

Hello, all

Here's a bit of a preface, but if you want to skip it and just see an explanation of the changes, go ahead and skip down to the heading "Levels".

Also, if you haven't read Volume 1 (chapters 1-75) and for some reason are reading this, there are some spoilers.

As I mentioned a few weeks ago, SRK and I are moving through volume I and making some tweaks here and there to make sure that everything governing the plot and world moving forward is as sturdy a foundation as we can give it. Most of the changes are minor and just involve some cleanup of loose threads, but the biggest thing that we're adjusting are Delver levels.

Delver levels are pretty meaningless if you lack Arlo's soul-sight ability. As it stands, a level 30 could have anywhere from 30 bonus stat points up to 240 bonus stat points. It's a pretty godly difference, and it comes down to what type of Delves they've done.

Delver levels only gave you a measure of a Delver's experience. A level thirty copper has experience in thirty Delves, whereas a platinum with a similar amount of points (32) has done four. However, the quality of that experience is worlds apart, so even using levels as a measuring stick for experience is dubious.

It has also led to some confusion with beta readers, RR readers, my SO, my write group... That ultimately led me to add quite a bit of exposition from Arlo to simplify the mechanics via the PR system for the reader, so that they can follow along a little more easily when characters are talking about "Level 30 copper," or "Level 20 silver," or "level 90 gold with a standard thirty-level difficulty progression." It was an interesting idea, but I don't think it does the narrative any favors in its current form.

So, here's what we're doing moving forward:

Levels

Levels are still a measure of the total number of Delves conquered. However, it is being standardized against Platinum as a baseline.

A Delver is no longer guaranteed to gain a level by completing a single Delve on any difficulty. Now, the Delver must complete a specific number of Delves at a given difficulty to earn a level. The breakdown is as follows:

8 Copper = 1 Level

4 Silver = 1 Level

2 Gold = 1 Level

1 Platinum = 1 Level

Any combination of Delves that would normally net you 8 stat points yields a level. This way, two Delvers who are both level ten, for example, are within a fairly narrow range of stat points between one another (80-87).

The characters in the story initially use the number of Delves or the number of stat points interchangeably when discussing how to level, since they are essentially the same by their understanding—to get stats you have to go through Delves. But, Arlo violates the stat rule, with his level being entirely based on the Delves he has completed. It is thus revealed that the levels are purely correlated to the number of Delves completed and are perhaps inaccurate as an absolute measure of stats.

Although levels are now a more reliable measure of a Delver's strength, providing an easier rule of thumb for the reader to gauge characters by, they are not a guarantee. This retains the original goal of levels being a somewhat misleading value and still allows Arlo to have better insight into a Delver's real strength, without making it overly complicated to figure out what the relative strength between two Delvers should *normally* be. Two characters at level twenty are probably in the same league, although there may still be significant differences in their level of skill, even if their stats are equal.

Metals/Difficulties:

The difficulty that a Delver pursues still has a significant impact on their relative strength to other Delvers of their own level. A level ten platinum has experience in much longer and more challenging Delves and has survived them through outrageous training, dedication, skill, and luck.

The level ten platinum has also earned greater rewards in the form of wealth, loot, knowledge, and sometimes unique abilities or perks as opposed to a level ten pursuing

a lower difficulty. A level ten who has done nothing but silver and copper Delves will be ill-prepared to battle a level ten platinum if it came down to it, having lower intrinsic skills, crappier equipment, and a far less nuanced understanding of their own abilities and how to exploit them. The level ten plat and the level ten silver have similar stats, but their ability to put those stats to use varies by a lot. It is still the case that the difficulty of Delves undertaken by a Delver is not immediately obvious to anyone without competent research, insider information, or a unique ability such as Arlo's soul-sight.

Higher difficulties also increase the soft cap that the character has for their maximum level. **This gets a little into the material covered more fully in Volume 2, but a good bit will likely find its way into Volume 1 as we continue slugging our way through it. This is also something that was hinted at in a few places in the present form of Volume I, so it shouldn't sound totally unfamiliar (hopefully). However, if you want to avoid any chance of mechanical spoilers (not really plot-related, just the mechanics of how Delvers pursue Delves), don't read beyond this line.**

Most Delvers pursue a standard 30 Delve per difficulty progression. This is because Delves slowly increase in relative difficulty, even when considering a Delver's growth in stats when completing a Delve, and growth in intrinsic skills between Delves. This is also why so many Delvers usually wait a while before going into their next Delve. Even with their new stats, they need to train to learn how to apply the stats and grow their intrinsics to stand a chance at the next rung of the ladder.

The common wisdom is that a competent and dedicated Delver has a good chance of surviving thirty Delves at a difficulty they resonate with. This is still a very dangerous endeavor, and the mortality rate is certainly higher than virtually any other profession once you're tackling gold or plat. After completing thirty Delves of a specific difficulty, the Delver then drops down to the next highest difficulty and is likely capable of conquering thirty more Delves in that lower tier.

Nothing is stopping a Delver from going 'up' a tier, but it will be very difficult, and making the jump only gets harder as you level. In most cases, the attempt is lethal.

This naturally results in those who pursue higher difficulties having a lot more runway with their level cap.

For a copper who only tackles thirty copper Delves, they will reach the upper ranges of level 3 but will be unlikely to reach level 4 or higher. $30/8 = 3.75$

There's no lower difficulty for the copper to drop down to, so once they can no longer safely complete copper, they're out of the leveling game.

A silver Delver with a 30 silver, 30 copper progression has the benefit of 7.5 more levels. $30/4 + 30/8 = 11.25$.

A gold Delver with a 30-30-30 progression gets $30/2 + 30/4 + 30/8 = 26.25$. This level, 26, is the adjusted level of characters like Umi-Doo, who were level ninety golds. These are very powerful and relatively rare individuals.

For platinum, the rule of thumb is not to do platinum. If you do platinum anyway, there's historical precedent for what other successful plats did to level, but there is no "common" wisdom on how a platinum Delver progresses through the difficulty because there are so few of them. However, as an example, we can look at the Dukgriens, who were some of the pioneers of the "30-level" difficulty progression.

Both Matriarch and Patriarch Dukgrien have 30 plats, 30 golds, and 30 silvers under their belts. This results in $30/1 + 30/2 + 30/4 = 52.5$

Thus, the Dukgriens, the most powerful Delvers seen in Volume I, are level 52.

Other stuff and junk:

Everything else is pretty minor. The only other thing that may be notable is that the Inquisition subplot from act 2 has mostly been removed. It all got hand-waved by Umi-Doo anyway. When I was writing Volume 1, I got to the point of the story where it was supposed to happen and I wasn't excited to write it. So, I got rid of it. There's still a one-liner from Lito that mentions it, so you may still get to see it come back to haunt Arlo, but there's no weird build-up and stress and anxiety about it, to suddenly get blue-balled by Umi-Doo in chapter 38 or wherever it was. That second Umi-Doo chapter is also getting a bit of an overhaul, but it won't change anything substantively, just hopefully make it a little less of a mess.

If anything else of note happens I'll let you know, but I doubt much else will be significant. The only thing that has any potential for confusing someone who has already read Volume I and is going into Volume 2 is the levels as mentioned above.

I think.

The full text of the edited Volume I will be available to kernel and cob tiers as a pdf and probably epub, but I may need to look a little harder at formatting for the epub, so it's not just complete trash.

Relatedly, *do* the epubs look like trash? I've poked around in a few of them but I don't use an e-reader, so hopefully they look ok. Seems like the formatting can be weird in places, but overall it's readable.

Anyway, we should be done editing Volume I by the end of the month.

Thanks! Let me know if you have any questions.