

UNDERCRAWL

TRAVEL RULES FOR DUNGEON GAMES

playtest draft: 7-8-2025



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GAMEPLAY ORDER

1. Read Description
2. Player Action
Roll, Rest, or Run.
3. Mark Resources
4. Roll Shadowclock
5. Resolve
6. Map Connections
7. Stick Around?
8. Move Out

RESOURCES

- 1 Torch** or Light Spell per Area
1 Ration per player per 6 areas
3 Torches per camp

STICKING AROUND

If the players Stick Around, roll again on the Undercrawl Table, treating any previously rolled numbers on any table as Player Choice.

TREASURE

- 1 **Cursed!** Random item (already being carried) is cursed. GM decides what the item is, what the curse is, and whether it comes up right away or not. Roll again. Reroll 1s.
- 2 **Coins.** $3d6 \times 10$ Coin Value
Or, Roll on the Shadowdark Treasure 0-3 Table. (GM Choice)
- 3 **Gems, Jewels, etc.** $10d6 \times 10$ Coin Value
Or, Roll on the Shadowdark Treasure 4-6 Table (GM Choice)
- 4 **Cultural Relic.** $1d6 \times 100$ Coin Value, plus one Secret.
Or, Roll on the Shadowdark Treasure 7-9 Table (GM Choice)
- 5 **Magic.** Scroll, potion, or other minor item (GM Choice)
- 6 **Player Choice,** 2-5

UNDERCRAWL TABLE

d6	Feature Types
1	Key Feature
2	Treasure
3	Secrets
4	Wayfinding
5	Resources
6	Player Choice, 2-5

WAYFINDING

- Choose a Priority: a desired destination or **Feature Type**.
- Hard INT Check** (DC 15), reveal shortest line to Priority.
- Medium INT Check** (DC 12), reveal 1 path as not the most direct.

RESOURCES

- 1 **Dropped!** Random player loses random piece of gear.
- 2 **Food Source.** $1d4$ Rations per Player
- 3 **Torches.** $3d6$ Torches
- 4 **Store-Room.** $2d6$ gear slots of mundane gear (player choice, GM approval)
- 5 **Arms Cache.** $1d6$ Gear Slots of mundane Weapons + $1d6$ Gear Slots of mundane Armor (GM choice)
- 6 **Player Choice,** 2-5

SECRETS

- 1 **Rumor!** No way of knowing if it's true.
- 2-4 **Secret.** Useful.
- 6 **Revelation.** GM Answers 1 question truthfully, and tells you how you learn this information.

WAYFINDING

- 1 **Wrong Turn!** Burn 1 extra Torch / Light Spell. Disadvantage on your next Direction Check.
- 2 **Good Look Around:** Read the descriptions of all connected zones before Moving Out.
- 3 **Old Map!** Advantage on next $1d4$ Wayfinding Checks
- 4 **Vibe Check.** Before your next Undercrawl Roll, the GM reveals which type of Feature is that Area's Key Feature.
- 5 **Quick & Quiet.** No resources consumed. Reset the Shadowclock to 20.
- 6 **One Quiet Night.** Shadowclock freezes for 8 hours - as long as you stay in this Area and make no Rolls.
Or: **Player Choice,** 2-6



UNDERCRAWL

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Designed for use with

ShadowDark RPG

INTRODUCTION

WHAT IT IS

This is a set of underground travel rules for dungeon games. Like hexcrawling, but in the dark.

It isn't a fully independent game. It's a self-contained add-on to your dungeon-delving game of choice.

It's for getting lost and finding a path in the darkness of places forgotten, forsaken, or lost; the empty places, places where silence is thick with age.

WHAT IT DOES

This game exists to make your world bigger, and deeper.

By creating white space between your dungeons, and then filling it with rumors, secrets, and danger, it creates more meaningful context for your dungeons.

The game is deeply hackable. The core **Undercrawl Table** and the four Features Tables (Treasure, Secrets, Wayfinding & Resources) are all just a place to start. There are thousands of dungeon delving tables out there just waiting to be cannibalized and adapted into this game.

WHY IT EXISTS

I like to think about *Moria*. About the *Tombs of Atuan*. About weeks spent in silence, seeking the secrets of forbidden gods.

I want to know: How deep *is* too deep? And what is sleeping down there? I want to go there. I don't always want to go room by room.

OSR

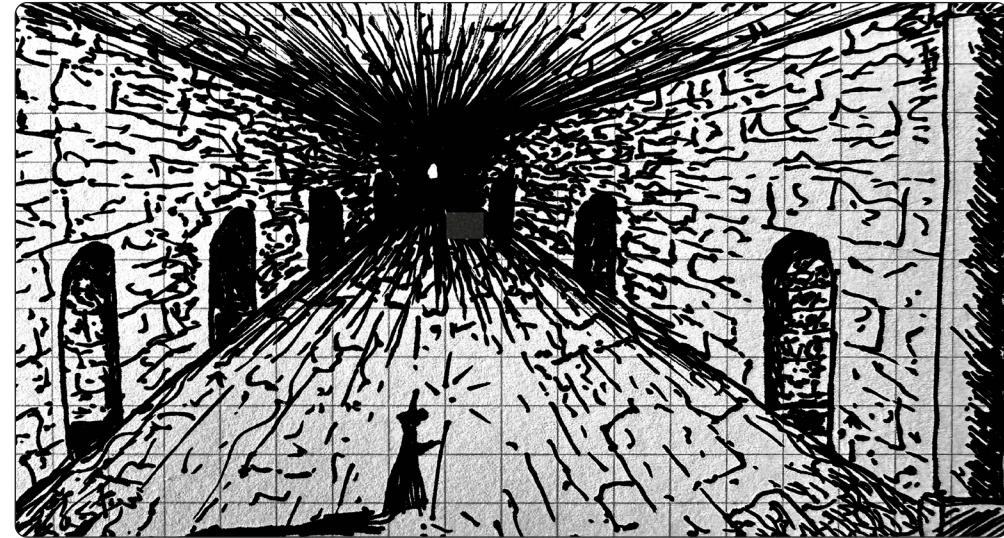
Undercrawl is compatible with any tabletop dungeon delving RPG, but the choices in this game assume that darkness is deadly and light is precious, that gear is limited and treasure matters. In short, it has an **OSR** design.

This game uses **Shadowdark RPG** as its base, including some rules interactions / references. They aren't necessary; it can easily be adapted to other systems.

HALLMARKS

The game should

- ▶ Be quick
- ▶ Provide meaningful choices
- ▶ Strain resources
- ▶ Help you build your world



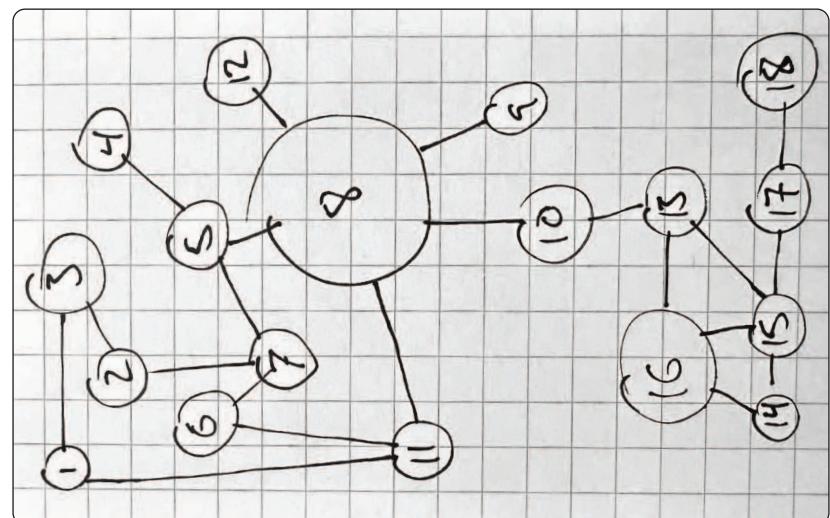
DUNGEONS

Undercrawl is not about dungeons. It's about what's between them.

As a rule of thumb, any time you want to roll Initiative or Ability Checks, flip back to your main game.

POINTCRAWLS

This is a pointcrawl system, emphasizing key locations and the paths between them, rather than detailing everything along the way.



A pointcrawl map.

GAMEPLAY

PLAY ORDER.....

For each new Area, play progresses as follows:

1. Read the Area Description.

2. Player Action.

Players may take one of three actions:

- ▶ Roll
- ▶ Run
- ▶ Rest

3. Mark Resources.

4. Roll Shadowclock.

5. Resolve.

Resolve results of the Player Action, then the Shadowclock.

6. Map Connections.

Read the connection descriptions to the Players.

7. Stick Around?

If the players Stick Around, repeat steps 2-5.

Treating any previously rolled numbers on any table as **Player Choice**.

8. Move Out.

Players may make a **Wayfinding Check**. The players move to a new Area.

ROLL!

Roll on the Undercrawl Table and then roll on the indicated Feature Type table.

Player Choice. Allow players their choice of results on that table as indicated.

Key Feature. The players find the Key Feature on a 1 on the Undercrawl Table, if they roll that Feature Type, or if they choose that feature type with Player Choice (can't choose *Key Feature* as a type).

RUN!

Chancy at best, but sometimes you must. When players Run,

- ▶ No resources are consumed.
- ▶ No Wayfinding Check.
Take a random path.
- ▶ Next Wayfinding Check:
at Disadvantage.

Players may only Run 2 times between rests.

REST!

Use the rest mechanics in your main game for resting.

WAYFINDING.....

Players choose one **Wayfinding Priority** in each Area:

- ▶ A particular destination (the *Great Halls of Aikandar*, etc)
- ▶ A kind of destination (the closest surface exit, etc)
- ▶ A Feature Type

WAYFINDING CHECKS.....

Hard INT Check (DC 15), reveal which direction represents the shortest line to the Wayfinding Priority.

Medium INT Check (DC 12), eliminate 1 choice as not the most direct.

Use the party's highest INT bonus for these checks, regardless of who is rolling.

KNOWN PATHS.....

Wise Players backtrack. If players are

1. traversing Areas they've been through before
2. following the same path they took before (in either direction)
3. and forego the Player Action (going straight to Move Out)

Then there are **no Wayfinding checks** to find their path, and they can move through **two areas** before marking Resources and rolling down the Shadowclock.

SHADOWCLOCK.....

The Shadowclock puts a motor of danger under the game.

Start at 15-20. Begin the clock when you start Undercrawling.

Roll 1d6 after the Players take their Action. Subtract that number from the clock. You can do this openly, or behind a screen - whatever is appropriate to your table.

At 0, there is an Encounter. Random, or from a curated list. Not all encounters should be combat! See **Example Encounters** on p. 22.

Reset the Clock. After the Shadowclock hits 0, or **after any encounter**, reset the clock to 15-20.



PLAY SAMPLE

Dverdaghar Market District.
Key Feature is Treasure.
Shadowclock is at 8.

GM: You follow carved granite down into a series of vast, low, halls – once the town center and market district of a Dvergar city state. Broad lanes, empty storefronts, and warehouses full of abandoned crates & dessicated rat-droppings.

Wayfinder: Smells like treasure!

Mapper: More like rats!

Caller: Mm... She said they were dessicated. Not fresh. Market District seems like treasure. If it's the Key Feature, we'll bag it on a 1, a 2, or a 6. Let's Roll.

GM rolls a 5 on the Shadowclock and ticks it down to 3.

Keeper: I'll mark the torch.

Roller: Okay, I got a 3 on the Undercrawl table: Secrets.

GM Rolls on the Secrets Table, and gets a 1: Rumor. She pulls one from a prepped stack: Giant spiders infest the old Iron Mine (area 12).

GM: In an abandoned cart, you find an old work-helmet, covered in rusted iron ore. It's inscribed with rhyming charms against giant spiders.

So. Stick Around? Move Out?

Keeper: Gentle reminder: we're down to 3 torches, gang.

Mapper: We left that bundle of torches in the Fortress of Dvardag. We can backtrack if we need to.

Caller: Alright. Stick Around. Let's get some loot!

GM: Okay, roll again!

Keeper: I'll mark the torch. 2 left!

GM rolls a 4, ticks the clock down to 0, and quietly pulls a Random Encounter. Cave Troll.

Wayfinder: No whammy, no whammy, no whammy. Just need a 1, 2, 3, or a 6.

Roller: Another 3! That's a duplicate, so player choice! We choose Treasure.

GM: On a high shelf in a once-busy market-side tavern, you find a dull silver chalice marked with mysterious runes. A crack runs down one side. To your surprise, it spills when you move it – it was full. When you set it down, it slowly fills again with frothy, sweet-smelling dark beer.

Keeper: Nice!

GM: You hear heavy steps behind you, getting louder fast.

Wayfinder: Ah, hell.

GM: Roll initiative.

They flip to the Main Game.

DVERDAGHAR MARKET DISTRICT

7

Description. Faded frescoes, empty plazas, broad streets. Dvergar. Warehouses with low ceilings, abandoned crates & dessicated rat-droppings.

Key Feature: Treasure. Cracked silver goblet, marked with dvergar runes. When placed upright, slowly fills to the brim with the last non-magical liquid that was in it.

Connections. 6, 2, 5

Level: 3



FORTRESS OF DVARDAG

5

Description. Ancient Stronghold against non-Dwarves entering further into Dverdaghar. Crude, wordless graffiti on the walls. Doors nailed shut in its last defense. Ransacked ages ago.

Key Feature: Wayfinding. Tactical Map carved on the wall. Advantage on next 3 Wayfinding checks.

Connections. 4, 7

Level: 2

ENCOUNTERS

ENCOUNTERS

An Encounter is anything that *happens to* the players—a moment of danger, wonder, choice, or surprise. It should not always mean combat!

Make a list of encounters for Undercrawling that fits your game, story, and character levels. For example, see *Shadowdark Core Rules* encounter tables

- ▶ p. 148: Caves
- ▶ p. 150: Deep Tunnels
- ▶ p. 172: Ruins
- ▶ p. 182: Tombs



"HERE BE"

A Here Be Encounter is a dangerous encounter that you seed into Areas – it isn't random.

It lets you do something narrative or unique to an Area. Maybe you just have a cool library of traps and hazards you want to run.

When an Area has a Here Be, the players encounter it automatically, instead of rolling on the Undercrawl Table. They only roll if they Stick Around.

It will often require you to flip to your main game.

RUMORS & SECRETS

PLOT & CHOICE

Underground, there is almost never a mysterious old woman in a tavern with a story, or an urgent message arriving from a nearby Town.

Secrets and Rumors are the backbone of how you create seed plot, give your Players meaningful choices, and make your world bigger in the dark.

Some Secrets may end up inspiring you to fill in your Undercrawl with Dungeons related to them.

Keep a running list – as many Major Secrets as you want to seed into your game, and a generous handful of lesser ones for when players roll them on the Secrets Table.



RUMORS

These are Secrets players have picked up before setting out on an Undercrawl.

Unreliable but true. Rumors should have a grain of truth, but should also be exaggerated or imprecise.

SECRETS

Secrets should

- ▶ Be true
- ▶ Impact something in the Undercrawl or a Dungeon
- ▶ Give your players information and/or mechanical benefit

Information. Should assist with choices: *There is a map at the Fortress of Dvardag.*

Mechanical benefit. Roll your next Treasure roll with Advantage, etc: *The Underking was known for hiding treasure under public plazas.*

MAJOR SECRETS

These are specific to your game, and only appear if you choose to plant them – usually as a **Key Feature**, or in a Dungeon.

MAKING UNDERCRAWLS

SIZE / DIFFICULTY

Decide how many Areas you want. 10 is a scenic jaunt, 20 is a taxing journey, 30 is a perilous descent into dark madness.

MAP

Roll that number of d6 on a piece of paper. Circle the dice where they lie. These are your locations, this is your map.

Draw **Connections** between Areas so that each one connects to the number of Areas on the face of its die. It doesn't need to make sense; deep darkness is disorienting.

Optional: Connection Type

"Go North" has little meaning underground. Better underground directions would be: *follow burrowed sandstone, down, to caves.*

Assign each Connection a letter, and assign each letter a **Type & Material** to create in-game Wayfinding secrets and details.

Type	Material
1: Masonry	1: Quartz
2: Burrowed	2: Basalt
3: Natural	3: Limestone
4: Carved	4: Sandstone
5: Broad	5: Granite
6: Narrow	6: Obsidian

INDEX CARDS

Number the areas and name them. (*Shadowdark RPG Core Rules* p. 123 has great names.)

Assign each area a Key Feature by rolling on the Undercrawl Table. Treat a 1 as a **Here Be**.

Optional: Depth. Decide how many levels you want. Assign by rolling an appropriate die. 1 is the level closest to the surface.

Simple Mode. If you don't want to prep custom **Key Features**, just treat any result on the Undercrawl Table of that Feature as **Player Choice** on that table.

FURTHER PREP

3 Rumors

All exaggerated, all partly true.

5 Secrets

7 Minor, 3 Significant

5 Encounters

A curated list of monsters, hazards, traps & mishaps.

Here Be Encounters

As many custom monsters, hazards, traps & mishaps as you want to drop in.

NOTES

GAME BREAKERS

Treasure Farming. When players Stick Around, they increase their chances of finding what they want, as Player Choice becomes more likely on each table and sub-table. This should expose them to danger: dwindling resources and the Shadowclock. Any resource that trivializes food or light may result in endless mining for Treasure, Resources, and Secrets.

Place limits, create challenges. Sometimes an area is well and truly empty. Sometimes there are hungry Trolls.

Rules Lawyering. If your players hit you with "*But I wouldn't pick up a cursed item! I have the spell Detect All Curses!*" Consider impromptu mini-dungeons that offer more agency and choice through your Main Game rules when there are meaningful consequences.

No Light. If the party runs out of Light Sources, make an **Extreme (DC 21) INT** (Wayfinding) check every hour

- ▶ **Success:** Backtrack 1 Area
- ▶ **Natural 20:** Find something usable as a torch
- ▶ **Natural 1:** Lost

ROLES

Optional. Assigning (rotating?) roles can keep the game moving and players engaged.

Caller. Communicates the party's choices to the GM: Roll, Run or Rest, as well as Sticking Around or Moving Out. If the party is slow to make decisions, the GM can ask the Caller to decide the course.

Wayfinder. Chooses Wayfinding Priorities and rolls Wayfinding Checks.

Roller. Rolls on the Undercrawl Table and Feature Tables.

Mapper. Players should be making their own version of the map, with notes. The Mapper oversees these.

Keeper. Tracks and marks group resources, such as torches and rations - including who is carrying them.

QUICK DUNGEONS

- ▶ *Shadowdark Core Rules*, p. 130: rapid dice-based dungeon generation
- ▶ *Watabou.io*: instant digital dungeon maps with some customization

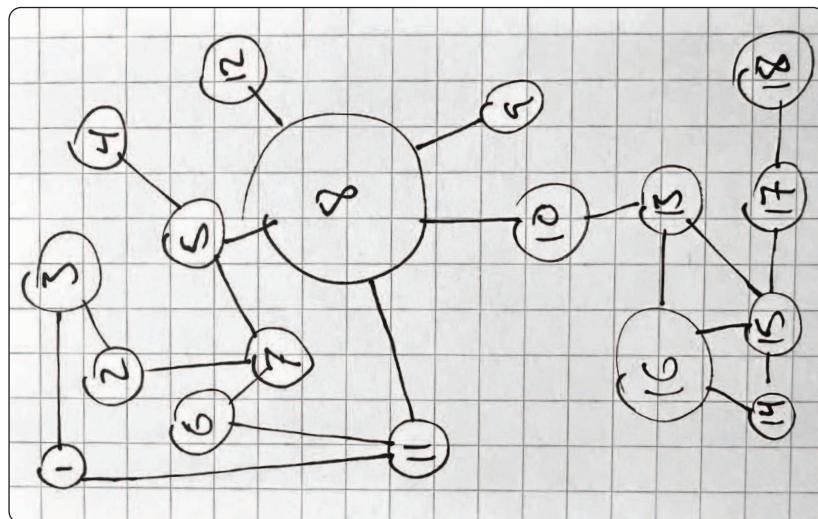
DVERDAGHAR

Dverdaghār was once the central jewel of a complex of caves, settlements, mines and tunnels connected by the Dwarves, spanning an entire mountain range.

Now it is dark. Lost highways, tread by no one now. Glittering caves that glitter no more. Forges of forgotten smiths, temples to forsaken gods.

12 of its 18 areas are detailed. What other horrors and wonders does its dark silence embrace? The *Monastery of the Whispering King*? The *Necropolis of the Shimmering Depths*? The *Tomb of the Bleeding Flame*?

That is for **you** to decide!



RUMORS

- ▶ Giant Spiders infest the old Iron Mine (area 12)
- ▶ rumor 2
- ▶ rumor 3

SECRETS

- ▶ Dwarves of old rode magical beasts that could swim through stone.
- ▶ The Underking was known for hiding treasure under public plazas.

MAJOR SECRETS

Your campaign, your choice.



COPPER MINE

1

Description. A copper mine, active until recently.

Key Feature: Resources. Gear: 3 pickaxes, 10 iron spikes, 60' rope.

Connections. Exit to Surface, 3, 11

Level. 1

ARMORY

4

Description. Military training complex for the armies of Dverdaghar.

Key Feature: Treasure. Saddles for mysterious beasts, imbued with magic.

Connections. 4, 7

Level. 2

GLITTERING CAVES OF ROGATHORN

2

Description. A glittering network of caves, like the insides of super-massive geodes. The walls fracture and reflect all light; even a candle lights it brightly. No torch consumed.

Key Feature: Wayfinding. A dark, secluded grotto. One Quiet Night.

Connections. 4, 7

Level. 2

FORTRESS OF DVARDAG

5

Description. Ancient Stronghold against non-Dwarves entering further into Dverdaghar. Crude, wordless graffiti on the walls. Doors nailed shut in its last defense. Ransacked ages ago.

Key Feature: Wayfinding. Tactical Map carved on the wall. Gain Advantage on any 2 Wayfinding checks (declare first).

Connections. 4, 7

Level. 2

LONG ROAD

3

Description. 5 miles of descending underground road without fork or branch. Deep ventilation shafts pierce the mountain at regular intervals, casting eerie patches of light.

Key Feature: Secrets. Near a barbed arrow, a letter dropped in haste, informing Lord Fezumel that Goblins have taken over area 11.

Connections. 1, 2

Level. 1-2

UPPER WARRENS

6

Description. Deep tunnels, dug by something time forgot.

Key Feature: Treasure. An absent monster's hoard of treasure. Short-handled mace, rare incense that is repulsive to undead, 3 skulls, and 100gp.

Connections. A secret, cramped passage to 7, 11

Level. 2

DVERDAGHAR MARKET DISTRICT

7

Description. Faded frescoes, empty plazas, broad streets. Dvergar. Warehouses with low ceilings, abandoned crates & dessicated rat-droppings.

Key Feature: Treasure. Cracked silver goblet, marked with dvergar runes. When placed upright, slowly fills to the brim with the last non-magical liquid that was in it.

Connections. 6, 2, 5

Level. 3

UNDERGROUND LAKES

10

Description. A vast underground set of finger-lakes, tributaries, and grottoes.

Here Be Cave Beast. An ancient cave beast with grey skin. Swims through stone. (Otherwise, use stats for **Bear**). Will happily accept a saddle from the Armory. Otherwise diffident, elusive, retreats to 13.

Connections. 8, 13

Level. 2

GREAT HALLS OF AIKANDAR

8

Description. Where the Underking himself once lived. A labyrinth of cracked staircases, vast chambers, and silent forges. Dwellings carved into underground cliffs faces. Deep shafts circulate air from unknown sources and depths.

Key Feature: Wayfinding. Surviving signage: read the first sentence of the descriptions for all connected areas out loud.

Connections. 8

Level. 3

GOBLIN OUTPOST

11

Description. Once a mighty Goblin outpost, part of the force that overthrew Dvardag. Goblins now trying to reclaim lost glory.

Here Be Goblin Work Crew. Work Crew, terrified, shoveling dirt into a deep hole to "hold her in". They beg the players not to intervene. 4d6 Goblins, they have mundane exploration gear and a barrel of 15 torches.

Connections. 1, 8

Level. 1

FLOODED NECROPOLIS

9

Description. Hall after Hall of Mausoleums. A Millennium of different styles and religions, shrines of every kind. Large parts flooded to knee-height, difficult going. Use 2 torches.

Key Feature: Treasure. War hammer of Olin: +2 against Ogres, Sparks when striking stone, can light fires. Guarded by Animated Armor.

Connections. 8

Level. 4

IRON MINES

12

Description. The oldest, original part of Dverdaghar. The Elder Door (leads to the surface) was sealed for defense when the mines were exhausted, but reopened in an earthquake more recently.

Here Be Spiders. A clutch of 2d6 fist-sized flesh-eating Spiders devouring a Rust Monster.

Connections. 8, Surface Exit

Level. 1

--- EXAMPLE ENCOUNTERS FOR UNDERCRAWL---

1. **Rabid, Starving Mule.** Saddlebags. Roll on Resources Table.
2. **Giant Centipede.** Eating someone recently deceased.
3. **Lost Explorer.** Gone subtly mad in the dark.
4. **Purple Worm.** Tunnels through. Create a new connection.
5. **2 Cave Brutes.** Stalking through a luminous fog.
6. **Mimic.** Disguised as a pile of bones with shiny new chainmail.
7. **2 Ghosts.** Dancing
8. **1d6 Stingbats.** Noise wakes them.
9. **Goblin Work Crew.** Terrified, shoveling dirt into a deep hole to "hold her in". They beg the players not to intervene.
10. **Sleepwalking Basilisk.** Herded by 1d6 careful Kobolds with poles
11. **Amputated Troll's Leg.** Twitching, manacled, chained to the ground. Regenerates completely in 1 hour.
12. **Blind Stone Giant.** Chained to the floor. Thirsty.
13. **Rust Monster.** Gnawing at the wall. Hungry.
14. **Feral Dwarves.** 1d6. They demand a story with a beginning, a middle, and a twist, with something dismembered and something remembered. Refusal dishonors them terribly. They attack.
15. **Lost, Forgetful Gnome.** Well equipped. 2d6 mundane Gear items.
16. **Dehydrated Crawlers.** 1d6. They demand rations at sword-point.
17. **2 Darkmantles.** Drop from the ceiling, extinguishing lights.
18. **Chasm.** The only way to cross is on a giant spider's web.
19. **Animated Armor.** Guards an ornate sarcophagus.
20. **Door, spiked shut.** Spiked from the *outside*. Voiceless scratching comes from within. 2d6 Skeletons behind it.

1. **Cave-in.** One connection closes forever. (GM Choice, or random)
2. **Bad Air Pocket.** You must Run, or take 1 CON DMG.
3. **Flash Flood.** Run or lose 1d6 random pieces of gear. This Area is impassable for 3 hours.
4. **Landmark Confusion.** You've gone in circles. Return to one of the last two Areas that you passed through.
5. **Unholy Scrying Pool.** Dark secrets and costs. For 2 days, you may take 1 CON dmg to know the Key Feature of any Area.
6. **Dark Water.** Smells metallic. Hard on gear. DEX DC 18 (each) or lose a random piece of gear.
7. **Malicious Mist.** Disadvantage on the next 2 Wayfinding checks.
8. **Dehydration.** Rest and consume a Ration or take 1 CON DMG.
9. **Nightmare Wall.** Bleeds human blood. WIS DC 15 (each) or Run.
10. **Dvergar Door.** Acts as a one-way portal to a random Area.
11. **Skeleton.** Pinned to the wall with a +2 crossbow bolt. Disturbing it causes a shrieking alarm. Reduce Shadowclock by 10.
12. **Treacherous Floor.** Spend another torch or take 1 CON damage.
13. **Edible Mushroom Cache.** 2d6 Rations
14. **Dead Magic.** All magic suppressed in this area.
15. **Ancient Shrine.** Dead worshipers. If you loot the bodies, roll on the Secrets Table. Reduce Shadowclock by 5.
16. **Maze.** WIS DC 18 (party's highest) or spend 1d4-1 torches and hours wandering.
17. **Lava Flow.** Somewhere, two connections close. One opens.
18. **Forgotten Shrine.** Littered with trinkets from different centuries. Failing to leave something angers it.
19. **Follower.** You hear footsteps following you, and then, nothing.
20. **Cliff.** Spend an extra hour and torch if you don't have rope.

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