

Dead Simple Supplement 2 - Going Underground

Introduction

Here are some simple steps to help a new GM build his first dungeon.

Decide who the Master is. This is the monster the Adventurers will face at the end of the dungeon. He should be a lot tougher than everyone else and a lot smarter. Some GMs like to think of the Master as being themselves. A Dragon always makes a great Master.

Decide who the Bosses are. These are the monsters the Master uses to manage his troops. You will probably need one Boss for each two sessions you want to run. Then arrange them in order of nastiness. The Adventurers should generally face these Bosses, and their evil minions, in order from weakest to strongest.

Then decide who each Boss's minions are. Thus a Hobgoblin may have three dozen goblins working for him. An Ogre may be leading a platoon of Orcs. A Necromancer may have lots of Zombies and maybe even a Mummy on his payroll.

One thing you do need to consider is this – do your monsters just sit in their rooms waiting for the Adventurers to kick the door in, or can they be encountered in the passages and other chambers going about their daily business?

Goblins could be sent out to collect firewood or water and bump into the party. Skeletons may have a programmed patrol route they follow. An Ogre could be hunting for goblins to eat and find a tastier treat – the Adventurers. Orcs could be travelling to a raid or guarding slaves working on building a new passage or room.

All you have to do now is draw up a map for the first Boss's dungeon level or area. Once you have done that you can begin play, knowing that you have time to build the next level or area as you play the first.

A map is the most important thing for an GM to create. After all he can run the monsters straight out of the rules and use the treasure tables to create loot as he goes.

A map doesn't have to be a work of art, just a simple line drawing on a piece of squared paper will do fine. You can even make it up as you go along though we recommend that you take notes as you do.

Think Deep

Underground dungeons should always be built in three dimensions. There should be several levels and sublevels, linked by stairs, elevators, shafts, ladder, poles, chutes and other interesting methods.

Deep underground the air is moist and cold, except in lava chambers of course. Use this fact to make walls and floors slick or even running with water.

Never worry about cramming lots of chambers into a small areas. The Under-earth is truly vast and besides it doesn't make sense to have lots of aggressive species packed in together. Make your passageways hundreds of feet long if you like.

Also make use of natural cavern systems with their uneven passageways, stalagmites & stalactites, pools and underground rivers.

And remember it is dark down there. Even using lanterns or magical lighting there are always shadows, and we know what lurks in them don't we?

Interesting Features

If you want to make the dungeon fun, make sure you have some interesting features in it such as:

- That fountain or pool, is it magical? Is it safe to drink from? Does a water monster lurk in it? Is there treasure at the bottom?
- Doors and Trapdoors. Most of these should be obvious, but some may be secret. Are they locked, and if so why and who has the key?
- All sorts of furnishings such as benches, forges, statuary, tables, bookcases, chests, barrels, fireplaces, torture racks, weapon racks. People once lived here, or may still.
- Chambers don't have to all be on one level, some can have raised daises, or high balconies from which goblin archers can rain down arrows.
- Secret passages that could lead to hidden rooms, or perhaps go around traps.
- A bottomless chasm with a rope bridge over it.
- Swarms of spiders, centipedes, rats and bats.
- The entrance to the next level or area. You should try to keep this from the Adventurers until they've almost finished the level that they are on.
- Strange carvings or paintings on the walls.
- Puddles of blood and severed body parts.
- Weird noises echoing down the passages. Distant drums are always good (the Mines of Moria), or terrifying howls and screams.
- A lever sticking out of the wall, with sign by it saying "Pull Me". What it does only the GM knows. Who can resist such a thing?
- Doors that rotate or slide instead of opening.
- Iron Portcullises or barred windows, so the Adventurers can see the monsters on the other side (and Vice Versa).
- A sacrificial altar, slick with blood.
- A room where every floor slab has a mysterious Rune on it. It will drive the players mad trying to work out which runes to step on. Add a small trap to one square to really send them paranoid.
- Gold Ducats, or other items, that float in midair. Put a hidden pit under them to make for real fun.
- 2' of dark water in a passage or room. What lies beneath? Perfect place for a simple pit trap.
- A chamber full of a thick mist.
- A single dead body. It could be trapped, or just left as bait by a nasty critter.
- A sad Ghost haunting the place where it was killed.
- Doors that close and lock themselves after the Adventurers have all passed through, or perhaps after only half of them have.

Traps

Some chests, doors and floors have traps on them. Thieves can search for traps. Other Adventurers cannot find them except by triggering them. Some traps may be poisoned.

If a Adventurer opens a chest or a door that has a trap on it, or moves over a floor square with a trap on it, then the trap attacks him. The trap rolls to attack and the victims roll for defence as if it was a combat. The Strength of various traps is as follows:

- Simple +2
- Tough +4
- Magical +6

If the Trap wins it does damage as usual in combat. The trap will remain active until disarmed by a Thief.

Some traps do not damage Adventurers directly. Classic examples of these include:

- The Ten Foot Deep Pit. This usually has smooth or greased walls to prevent people climbing out.
- The Slide. This takes the victim to another room or level, and possibly into a monster's lair.
- The Hanging Snare. This whips the Adventurer upside down and hanging by one foot. Now is the time to send in the Goblins.
- The Giant Ball. This only wounds you if it catches you. It moves at 1D6+2 squares per turn until it hits a wall or other immovable object.
- The Teleport. This transports the unfortunate Adventurer to a completely different, and usually unfamiliar, part of the dungeon.
- The Magnetron. All of an Adventurer's steel or iron kit sticks to this trap. It takes two or three people to pull the stuff off again. Send in the Goblins!
- The Bear Trap. Steel jaws close about the Adventurer's leg locking him in place. If attacked while trapped he gets no Dexterity for his defence.

A Dungeon by any other name

Although this game is initially aimed at creating underground dungeons, don't let this limit you.

What is a haunted Chateau but a large, above ground dungeon? How about an Elven Tree village – a dungeon with very nasty drops? A ruined Temple half sunk into a swamp? A Pirate ship adrift in a stormy sea? The back alleys and winding streets of a great City? A Wizard's Tower?

The reason that Dungeons were the first real roleplaying setting is that you could limit the player's choices and contain the action. This is great while you and your players learn the few rules of this game, but after that your world is literally your oyster.

The sources for your adventures can be as random as a plan of a medieval church, an issue of National Geographic with its wonderful pull out illustrations and maps, or a doodle on a napkin.

Floorplans

The easiest and most practical way of representing your dungeons is to acquire or create a gridded surface. You can buy dry-wipe mats at reasonable prices, or print out a grid and laminate it. Then you use dry-wipe whiteboard markers in a variety of colours to draw the layout of your dungeon as you go.

Or you can buy pre-made card Floorplans. These are generally modular and each sheet represents a chamber or corridor section. You just lay them down as the players see them. There are many companies now selling these either in hard copy form or as Pdf's you can print off on card.

That said there are many excellent artists on the internet who create and share these floorplans for free.

One way we have seen this done at small cost and effort is to print off the Floorplans you need and then slip them into transparent document pockets. This makes them fairly durable in play and means they can be changed quickly.