

CONDITIONS IN THE UNDERWORLD

AMBIENT LIGHTING

The Underworld is dimly illuminated by an ambient blue-green light that emanates from the walls, floors, and ceilings of the vaults, chambers, caverns, and passageways, large and small. This light provides decent visibility for 60' before fading into miasmal obscurity. Large shapes can still be made out at 120', but beyond that, nothing. Torches, lanterns, and *light* spells will serve the dual purposes of highlighting the user's position and limiting vision to 30'.

This lighting does not occur in certain areas (such as worm-carved tunnels or dwellings hewn into the Underworld walls), as indicated in the descriptions of individual encounter areas.

AMBIENT CHAOS

The closer one gets to the center of the earth, where Primal Chaos slowly decays in its twice-eternal half-life, the greater the intensity of ambient Chaos. This radiation is capable of destroying life or altering its form in surprising ways. These effects only come into play if the characters are out of red or blue anti-Chaos pills. If they are wandering the Underworld unprotected by the pills, each week they must make a Fortitude save (DC 10 +1 per week of unprotected exposure). Failure indicates the effects of ambient Chaos have overtaken them.

EFFECTS OF LONG-TERM EXPOSURE TO THE UNDERWORLD

d12	EFFECT
1	Paranoiachyper-vigilance: reduced sleep requirement/ accelerated aging process, shifty eyes, constant perspiration [+1 to initiative rolls]
2	Rapid onset full-body hair loss

d12	EFFECT
3	Total color blindness: everything appears as shades of green, visual acuity increased by several megapixels. Detect hidden objects (doors and the like): +4; may have other situational effects as per the judge.
4	Sallow, sickly appearance, unhealthy anti-glow: -1d to Personality checks
5	Absorption of trace airborne elements: AC +2; -1 skill check penalty, d8 fumble die (as leather armor). Temporary: -1d to Agility checks and Reflex saves; restored after a full day of rest.
6	Olfactory enhancement: picking up the subtleties once ignored, +4 to detect abuscades, condition permanent until reversed by exposure to fresh surface air
7	Cave depression: emotional responses muted, adrenaline tolerance through the roof, immune to fear effects, magical or otherwise.
8	Ration starvation: vitamins/minerals missing from feed; weight loss, bad breath, immune system compromised: -1d to all saves. Personality checks -1d until corrected with nutritious food.
9	Low-light vision enhanced: Infravision 30'; if the character already has infravision, extended by 30'.
10	Dungeon pragmatism: atrophy permanently erodes empathy, compassion, regard for sanctity of life; role-play for the amusement of the table
11	Systemic fungal infection: increases Strength [+1] and Stamina [+3], occludes thought process [-1d4 Intelligence]
12	Total acclimation: Underworld environment seems like home, surface life just an increasingly vague memory, surface folk instantly regard you as a weirdo, -1 to Personality checks when dealing with surface-dwelling NPCs. Can't stop jawing about how great the Underworld is.

MAJOR REGIONAL UNDERWORLD FACTIONS & THEIR RELATIONSHIPS

For statistics, see **Appendix F: Monsters, Treasures, and Spells** [p.261] and individual encounter areas.

1. SHAGGATH-KA THE WORM SULTAN AND HIS CULT

Shaggath-Ka remains obscure to surface folk, but in this region of the Underworld his name is a byword for terror. This fully mature Chaos godling takes the form of a colossal, vaguely anthropomorphic worm with a taste for depravity and hungry for the blood sacrifice of sentient beings.

In his breeding pits, Shaggath-Ka's unspeakable wives produce inexhaustible numbers of worm soldiers (and other servitor creatures) with which he has secured considerable Underworld territories. According to cult dogma, before he can focus on spreading his influence to the surface world, he must first destroy and consume his brother worm godling, Kwanju, believed to have manifested somewhere along the Black Ooze River.

Shaggath-Ka is primarily concerned with his more highly populated territories to the west but is still the preeminent Chaos godling and major power in this section of the Underworld. This outlying area, the crossroads for two important Underworld thoroughfares, the Devil's Highway and Hell's Back Road, provides income via roadside **Graven Images** (see p. 52), but little else of interest for the ambitious godling. Now, following a barely thwarted assassination attempt by heroes from the surface world, the Worm Sultan's minions seek to capture or destroy any remaining survivors.

Shaggath-Ka has granted the Cult of Nul license to operate its chain of temples along the Devil's Highway and has no official position on the science fungoids.

2. CULT OF NUL

Nul cultists fall into two basic categories; the fanatics who voluntarily snip off their own heads and install in their place aerial receivers and the cabal of sorcerers who exploit their credulity for material gain.

An up-and-coming Underworld cult, but one lacking a deity willing (or able) to manifest on the physical plane, the Nullites seek to cultivate alliances wherever possible. They pay princely tribute to Shaggath-Ka to exploit the tourist trade along the Devil's Highway. To curry favor with the Worm Sultan, the Nullites are assisting efforts to apprehend his assailants following the recent assassination attempt, and will come to his aid if threatened.

Their attempts at diplomatic outreach to the science fungoids have lead to a tentative secret alliance. All Underworld contact between these parties remains completely clandestine, but on the surface the two powers are conducting their first joint maneuvers (see **ODIOUS UPLANDS**).

See Appendix P: Patrons should the characters be nutty enough to want their heads sawed off and an antenna installed.

3. SCIENCE FUNGOIDS

Science fungoids, cheerful mushroom-shaped beings for whom the act of inquiry is an end in itself, are numerous, wily, and difficult to destroy. They pursue knowledge unfettered by any sense of moral decency and consider other sentient beings as lab rats, to whom they are unfailingly polite and pleasant.

Their main seat of power lies to the northeast of this region and deeper below the surface, on the shores of the Black Ooze River. Here, the fungoids propagate experimental fungal gardens and remain aloof from the clashes of Chaos godlings. They play the long game and have secret plans for everyone (including their new Cult of Nul allies).

4. THE GRAY DWARF INSURGENCY

The gray dwarves (like their cousins the blue dwarves and bat-winged dwarves) are in most respects similar to the familiar dwarves of fantasy fiction. These Underworld natives, once wealthy providers of contracted services, now losers of a series of devastating trade wars, take slow revenge upon the Chaos godlings and other parties that ruined their economy. Their secret plans include attempts to sow the seeds of war among their enemies through subterfuge and cunning acts of terrorism. Universally despised, they have no problem collaborating with surface folk so long as it serves their ends.

5. THRANTRIX THE INEFFABLE

Thrantrix, a freshly born Chaos godling in the form of a whirling, levitating ball of snakes, really hasn't had the time or wherewithal to establish relationships yet and still considers most anything she comes across as a potential worshiper. She does, however, sense that Shaggath-Ka is badly wounded and would like nothing more than to finish him off and steal his flock and influence.

See Appendix P: Patrons should the characters wish to attached themselves to Thrantrix' star – growing in power as she does.

6. AND THE REST

Many of the other beings in the various encounter tables and areas have some prominence in the Underworld generally but are out of their element here and well beyond their spheres of influence. They may choose to ignore, aid, or oppose PCs, depending on the circumstances.

LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

Underworld Common is spoken by most sentients and is almost identical to the common tongue of the surface world, though pronunciation is skewed by the outrageous accents characteristic of each sentient type (I usually attempt my Toshio Mifune impersonation for the voices of grey humanoids).

High Beetlese, the ancient tongue from which all modern languages descended, is also the language of magic, which allows Magic-Users to read and understand it in most instances.

See the new language table in the Operation Unfathomable Player's Guide, DCC RPG Edition. Otherwise, consider replacing one of the languages exclusive to wizards, clerics, and elves on the standard table in the core rules. Centaur is a great choice. Who the hell wants to talk to them anyway?

The section of Highway this adventure centers around is a kind of no-man's-land between the influence of the grey humanoids' Castle Ziro to the west, Shaggath-Ka's territories to the southwest, and pockets of various weirdness to the east.



THE DEVIL'S HIGHWAY

This major Underworld thoroughfare was once the main artery connecting several important centers of the extinct Beetle civilization and remains in heavy use for trade among Underworld sentients. Routine maintenance continues via the strange segmented giants (see **Appendix F: Monsters, Treasures, and Spells**, p. 261), though their population has now dwindled and those remaining can no longer keep up the Highway to their innate aesthetic standards.

Behavior on the Highway varies from species to species, but most give one another wide berths, avoid open conflict, and respect fellow travelers despite otherwise unpleasant relations. Banditry occurs, but is relatively rare in areas controlled by godlings and their cults or Underworld civilizations, who tend to provide at least nominal security within their spheres of influence. In emergencies, human-sized creatures flee to the shelter of concealed foxholes along the cave walls, created by the Beetles long ago as roadside protection from the Underworld's more colossal elements.

HELL'S BACK ROAD

Like the Devil's Highway, this miles-long cavern once served as an important trade route for the Beetles but now sees much less frequent travel as the Underworld areas it connects have reverted to Chaos in the eon since the Genocide Period. Served by the segmented giants only infrequently, the floors are often obstructed by fallen debris, and accreting elements have rendered its walls baroque with weird shapes and drooping stalactites.

Movement here is at half the normal rate.

SMALLER PASSAGES & CAVES

Conditions in these areas, with the exception of ambient lighting, are functionally similar to those of traditional "dungeons".



YEAH, IT GETS TO YOU AFTER A WHILE.

THE LIGHT WAS THE COLOR OF PHLEGM, FORGOT WHAT THE SUN LOOKED LIKE, I CAN'T RECALL THE NAMES OF ANY OF THE POOR BASTARDS WE LEFT UNDER PILES OF GRAVEL BY THE ROADSIDE, AND IT STANK.

I STANK, THEY STANK, WE ALL STANK, SPECIALLY THE POOR BASTARDS BY THE ROADSIDE, BUT AT LEAST THEY HAD THE EXCUSE OF DECOMPOSITION.

BRING A GAS MASK, THEN AT LEAST YOU ONLY HAVE TO SUFFER YOUR OWN BAD BREATH.



ENCOUNTERS & OTHER RANDOM WEIRDNESS

Because of the highly dangerous and unpredictable conditions in the Underworld and the presence of several factions all looking for the same object, judges should check for random weirdness at the beginning of each turn spent on the Devil's Highway and Hell's Back Road, and every other turn in other areas. Weirdness occurs on a roll of 1–2 on a d6. In secluded caves and chambers the chances drop to 1 in 6. If the roll indicates events or encounters, roll on the **Master Event Table**.

The use of these tables is intended to supply surprises for the judge as well as the players. Results should be altered (or ignored) as required by the circumstances of the game as it unfolds.

If a less random approach is preferred, the judge should freely pick and choose from the entries to create maximum drama, engineer a satisfactory conclusion for the session, or ensure that whatever happens is cool. If desired, these encounters and events could be preselected to provide a more “programmed,” and therefore more easily manageable, scenario.

MASTER EVENT TABLE

d12	MASTER EVENT
1-4	Underworld Phenomena
5-8	Competing Parties & Underworld Travelers
9-11	Wandering Horrors
12	Roll twice and combine results (rerolling additional 12s)

Each entry in the tables below is fully described on the page noted.

UNDERWORLD PHENOMENA

1d6 in smaller passages, 1d8 on Hell's Back Road, 1d12 on Devil's Highway [see p. 22 for details]

d6/d8/d12	UNDERWORLD PHENOMENA
1	Blackout
2	Whirlwind of unbidden transportation
3	Seismic gas activity
4	Sounds without cause
5	Cave lightning
6	Procession of skulls
7	Spectral spectators
8	The Cold Fires
9	Worm tremor
10	Mutagenic cloud
11	Stench of unknown origin
12	Blinding illumination

COMPETING PARTIES & UNDERWORLD TRAVELERS

1d8 in smaller passages, 1d12 on Hell's Back Road, 1d20 on Devil's Highway [see p. 24 for details]

d8/d12/d20	COMPETING PARTIES & UNDERWORLD TRAVELERS
1	Professor Zabon Gormontine, the Robot Master
2	Doctor Ephraim Thontorios
3	Sorcerer's expedition
4	Grey humanoid wedding party
5	Nul priest with two-headed ape mummy bodyguard
6	Terrified woolly Neanderthal spirit-questers
7	Nul priests and decapitante war party
8	Worm constabulary of Shaggath-Ka on authorized revenge rampage
9	Doomed Templars
10	Slugman business trip
11	Science Fungoid shipping crew
12	Merchant riding glutton-newt and Guild Warden
13	Blue dwarf work gang
14	Mutineers
15	Ilgoriath and Yeen-su
16	Ootherion, ape myrmidon
17	Underworld Ranger patrol
18	Blind antler men
19	Segmented giant
20	Worm priest and entourage

WANDERING HORRORS

1d6 in smaller passages, d8 on Hell's Back Road, d12 on Devil's Highway [see p. 41 for details]

d6/d8/d12	WANDERING HORRORS
1	Mind-bats [1d4]
2	Giant pill bugs [1d4]
3	Firebomb beetle
4	Flaming hounds [12]
5	Bewildered Martian ape
6	Hrrk and Krrgh, Twin Princes of the Magmen
7	Chaos flies [8] with carrion cargo
8	Psychotic cyclops
9	Uurx the Impervious
10	Cave swallows [6]
11	The Egg Carrier
12	Thrantrix the Ineffable

UNDERWORLD PHENOMENA

1 | BLACKOUT

Without warning, the ambient lighting of the Underworld crackles and goes out, leaving characters in a totally lightless environment. After 2d4 turns the blue-green illumination just as suddenly returns. Any artificial light produced by the adventurers during the blackout will, of course, make them stick out like the proverbial sore and glowing thumb. Infravision works normally during the blackout conditions.

2 | WHIRLWIND OF UNBIDDEN TRANSPORTATION

A miniature twister careers wildly about the area, moving generally in the direction opposite to that of the adventurers. Anyone in the 10'-diameter area must make a Reflex save [DC 12] or be swept up in the funnel. At the judge's discretion, characters are dropped and dazed for 1 turn, but otherwise unharmed. Roll 2d4-1 for the number of objects, other than helpless adventurers, dropped by the whirlwind, and consult the table below.

d12	WHIRLWIND CONTENTS
1	Pack of cigarettes from the future, vitamin rich, quite good for you. Smoke a pack of cigarettes and gain a permanent hit point. Sounds like the '60s!
2	Unidentifiable alien skull, notable for three eye sockets, three-way mandibles lined with razor-sharp teeth, and distended braincase
3	Science fungoids: 1d4, immune to whirlwind daze effect; immediately attempt to get any humanoid present to agree to brief measure of intellectual capacity using calipers, pay one ancient gold coin per participant, note results on clipboard, toddle off laughing like tiny hyenas
4	Foppish floppy hat, sized for giant; bejeweled hat pin worth 250 gp
5	Dead Nanuits, innumerable [see Encounter Area 21: Ice City of the Nanuits , p. 79]
6	Giant pill bug, dazed; lashes out in anger anyway then rolls off. This pill bug is -1d to all action dice, damage rolls, and saves due to the effects of the whirlwind.
7	Tunnel prawn, dazed, delicious, and nutritious; 12 servings.
8	Wax-sealed vial containing a Potion of Advantageous Auto-Decapitation [p.283]
9	Human hand wearing cursed Ring of Lassitude [see p. 284]

d12 WHIRLWIND CONTENTS

10	2d20 purple, polished semiprecious stones; legal tender in Slugtown on the Black Ooze River, each worth 1 gp in the Underworld, 1 sp on the surface
11	Smashed fragments of potion bottle with dried residue; if licked, gets subject high for one turn of hilarity
12	Leather belt with golden, bejeweled Black Ooze River Town Wrestling Championship buckle; 300 gp value, 1,000 gp in Black Ooze River Town

3 | SEISMIC GAS ACTIVITY

A violent but momentary tremor shakes loose stalactites, topples columns, and creates a number of narrow cracks in the floor. In the ensuing chaos, characters must make Reflex saving throw [DC 8] to avoid 1d6 damage from falling debris. Simultaneously, the fissures in the floor flood the area [20' cube] with a scintillating gas that heals 1 HD of damage and adds 1d6 Strength for 1d4 turns.

4 | SOUNDS WITHOUT CAUSE

A terrible resonant gurgling followed by a series of dinosaur-sized bleats and warbles emanates from the passage ahead. The noise is loud enough to make shouting necessary for communication and, if traced to its source, seems to be coming from empty air. Touching or otherwise disturbing the air around this obnoxious chaotic effect causes it to immediately cease. Otherwise, the sounds continue for a full turn.

Mysterious disturbances, though frequent in the Underworld, often attract attention: roll once on the **Wandering Horrors** table.

5 | CAVE LIGHTNING

Following a momentary smell of ozone, a deafening thunderclap accompanies the outbreak of horizontal cave lightning, ricocheting around the area in a blinding flash. Each character in the entire passage or chamber, regardless of size, must roll a Reflex saving throw [DC 2]. If any characters or creatures fail this save, they take 5d6 damage [DC 12 Reflex for half damage].

BIT OF A TROUSER FILLER,
THE OLD SUBTERRANEAN LIGHTNING,
AT LEAST THE FIRST COUPLE
OF TIMES YOU MEET IT.

LEARN TO SPOT THE SIGNS,
DROP A CALTROP AS A LIGHTNING
ROD, AND RUN LIKE DYSENTERY.