Encounters and defend the Delve? There's only one way to find out.....

A Typical Delve

Copper Knight Delve began life, it is said, when a group of bold heroes led by Dwarven Paladin Kalavar Copper Knight cleared an old mine of a mighty White Dragon and his Kobold cult followers and led the poor townfolk of Harkenwold to safety below ground (for the truth of Coppernight Hold, see Dungeon Delve p12). The Delve has long since expanded beyond far beyond the original handful of rooms though the surface entrance is still marked with the same statue of a dwarven warrior which greeted the first inhabitants many generations ago. Most common folk believe it to be of Kalavar himself, even though historical documents prove this not to be true. As usual though, fanciful belief trumps documented fact.

Copper Knight Delve, as befits its history, boasts a greater than average number of Dwarves in its population, and the typical Deepwatch member is a Dwarven Knight who proudly bears the crossed copper pickaxe symbol on their shield. Non-Dwarf members still wear the black cloak of the Deepwatch, but may not bear the symbol of the Dwarf's hallowed ancestor.

As may be expected, the construction quality of the Delve is excellent with passageways well fortified with foot-thick stone as protection against burrowing monsters.

Delve size: equal to 10 Dungeon Delves (30 encounters) expanding to three levels in depth.

Threats: Kobolds continue to plague Copper Knight Delve regularly, and stories persist that the White Dragon was merely injured and continues to send its minions to reclaim the Delve. A small tribe of Gnolls and Ogres resides to the North but generally keep to themselves unless something more powerful forces them South, and Trolls and Umberhulks occasionally stumble into the corridors. Further afield, the Far Roamers report Red Orcs, Goblins and an ancient tomb swarming with Undead.

Important personalities: Thurimir Copper Knight (real name Thurimir Gimblefoot) is leader of the Deepwatch. He is a Fighter-7/multiclassed Rogue and claimed to be a direct descendant of Kalavar himself. He's deeply regrets that lie, but it is so firmly ingrained in the mythos of the Delve that he fears the Deepwatch itself will suffer if he now admits the truth. He has sworn that if he cannot be a direct descendent by blood, he will be in deed, Thanks to his leadership, the Delve has never fallen, and all residents hold him in the highest respect.

Dracoloth Firehands (Dragonborn Sorcerer-7) and Elustrielle Windsong (Elf Ranger-6) share the leadership of the Far Roamers. They encourage close relations with the Deepwatch and often suggest that its members join them on expeditions in order to learn more about the surrounding threats to the Delve. This don't stop the friendly rivalry between the two organizations, but it has fostered something like respect.

Ospin Dellow (Gnome Artificer-8) is leader of Copper Knight Delve's craftsmen. With no formal guild structure in place (they're far too busy for such bureaucracy), they look to him as their spokesman and trust him implicitly. Unfortunately, Ospin is a cultist in the service of an Aboleth who contacted him from the deepest parts of the Underdark. It is patiently nurturing the Delve to act as it's eyes and ears close to the surface. Through Ospin, it will soon spread its vile evil throughout the whole Delve – and they won't even know they have been invaded.

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