

## Monster ENCyclopedia: Umber Hulk

This is a [series of articles](#) about specific monsters from D&D's history. Each entry takes a look at the origin of one D&D creature, and tracks its appearances and evolution across different editions. For the letter "U" we're taking a look at... no, that would be a bad idea. For the letter "U" we're *examining* the umber hulk.

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### Origins

According to his [ENWorld Q&A](#), Gygax made up the umber hulk entirely from his imagination. It was intended to be a tough monster, something new which would pose a considerable challenge to potent PCs. Tim Kask [remembers](#) the umber hulk as one of several monsters inspired by a plastic toy originating in Hong Kong, but this lineage is a matter of some debate, as documented by Michael Tresca in [The Plastic Ancestry of the Umber Hulk](#). The plastic toys (called patchisaur) that inspired Gygax to create the rust monster, owlbear and other monsters were mostly rip-offs of Ultraman characters. If the umber hulk was indeed based on a plastic patchisaur toy, it was likely one based in turn on the character of Antlar.



**Antlar**, image from [Hobby Search](#) and **patchisaur**, image from [Fantasy Toy Soldiers](#)

The first appearance of the umber hulk in D&D is in *Supplement I: Greyhawk* in 1975. It is described as an eight foot tall, five foot wide biped, of shape somewhat similar to a human. It has a head which resembles a bushel basket with four eyes which, if looked at squarely, cause confusion (on a failed save). Its mouth is flanked with a pair of exceptionally sharp mandibles (2-8 damage) and claws harder than iron (2-12 damage) with which it can burrow through rock at a rate of one foot per turn. In combat, an umber hulk makes three attacks, one with each claw and its bite.

Umber hulks are encountered in their lairs half of the time, and are found in groups of up to four. They accumulate copper, silver and gold coins as treasure, as well as occasionally gems, jewelry and often a few magic items or a scroll. Umber hulks have an armor class of 2, a movement of 6, and 8 hit dice. In the dark, where they are often encountered, it is easy to mistake one for something less deadly. Although they are neutral in alignment, they prize human flesh highly. They can be summoned using the *monster summoning VII* spell. An illustration of an umber hulk is included in *Supplement II: Blackmoor*, released six months later.



*Supplement II: Blackmoor (1975)*

In *Monster & Treasure Assortment Set Three: Levels Seven-Nine* there is a solo umber hulk on the level 7 tables, and multiple umber hulks on the tables for levels 8 and 9. However, the accompanying illustration is more interesting. It shows an umber hulk using its mandibles and one claw to grip a fighter in place while it bites into his torso. Presumably his nearby henchman has been confused, as he is staring open-mouthed at the attack rather than assisting.



*Monster & Treasure Assortment Set Three: Levels Seven-Nine (1978)*

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### 1st Edition

The *Monster Manual* consolidates all the information scattered around *Supplement I: Greyhawk* into a single short description and statistics block. The umber hulk remains the same size (a large creature, 8 feet tall and 5 feet wide), with the same armor class (2), movement (6") and nearly the same hit dice (8+8), although the hit dice were only updated from the second printing of the *Monster Manual* onward. The creature still has three attacks, but they do marginally more damage, with the claws inflicting 3-12 points of damage, and the mandibles 2-10. The umber hulk's burrowing rate through stone is given as 1" per turn, but that is based on AD&D movement scale and translates to the same one foot per turn it had in *Supplement I*. It can burrow through loam at six times that speed. The confusion effect triggered by looking into an umber hulk's eyes

lasts for 3-12 rounds if the save versus magic is failed, and it is noted that this effect only works on intelligent creatures.

Umber hulks are still found in groups of 1-4, but the chance to encounter them in their lair has dropped to 30%, and their treasure has changed to type G, which consists of gold, platinum, gems, jewelry and a number of magic items. Their frequency is given as “rare” and they are noted as having average intelligence and their own language. The umber hulks’ alignment has shifted from neutral to chaotic evil. They haven’t lost their taste for human flesh, but are described as subterranean predators whose prey includes purple worms, ankhegs and similar monsters. An umber hulk is black in color, with yellowish gray on the front. The top of its head is gray, and it has ivory-coloured mandibles. The umber hulk’s dark colouration is given as the reason that it is sometimes mistaken for humanoid creatures at distances of 40 feet or more.



*Monster Manual (1978)*

If the illustration appearing in the *Monster Manual* looks familiar, that’s because it is almost the same as the one from *Supplement II: Blackmoor*. Although *Blackmoor* predates the *Monster Manual* by three years, the earlier picture seems more finished, as if David C. Sutherland added additional shading to the *Monster Manual* version to get the one appearing in *Blackmoor*. There is a completely new picture of an umber hulk in the *Players Handbook* illustrating *Otto’s irresistible dance*. The enspelled creature is certainly enthusiastic about its enforced jig.



*Players Handbook (1978)*

Unsurprisingly, the *Official Advanced Dungeons & Dragon Coloring Album*, published in 1979, provides the most detailed description of the umber hulk’s coloration so far. It has deep reddish or blackish brown back, arms and legs, fading to a yellowish brown on its chest and belly. Below a maroon ridge, its large multifaceted eyes



shine light blue, while the small central eyes are dark green. The monster's mandibles and talons are grey-ivory, its teeth dingy yellow and its mouth yellow-green.



*The Official Advanced Dungeons and Dragons Coloring Album (1979)*

In the *Dungeon Masters Guide*, the umber hulk appears on the monster level VII (as a solo) and monster level IX (1-4) encounter tables, and on the *monster summoning VII* table. The *Dispel Confusion* column in *Polyhedron #10* offers a clarification of how the umber hulk's gaze attack works. Importantly, it can be directed at only one target per round. However, it also notes that each surprise segment is treated as a separate round, meaning that each surprised character might become confused. *If Looks Could Kill* in *Dragon #130* specifies the range of the umber hulk's gaze effect as 20 feet. Curiously, the article also seems to imply that umber hulks are not necessarily immune to the confusion effects of other umber hulks.

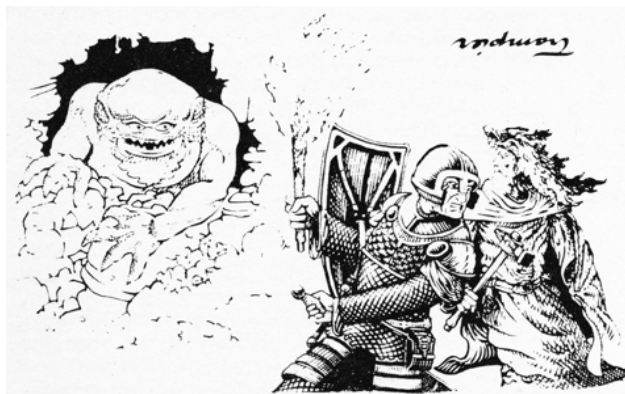
The *Monster Cards, Set 2* gives us the first color picture of an umber hulk (or at least an umber hulk's head) and the colouration is consistent with the *Monster Manual* description. The text on the back of the card clarifies the creature's damage (claws are 1d10+2, the bite 1d8+2) although this doesn't give the correct results for the bite. There is also a table of effects for the confusion gaze attacks. This appears to be adapted from the *confusion* spell in the *Players Handbook*, but uses a d10 instead of d%. On a 1 the target wanders around for the duration (3d4 rounds), on a 2-6 the target is stunned, on a 7-8 it attacks the nearest creature, and on a 9-10 it attacks the umber hulk.



*Monster Cards, Set 2 (1982)*



The *Monster Card* text also expands slightly on the umber hulk's habits and tactics. It is said to fight intelligently, including constructing surprise pits by undermining the floors of tunnels. An umber hulk buries its treasure, and covers up the burrows which lead into its lair. Inside, the walls of the lair are lined with castings, carapaces and bones of the umber hulk's prey.



*D2: Shrine of the Kuo-Toa* (1978)

Umbur hulks were popular monsters in 1st Edition adventures. They appear on random encounter tables or as minor encounters in *D2: Shrine of the Kuo-Toa*, *D3: Vault of the Drow*, *S3: Expedition to the Barrier Peaks*, *S4: The Lost Caverns of Tsojcanth*, *I5: Lost Tomb of Martek*, and *T1-4: Temple of Elemental Evil*. In *Q1: Queen of the Demonweb Pits* they are listed as one of the creatures someone might be reincarnated as while in the Demonweb. They are also mentioned as part of Lolth's forces invading the dwarven nations of Maldev, one of the alternative worlds that can be accessed via gates in Lolth's realm. The adventure suggests adding extensive "catacombs of the umber hulks" as one of the ways to flesh out the levels of the Demonweb further, should the DM wish to do so.



*C2: The Ghost Tower of Inverness* (1979)

Although there is only a single umber hulk in *C2: The Ghost Tower of Inverness*, it gets two illustrations, one on the frontispiece and one accompanying the encounter description. The hook for the encounter is a large iron chest. If the party ignores the chest and proceeds through the room, they can avoid dealing with the umber

hulk. Since we all know the odds of players ignoring possible treasure are miniscule, they will soon find themselves ambushed by the hulk. The text expands on the *confusion* power even further, clarifying that it requires a random roll each round to determine the victim's resulting action. The text also notes that it is possible to fight the creature while attempting not to look at it, but this results in a -4 penalty to attacks.



*C2: The Ghost Tower of Inverness (1979)*

In *REF4: The Book of Lairs II*, a group of four umber hulks has taken over an ancient underground city once inhabited by a tribe of aboriginal humans. The *Dungeoneer's Survival Guide* mentions umber hulks as one of the creatures responsible for creating tunnels through stone, and potentially a source of cave-ins should they happen to be tunneling near unstable terrain. In the Lands of Deepearth setting presented in the last part of that book, umber hulks populate the area known as the Melting Pot.



*Dungeoneer's Survival Guide (1986)*

Umber hulks appeared frequently in early issues of *Dragon*. A pair guards the main hall in *The Hall of Mystery* in *The Dragon* #21. They appear in the wandering monster tables for *The Temple of Poseidon* in *Dragon* #46 and *In Defense of the Law* in *Dungeon* #8. The *Fights of Fantasy* article in *Dragon* #79 notes the usefulness of a—presumably charmed—umber hulk in digging into a castle defended by sturdy walls, an idea repeated in *The Enemy at the Gates* in *Dragon* #160.

The umber hulk being held captive in *The Jangling Mordo Circus* in *Dungeon* #7 is actually a *polymorphed* high elf being held for ransom. The “umber hulk” attempts to get the attention of anyone it thinks might help her, but is incapable of intelligible speech. Should someone happen to cast *know alignment*, the chaotic good nature of the umber hulk might be a clue to its real identity.



*King's Quest* (1984)

Umber hulks also popped up in some of the gamebooks TSR published during the 1980s. *King's Quest* is book #18 in the *Endless Quest* series. This was marketed as a series for Dungeons & Dragons, rather than Advanced Dungeons & Dragons. As we'll see later, the D&D world has similar creatures called hulkers, but doesn't have any umber hulks. Clearly the wizard Vuverain, antagonist of the story, doesn't know this, as one of the creatures he changes into during the story's climactic wizard duel is an umber hulk.

In *Curse of the Werewolf* (part of the *AD&D Gamebook* line) the protagonist must fight an umber hulk in an arena match. Outclassed in terms of power, he defeats it by knocking it onto its back. According to the text, the umber hulk is as helpless as a turtle turned upside down. One wonders why this tactic is not more widely known and practiced by adventuring parties!



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## 2nd Edition

An umber hulk graces the cover of the *Monstrous Compendium Volume One* along with a displacer beast and a beholder. It's interesting to note that all three of these were in the fairly short list of core D&D creatures not included in the d20 Open Gaming Licence. Clearly TSR recognised the iconic value of these monsters a full decade before the d20 revolution.



*Monstrous Compendium Volume One (1989)*

The earlier descriptions of the umber hulk are expanded on here. We learn that the creature's muscles bulge beneath its thick, scaly hide, that it has powerful arms and legs, no visible neck, a mouth filled with rows of triangular teeth, and eight-inch mandibles that can bite through hide or bone. The umber hulk's eyes get a slight adjustment; instead of the two small central and two larger side eyes shown previously, it now has four eyes evenly spaced across its forehead. Each one is a blackened dot the size of a small coin. Confusingly though, it is the outer eyes (only) that provide the umber hulk with its 90 feet infravision.



*Monstrous Compendium Volume One (1989)*

The ecology of the umber hulk is developed a little more. We learn that they are solitary creatures. Males and females meet to mate and then promptly separate once more. The female hollows out a special nursery and one to three young are born roughly a year after mating. The hulklings remain in the nursery for the next two years, at which point they are large enough to start joining their mother on hunts. Encounters with multiple umber hulks are thus usually with a mother and her young on a hunt.

Although they are monstrous in appearance, umber hulks are intelligent and have their own language. Their hunting strategy appears to involve raids on underground dungeons, in a similar manner to anteaters raiding ant colonies. They attack a dungeon, consume most of the denizens and then retreat, giving that dungeon time to recover before they target it for another raid. UMBER HULKS continue to favor human prey if they can get it.

Comparing the 2nd Edition statistics block with the one from the *Monster Manual*, the “subterranean” climate/terrain entry is new, as is the “any” activity cycle, the “carnivore” diet and the “elite (13)” morale. While the number appearing remains 1-4, the organization line now reflects that umber hulks are “solitary”. They remain chaotic evil, with average (8-10) intelligence and treasure type G. Armor class, hit dice and movement all remain unchanged, as do attacks and damage, with the exception of the umber hulk’s bite, which now does 1-10 damage instead of 2-10, probably because d5s are rarer than d10s.

The combat tactics of the umber hulk are expanded to include use of planned cave-ins, dead-end tunnels where the umber hulk can wait for victims, and a more common strategy of digging a hideyhole next to a main corridor and then watching for targets through a crack, before springing out to make a surprise attack. The hulk’s ponderous and slow gait and poor balance in wide spaces are its weaknesses in combat. An umber hulk will not fight to the death and if it gets into trouble will happily cause a cave-in on itself and its attackers so that it can dig an escape route and get free.

The *Monstrous Compendium* hints of rumors of entire hidden cities of umber hulks deep underground with tunnels radiating outwards to other locations like spiders’ webs. This would explain the fact that the creatures seem to surface unexpectedly in new regions, and why they sometimes take such great care to hide their tunnels behind them.

In the encounter tables in *Volume Two* of the *Monstrous Compendium*, the umber hulk remains something encountered only in dungeons and the underdark (or summoned). *PHBR11: The Complete Ranger’s Handbook* lists the umber hulk as a potential species enemy for an underdark based ranger. The *Dungeon Builder’s Guidebook* adds ruins and tombs to the list of places to find them.

*The Ecology of the UMBER HULK* in *Dragon #152* was published only a few months after the first two volumes of the *Monstrous Compendium*, and it hews fairly closely to early 2nd Edition lore. According to the article, the eyes of an umber hulk consist of two sets. The pair on the outside of its head are white with black irises, while those in the middle of its forehead are purple with yellow or amber irises. The creature’s iconic confusion gaze is said to magically affect the victim’s brain through the optic nerve, and other umber hulks (and vodyanoi) are immune to it. The article suggests that the smaller central eyes are the source of the effect. Contradicting other sources, the range of the gaze is given as 40 feet here, and said to affect any number of victims in front of the umber hulk.

The umber hulk does not have a nose. It breathes through gill-like structures on its neck, suggesting aquatic origins. This means it can eat and breathe simultaneously. It is also able to breathe in water for short periods of up to ten minutes, and sometimes uses this to its advantage by collapsing and flooding caverns. Despite the absence of a nose, umber hulks have a highly developed sense of smell. (The response to a letter in *Dragon* #158 clarifies that there are olfactory receptors around the gill openings.) Combining this sense of smell with excellent hearing, hulks have no difficulty tracking and hunting in darkness. Their eyesight is not bad, and they can see normally in all but the brightest of light sources, but they aren't fond of brightness and generally avoid daylight unless desperate for prey. In very bright light, they take a -1 penalty to attacks and saves.

The umber hulk's offensive features have developed to deal with dangerous foes such as ankhegs and purple worms. They sometimes allow themselves to be swallowed by larger purple worms just so that they can tunnel out from the inside. They have been known to rip less hardy foes in two with their claws.

Their claws are also used extensively for tunneling, and the area surrounding an umber hulk's lair is crisscrossed with countless tunnels. While confusing to others, umber hulks know these passages well and use them to outflank unwanted visitors, or to flee from (rare) opponents posing a real threat. A fleeing umber hulk is challenging to follow as it leaves little in the way of tracks. Walls of an umber hulk's lair are frequently characterized by prominent claw marks.



*Dragon* #152 (1989)

Aggression usually leads an umber hulk to immediately attack opponents that appear weaker, and sometimes overrules its sense of self-preservation against stronger foes. UMBER hulks are destructive in nature, and anything they cannot use is shredded, broken or damaged. Their lairs are littered with remnants of gear and armor which once belonged to those who would challenge them.

UMBER hulks seem to covet gold and platinum and the sight of large quantities of coin has been known to distract even an enraged hulk. They can even be persuaded to cooperate with other creatures for sufficient



reward and not too much risk, and provided that they are not required to spend time aboveground. Employing an umber hulk is a risky proposition as they are fickle and will sometimes turn on their employers for no apparent reason. It is not clear what umber hulks do with their accumulated treasure. Theories range from digestive aids (gold gizzard stones?) to propping up the economies of their rumored cities beneath the earth.

One quarter of the umber hulk population is female, but there is no external difference between the two. Males are protective of females and will sacrifice themselves to protect the rarer females. Once the hulklings are born, a year after mating, they are helpless. At three months, they are one foot tall and have 1+1 hit dice, and do 1d4/1d4/1d2 damage with their claws and mandibles. The *Ecology* article provides a chart of hit dice and damage covering nine age ranges, but hulklings develop their abilities quickly and are functionally adults within two years. UMBER hulk mothers are particularly dangerous as they hunt constantly for food to feed their voracious young.

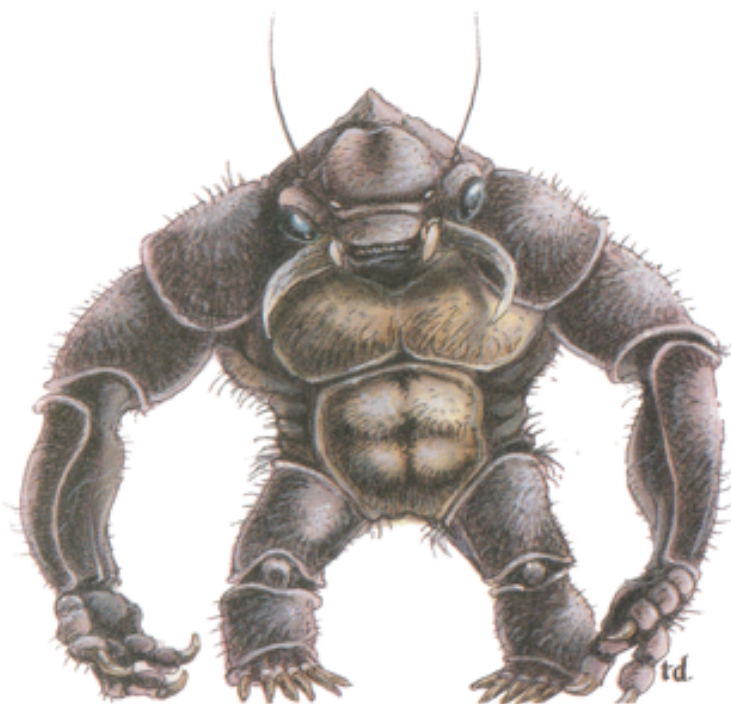
The spoken umber hulk language (refer to here as “Hulkish”) is simple as it conveys only limited information. While it is easy to learn to understand the language, speaking it is challenging. Many sounds are impossible for humans to duplicate, as are the gestures, mouth, mandible and eye movements used to emphasize the vocalizations.

Most umber hulks have a strength of 19, but 5% have a higher strength of 20, and do more damage with their claws (1d6+6 points). Males live for 50 years on average, females for 75 years. Adult umber hulks weigh 1,500-1,750 pounds. The *Ecology* article’s assessment of the umber hulk’s mass is contradicted by the *Sage Advice* in *Dragon* #192, which estimates it as only 450 pounds while answering a question of how much alcohol it takes to get an umber hulk drunk. In case you are wondering, the answer is slightly less than a gallon of beer, but that is predicated on the lower mass. For a 1,500 pound umber hulk, the answer would be three gallons. We also have evidence that umber hulks do, indeed, get drunk. In *OP1: Tales of the Outer Planes*, as the adventurers make their way through the *World Serpent Inn*, they pass a balcony where two umber hulks are trying to drink each other under the table.



AD&D 1991 Trading Cards (1991)

The umber hulk on card #506 of the *AD&D Trading Cards* is an artist's copy of the one from the *Monstrous Compendium Volume One*, with the same blue colouration contradicting the “yellowish gray” description from the *Monstrous Compendium*. It has much sharper, pointed claws and mandibles that look more like horns. The illustration in the 1993 *Monstrous Manual* has the correct colouration, but reverts back to an umber hulk with large-sized side eye. It looks significantly more insectoid than the *Monstrous Compendium* picture, and notably, this is the first image where it sports visible antennae. The umber hulk also appears on card #87 of *Set 7: The Underdark* of the *Spellfire* card game; the card recycles the color picture from the *Monstrous Manual*.



*Monstrous Manual* (1993)

Umbur hulks are less of a staple in 2nd Edition adventures than they were in 1st Edition, but still numerous. In *HHQ1: Fighter's Challenge* there is an umber hulk that was being kept captive by duergar. It has snapped the chains holding it in place, but instead of escaping, it has been listening in on the duergar's plans. It is curious about the nearby wererat colony, which it views as a potential source of food. It is also interested in the possibility of getting the duergar's treasure.

The *Subterranean Stalker* encounter in *CR4: Deck of Encounters, Set One* is about as vanilla an umber hulk encounter as is possible. A single hulk watches an intersection through a crack in the wall, and breaks through to surprise the heroes once it spies them. It has prepared a pit nearby into which it will toss anyone it manages to grab in its pincers. *CR5: Deck of Encounters, Set Two* has a similarly vanilla encounter, but one which is designed specifically to frustrate the PCs. In *I'm So Confused* two umber hulks ambush them in a chamber too small to maneuver. The umber hulks use their claws to give themselves enough room to attack, but the PCs have to back into a small passage to be able to escape or switch places.

In *The Rob of Seven Parts*, the aboleth controlling the area in which this solo umber hulk can be found has decided that it is more useful left alive, and regularly sends it unarmed slaves to eat. Adventurers might realize that the scattered splintered bones in the vicinity are a clue to the monster's presence.



*The Rod of Seven Parts* (1996)

The umber hulk in *College of Wizardry* is bound with enchanted chains, but it still has a chance to break free if enraged. Its captors have neutralized its *confusion* gaze by simply blindfolding the beast.

### 3rd Edition

The 3rd Edition umber hulk appears in the *Monster Manual*, and looks significantly more insectoid than in previous depictions, maintaining the antennae first seen in the 2nd Edition *Monstrous Manual*. Characterized as a powerfully built cross between a great ape and a beetle, the umber hulk keeps its earlier proportions (8 feet tall, and 5 feet across) but weighs less than it did in the *Ecology* article (now 800 pounds). It seems to be slightly more aggressive than previously; described as ripping through rock as though it were light underbrush and rampaging continuously, leaving a wake of destruction.



*Monster Manual* (2000)



The umber hulk has armor plates covering most of its chitinous body, and what looks like hair on its body is actually scattered feelers. It has a low, rounded head, massive mandibles and the same rows of triangular teeth it had previously. The mandibles can easily bite through armor or bone, and its claws are powerful enough to crush almost any enemy. Despite its raw power, the umber hulk is an intelligent creature, capable of outthinking opponents and skillfully using its tunneling ability to create traps and hazards for opponents. UMBER hulks still have their own language.

Mechanically, the 3rd Edition umber hulk has 8 hit dice (68 hit points), an armor class of 17 and can use *multiattack* to use both claw attacks (+11 melee, 2d4+6 damage) and its bite (+9 melee, 2d8+3) against opponents. It has the same walking and burrowing speed of 20 ft, and a reach of 10 ft, which is a significant advantage in 3rd Edition's more tactical combat. The umber hulk's *confusing gaze* is now functionally equivalent to a *confusion* spell cast by an 8th-level sorcerer, with a range of 30 feet. It has *tremorsense* allowing it to detect the location of anything within 60 feet that is in contact with the ground.

As in earlier editions, umber hulks are encountered underground, either alone, or in groups ("clusters") of up to four. The advancement line indicates that umber hulks can have up to 24 hit dice. Specimens with up to 12 hit dice are large, while those with 13 or more hit dice are huge.



Ember and an umber hulk, *Dungeon Master's Guide* (2000)

In the *Monster Manual v.3.5*, the umber hulk gets only minor changes. It has three extra hit points (71), a marginally better armor class (18), and it gains *darkvision* (range of 60 feet) and two additional feats (*great fortitude* and *toughness*). The 2nd Edition change to four equal eyes is discarded; the description calls out two

different types of eyes, simple and compound. The text clarifies that a burrowing umber hulk only leaves a usable tunnel behind it if it chooses to do so, presumably making it a challenge to follow if it does not.

Accompanying the statistics block for the ordinary umber hulk is one for the candidly named “truly horrid umber hulk”. This is a huge, 20 hit dice (270 hit point) version with substantially more powerful attacks (3d6+13 claw damage and 4d6+6 bite damage). The truly horrid umber hulk is more than 16 feet tall, and clocks in at about 8,000 pounds. Hulks of this size are loners, feared even by other umber hulks.



**The Claw**, *Enemies and Allies* (2001)

The accessory book *Enemies and Allies* details a group of monstrous adventurers known as The Claw. As well as an ettercap cleric, a troll fighter, a phase spider rogue and a pseudodragon sorcerer, the team includes Blind Jak, an umber hulk monk who wears a blindfold to prevent his companions from being constantly confused.



*Miniatures Handbook* (2003)

If meeting an umber hulk monk isn't enough, *Savage Species* provide a playable version of the umber hulk. A fully developed umber hulk has an Effective Character Level of 14, slightly lower than the 15 suggested in *Dragon* #293. The progression chart for a PC of the umber hulk race spans these fourteen levels. An adventuring umber hulk starts with claw and bite attacks, and *darkvision*, but only picks up its other abilities as it progresses, gaining *tremorsense* at 4th level, a burrowing speed at 5th level, and a *confusing gaze* at 7th level.



*Lords of Madness* (2005)

There are a few other 3rd Edition sources with snippets of umber hulk lore. *Lords of Madness* claims that the umber hulk was created through magical mutation. Its creators are now long forgotten as the hulks have existed for thousands of years. *Tome of Battle* mentions a swordsmage organization devoted to study the combat techniques, migratory patterns, and warren culture of the umber hulks of the Sunspire Mountains, presumably with a long-term goal of exterminating them. *Dungeonscape* presents a selection of alternative feat choices for umber hulks, including *cleave*, *improved initiative*, *improved natural attack*, *improved sunder* and *power attack*. *Dragon Annual* #5 suggests that umber hulks are capable of learning how to infiltrate a city, working as sappers to destroy city structures from below.

Umbur hulks feature in many 3rd Edition adventures. There are, or rather were, three umber hulks in the Crater Ridge mines in *Return to the Temple of Elemental Evil*, a mated pair and their younger offspring. One of the older umber hulks was recently slain by nearby trolls. The surviving parent has accumulated a fair amount of treasure during its time in the mines, but is beginning to realize that the time is approaching when it may have to buy the assistance of its offspring to get food.

The third chapter in the *Shackled City* adventure path, *Zenith Trajectory*, kicks off with a fiendish umber hulk rampaging through the streets of Cauldron. Although the encounter is with a single hulk intent on damaging as much property as possible, a number of NPCs and eventually the city watch get involved, not necessarily helping the situation given the umber hulk's *confusing gaze*.

In *Root of Evil*, in *Dungeon* #122, there are two truly horrid umber hulks in the service of a great demonic tree called Malgarius. They cooperate with a greater stone golem in an attempt to kill adventurers reaching their chamber.



We round out the 3rd Edition coverage of the umber hulk with the *Caption Contest* from *Dragon* #287. As announced in *Dragon* #290, the winning caption was “I’ll only be a week. Make sure that you play with him every day, and if he eats any of the neighbors, just let him bury the bones in the backyard.” The runner up was “I’m leaving you, John, and I’m taking the UMBER Hulk with me.”



**Caption Contest**, *Dragon* #290 (2001)

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#### 4th Edition

The 4th Edition *Monster Manual* presents two versions of the umber hulk, adding a higher-level shadow hulk to the ordinary hulk. There is no explanation of why the shadow hulk exists. The *Monster Manual* includes very little lore. All we are told about the umber hulk’s ecological niche is that it burrows through the earth in search of prey, leaving rough-hewn tunnels. In a change from earlier editions, umber hulks do not speak, but can understand Deep Speech. The umber hulk is unaligned, and is treated like a naturally occurring creature. The text provides no description of the umber hulk, but the picture is consistent with previous versions.



*Monster Manual* (2008)

Mechanically, this umber hulk is a fairly potent foe, but one that seems simpler and less interesting to fight than its ancestors may have been. Large in size, it has 248 hit points, and an armor class of 30. In 4th Edition terms, it is a level 12 elite soldier. It has a speed of 5, and a substantially slower tunneling speed of only 2. The umber hulk still has keen senses, gaining *darkvision*, and range 5 *tremorsense*.

Its claw attack has a reach of 2, an attack bonus of +18 and does 2d6+8 damage. It can make two claw attacks, and if successful with both, the target becomes grabbed and takes ongoing 10 damage from the umber hulk's mandibles until it escapes. However, the umber hulk can't make any other attacks while grabbing an opponent, which makes this a seemingly poor tactical option for the beast, since it can inflict more damage without grabbing.

The *confusing gaze* is now a minor action, but it affects a blast area, so any enemy within 5 squares must make a will save or be slid 5 squares and become dazed until it saves against the effect. There is no longer a chance of a *gaze* victim attacking an ally, they simply become dazed. The tactics as given in the *Monster Manual* are quite basic, although the umber hulk does get one action point to spend. An umber hulk charges into battle, makes a basic attack against a foe, followed by using the action point to make a *grabbing double attack*. It also uses the *confusing gaze* as often as possible.

The shadow hulk is a level 17 solo soldier. It has 860 hit points and an armor class of 35, so can take a significant beating. It is faster (speed 6, tunneling speed 4), gains *phasing* which it tends to use to surprise opponents, and has two action points instead of one. The attack from a single claw has a +23 bonus and does 3d6+11 damage. If it uses *grabbing double attack* the ongoing damage is 15, but it still can't make any other attacks. Once the shadow hulk becomes bloodied, it can use *claw frenzy* to target all opponents in a close burst 3 with a standard claw attack. It can only recharge this ability on a 6, so the odds of it coming into play more than once in a battle are low. The *confusing gaze* is replaced by a *maddening gaze*, also in a close blast with a range of 5. This causes a target that fails a will save to attack its nearest ally, much as an earlier edition umber hulk's gaze might have. A young shadow hulk (with only 252 hit point) features in an adventure in *Dungeon #163*.

The *Monster Manual 3* adds a little more to umber hulk lore. They are said to be some of the oldest creatures in the cosmos, dating back to before the Dawn War. Sages hypothesize that umber hulks emerged from the raw stuff of the world before the primordials had finished crafting it. UMBER HULKS are blamed for causing clashes between Underdark races that are forced to meet each other because of the labyrinthine tunnels the hulks create underground. They are either hunted or captured by most intelligent Underdark races and make good guard beasts if well fed, as they are both obedient and easily trained. We learn that umber hulks prefer to tunnel through veins of metal ore, potentially threatening mining operations. There is a dwarven expression "chasing an umber hulk" for a dangerous plan that might work, referring to prospectors following umber hulks in the hope of finding mineral veins uncovered by the creatures.

Three new types of umber hulk are introduced in the *Monster Manual 3*: the abyssal and astral hulks, which are discussed in the section on variants below, and the umber ravager, the smallest member of the hulk family. Generally found only in the upper layers of the earth, ravagers are motivated primarily by hunger. Medium in size, an umber ravager has just 95 hit points. It has a *disarming gaze* which renders foes helpless (by stunning them), so that the ravager can feast. It also has a *crushing gaze* which does psychic damage and drops foes prone. It will use this if it needs to retreat from battle. UMBER RAVAGERS usually hunt in packs,

narrowing in on groups of travelers, with each ravager selecting one opponent to focus on to the exclusion of other targets.



**Umber Ravager**, *Monster Manual 3* (2010)

The *Monster Vault* book from the *D&D Essentials* line revises the ordinary umber hulk and adds three new variations into the mix. The umber hulk now has lower defenses across the board, with fortitude dropping the most, from 33 to 25. The description of the double grab attack has been simplified, and the damage boosted; a single claw does 3d6+10 points (instead of 2d6+8) and the damage to a grabbed target is upped to be 40 points (instead of that questionable 10). The *confusing gaze* still dazes targets, but now until the end of the umber hulk's next turn, rather than until the victim saves.

The three new types of umber hulks introduced are the umber hulk tunneler, the umber hulk bewilderer and the deep hulk. The tunneler is a skirmisher, with a *snatch and run* attack to drag a target with it, and a *rebuffing gaze* to repel anyone who gets too close with a psychic attack. The umber hulk bewilderer is a controller, with a gaze attack that can either stun opponents or cause them to stagger away reeling from psychic damage. The deep hulk is an elite brute with 404 hit points and a claw attack dealing 4d8+12 damage. An opponent grabbed by a deep hulk takes a whopping 60 points of damage. The deep hulk's gaze not only forces targets to attack nearby allies, but if none are within range, then a target will charge to attack the closest ally it can reach.

In addition to the new variations, *Monster Vault* devotes more space to umber hulk lore. The text specifies that it is their "strange second set of eyes" that is responsible for the gaze attack. The mechanics of umber hulk tunneling are explained as rapid scooping of rock, followed by the hurling of crumbling boulders behind it, so that the beast can pass through. Burrowing consumes a lot of energy, which is why an umber hulk must eat frequently. When hunting, a hulk will lurk near well-traveled passages until it senses movement, and then it bursts through to attack. UMBER hulks seldom tunnel without purpose; they will investigate open spaces detected using tremorsense in hope of finding prey. They do not distinguish between natural stone and worked stone, so can easily explode into someone's cellar or city sewers.

The two new variations of the umber hulk, the tunneler and bewilderer feature in the 4th Edition version of *Steading of the Hill Giant Chief* in *Dungeon* #197. They are found in the northern caverns, and the giants

occasionally provide them with prisoners as tributes to prevent them from encroaching on the caverns inhabited by the giants. There are also several tunnelers in the adventure *Pearl of the Sea Mother* in *Dungeon #204*. *Dungeon #215* uses normal umber hulks as random encounters in the adventure *The Last Slave Lord*, but despite being a late 4th Edition release, this adventure is actually designed to use the 1st Edition AD&D rules (but with 4th Edition conversion guidelines).

The *Underdark* accessory details a massive living fortress known as Hraak Azul which crawls through the shallows of the Underdark. UMBER hulks are given as one example of the type of creature the fortress might host. *Underdark* lists umber hulks as commonly found in the Deeps of the Underdark, and shadow hulks as commonly found in the Shadowdark (the Shadowfell's version of the Underdark). The astral plane in 4th Edition is filled with shattered dominions, as detailed in *The Plane Above: Secrets of the Astral Sea*. One of these is the white desert of Shom, a dominion that lost its deity in the battles of the Dawn War. UMBER hulks might be encountered in this realm.

One of the last 4th Edition releases, *Into the Unknown: The Dungeon Survival Handbook* includes an entry for umber hulks and describes them as greatly feared denizens of the Underdark. With claws that rip through stone as if it were parchment, scimitar-sized mandibles bristling with serrations, and armored shells thicker than plate armor, they make the ground shake when they approach. Experienced explorers know that it is time to take cover. They have a ravenous appetite and ceaselessly hunt for food when hungry. UMBER hulks are solitary hunters but are often followed by smaller creatures scavenging on their left overs. Once sated, an umber hulk will allow vermin to crawl over and clean its mandibles and claws.

For the first time in *Into the Unknown*, the umber hulk's molting process is mentioned. Molting takes several days, during which the umber hulk is in a torpid state. This is one of the rare times in an umber hulk's life that it is vulnerable. The exoskeleton discarded after an umber hulk molts is a valuable treasure because it can be turned into sturdy armor and shields.



*Into the Unknown* (2012)



*Into the Unknown* also introduces Ultok, a rare example of an umber hulk with a name. He is a juvenile and was trained by the dwarves of a mining outpost called Z'kar to serve as a mine laborer and beast of burden. Ultok was treated well by the dwarves and is docile and tame. He wears a brass collar with his name inscribed in dwarven (Davek) runes and understands a few words of Dwarven. Unfortunately, a group of orc raiders killed the inhabitants of Z'kar and although Ultok routed the orcs, he is now alone and hungry, wasting away in the chambers of the outpost waiting for instructions that will never come. Ultok is presented as a potential ally for adventurers who are savvy enough to befriend him and who are able to keep him fed.

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## 5th Edition

In the lead up to 5th Edition, Wizards of the Coast conducted more than a year of public playtesting of what was then called D&D Next. This process provided insights into the designers' approach to many D&D monsters. The umber hulk wasn't included in the very first playtest packet, but it did make it into the second one, released in January of 2013.

The D&D Next version of the umber hulk is a large, chaotic evil, level 7 monstrosity, with an armor class of 13, walking and burrowing speeds of 20 ft, and 66 hit points. It knows the Terran language, has *darkvision* 100 ft. and *tremorsense* 50 ft. It has *multiattack* allowing it to make two claw attacks (+5 to hit, 1d6+5 slashing damage) and one mandible bit attack (+5 to hit, 2d8+5 slashing damage). The umber hulk's *confusing gaze* has a range of 20 feet, and affects any creature that can see it, unless it makes a saving throw or looks away. Surprised characters don't get a save, and characters averting their eyes have disadvantage on attacks until their next turn. Failing the save means the target is charmed until the end of its next turn and must use its action to make a melee or ranged attack against a random target.



*Monster Manual* (2014)

Throughout the lengthy playtest period, the umber hulk's stats stayed mostly the same, although armor class, hit points and level vary slightly. In some of the playtest material, the hulk has an armor class of 14 (instead of 13), 68 hit points (instead of 66) or a level of 6 (instead of 7). The wording of the charm effect of the *confusing gaze* is refined to include any attack which consists of a harmful effect that the target can use-at-will, rather than being limited to melee or ranged attacks.

The *Wandering Monster* article published on the Wizards of the Coast website in June 2013 provides more insight into the designer's view of the umber hulk and how it might be represented in 5th Edition. James Wyatt characterizes the umber hulk as one of the iconic D&D monsters, and mentions its powerful digging

claws, chitinous carapace, large pincers flanking its mouth and two pairs of eyes (a pair of multifaceted insect eyes and a smaller pair). He highlights the high slashing damage done with their claws, their ability to create pits and cave-ins as traps, and notes that they will flee from threats that they can't overcome rather than fighting to the death.

Although the D&D Next playtest version of the umber hulk has a gaze that exclusively causes targets to attack other creatures, the summary here includes the other options from earlier editions: wandering aimlessly, standing in a stupor or babbling nonsense. Potential changes to the umber hulk mentioned in the article are a lower intelligence (7 or 8 is suggested) and ditching the lore about rumors of umber hulk cities deep underground, which Wyatt finds is too much of a stretch given the solitary hunter persona of the monster.



*Monster Manual* (2014)

So how does the 5th Edition umber hulk compare to all of its predecessors? The *Monster Manual* describes it as an abominable horror from deep beneath the earth. It is capable of burrowing through solid rock, and the steel-hard chitin of its body protects it from the rocks that fall as it tunnels. It digs through the Underdark and into settlements and caves in search of food, and frequently hides in wait, lurking in the wall. Using its hair-like feelers it can sense any nearby movement, and when it does, explodes from hiding on its unsuspecting prey.

The impact and after effects of the umber hulk's gaze are given more attention than in previous editions. Survivors are said to remember little about the creature's attack because the *confusing gaze* scrambles their memories of the event. Because of this, stories about umber hulks tend to present them as supernatural foes, responsible for vanished explorers and wanton destruction alike. Mechanically, any creature within 30 feet that can see an umber hulk's eyes is forced to make a save or avert its eyes, rendering it unable to see the hulk at all. A failed save once again has a random effect: 50% of the time, the victim does nothing, 25% of the time, the victim flees in a random direction and the remaining 25% of the time, the victim makes a melee attack against a random creature (or does nothing, if none is within reach). The gaze effect requires the umber hulk to "magically force" targets to look at it, so it stops working if the hulk is incapacitated.

The umber hulk ends up a bit more powerful than it was in the playtests, with an armor class of 18, and 93 hit points. It retains its *darkvision* (120 ft.) and *tremorsense* (60 ft.), and gets the slight decrease in intelligence

foreshadowed by Wyatt (now only 9). It has a normal speed of 30 ft. and a burrowing speed of 20 ft. but a separate speed is given specifically for tunneling. If the umber hulk's goal is to leave a functional passage (5 foot wide, 8 foot tall) in its wake, then it can burrow at only half speed (10 ft.). Its physical attacks are the same as in the playtest: claw (1d8+5), claw (1d8+5) and mandibles (2d8+5), but have a higher attack bonus (+8 to hit). An umber hulk is classified as a chaotic evil, large monstrosity. It no longer understands Terran, but once again has its own UMBER HULK language.

Umbra hulk can be found in various supplementary 5th Edition products. *Infernal Machine Rebuild*, released in 2019 to support Extra Life, is a time traveling adventure which revisits the Tomb of Horrors. It includes several references to umber hulks. There are dwarf cult fanatics able to magically compel hulks to obey certain command words, a pen where the umber hulks used as labor for construction of the Tomb are kept, and animated umber hulk exoskeletons.



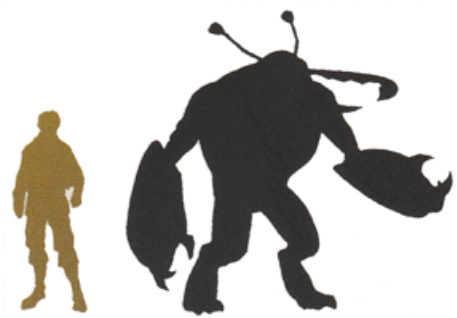
*Dungeons & Dragons Adventures Outlined Coloring Book (2018)*

An umber hulk lurks in the Caverns of Confusion in the *Adventures Outlined Coloring Book*. Another features in *Beasts & Behemoths*, one of the books in the *A Young Adventurer's Guide* series. According to *Beasts*, parents in the Underdark tell their children scary stories about the umber hulk. If you don't finish your dinner and do your chores, the umber hulk will get you!



*Beasts & Behemoths: A Young Adventurer's Guide (2020)*

*Beasts & Behemoths* includes a size comparison showing an eight-foot high umber hulk next to a typical human.



*Beasts & Behemoths: A Young Adventurer's Guide* (2020)

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### Vodyanoi

The vodyanoi debuted in the *Fiend Folio* and is described as a close aquatic relative of the umber hulk, residing in deep fresh-water bodies. The differences between the vodyanoi and the umber hulk are minor. Vodyanoi have green, slimy skin and webbed claws. They appear in groups of 1-3 (instead of 1-4), have 8 hit dice (not 8+8) and their mandibles do 1-10 points of damage (compared to 2-10). Vodyanoi have only two eyes, instead of the four possessed by umber hulks, so they lack the confusion ability of umber hulks. Instead they gain the ability to summon (with a 50% chance of success) 1-20 electric eels.



**Vodyanoi**, *Fiend Folio* (1981)

Vodyanoi eat large fresh-water creatures, but share the umber hulk delight for human flesh if they can get it. They are known to rend the hulls of passing boats with their powerful claws or to simply overturn smaller vessels. The vodyanoi's appearance in the *Fiend Folio* was not universally welcomed. A review in *Dragon* #55 describes it as "a cheap ripoff of the original AD&D monster" that "shouldn't have been allowed in the book".

It's worth noting that although there isn't a mythological origin for the umber hulk, the vodyanoi or vodyanoy is a creature from Slavic myth, said to appear as a naked old man covered in black scales, with a



frog-like face, long hair, green beard and a body covered in algae and muck. A separate fey version of this creature, unrelated to the umber hulk, would eventually appear in *Dragon* #290 and *Frostburn*. The encounter tables in the *Monster Manual II* imply that the vodyanoi is also known as a green hulk. *Dragon* #93 gives the pronunciation as either VOD-ya-noy or VAD-ya-noy.

In *Endless Quest* book #30, *The Fireseed*, Davin Farold and his islander companion Rami encounter a vodyanoi in a sea cave. It is described as a mountain of mottled green flesh, dripping gallons of seawater from its slimy hide, which is covered with warts and growths. Choosing to fight the beast has fatal consequences, and the better choice is to flee from it in the dark of the cave, since its eyes are adapted for hunting in the ocean and it cannot see the protagonists very well.



*Endless Quest* #30: *The Fireseed* (1985)

The *Fiend Folio* suggests that there is also a salt-water species twice as large as the vodyanoi and umber hulk. Less than 18 months later, *Dragon* #68 obliged with a statistics block and description of the marine variety vodyanoi in the article *What's That in the Water?*

A marine vodyanoi is described as a predator that fears nothing. It is a larger, more powerful, and less intelligent version of its freshwater cousin, 14-20 feet tall, 8-12 feet wide and of low intelligence. It has more hit dice (12+6) and it does more damage with its claws (4-24 points) and bite (2-16 points). The statistics block accidentally omits to provide an armor class. For some reason the *Fiend Folio* did not list a swim speed for the freshwater vodyanoi, but its marine cousin gains a swim speed of 12" and can burst up to 24" for short periods, which it often does when attacking. On a successful attack it has a chance to grasp characters in its mandibles; the byzantine details of how to determine if a victim can break free make the 3.0 grappling rules seem slick.

This version of vodyanoi has tough, sandpapery skin and has a chameleon-like ability to change color from deep sea green to solid black. This allows it to blend in with vegetation, rock and other underwater features, and increase the change of surprising opponents. It is a cold blooded creature, so neither infravision nor ultravision reveals it. Despite being described as fearless, if it is being bested in a fight, the marine vodyanoi will attempt to flee, and will try to use its camouflage ability to avoid detection.

The marine vodyanoi is very rare, compared to the already rare vodyanoi, and is found only solitary or in pairs. It is more likely to be found in its lair (50% instead of 30%) and has treasure type U instead of G. This includes gems, jewelry and magic items excluding potions and scrolls, and is a treasure type frequently assigned to underwater creatures.

A different salt-water version of the vodyanoi appears in *Dungeon* #79. This is not as powerful as the marine vodyanoi from *Dragon* #68. It has only 10 hit dice and does less damage.

In the 2nd Edition *Monstrous Compendium*, the vodyanoi shares a page with the umber hulk, but still gets its own stats block. Comparing this to the *Fiend Folio*, the only substantial change is that the vodyanoi's movement has decreased to 3, but it now has a swim speed of 6. *FOR3: Pirates of the Fallen Stars* provides statistics for vodyanoi, if somehow coerced to tow vessels. It can tow 10 tons of cargo at a speed of one mile per hour.

There are minor encounters with vodyanoi in *T1-4: Temple of Elemental Evil* and *I8: Ravager of Time*. Notably the vodyanoi in *I8: Ravager of Time* summon giant leeches instead of electric eels. There are three vodyanoi lurking in the *Pilgrim's Pool* in *Polyhedron* #36.

*The Rod of Seven Parts* includes a vodyanoi encounter, but this is an illusion created by an eye of the deep. The illusory vodyanoi has an unrealistically rapid movement rate, which could be a clue to its phantasmal nature.



**Vodyanoi**, *Dragon* #250 (1998)

Towards the end of 2nd Edition, a playable version of the vodyanoi appeared in *Dragon* #250, in the article *Heroes of the Sea*. This drew on the model used for PC races in *The Complete Book of Humanoids*. The choice to include the vodyanoi is odd, given that the umber hulk didn't make the cut for *The Complete Book of Humanoids*, but perhaps there weren't enough other aquatic humanoids to choose from for the article.

The playable vodyanoi gets ability bonuses to strength and constitution, and penalties to dexterity and charisma. It is limited to a 3rd level shaman or 12th level fighter, and gains hit dice by class with a bonus 8 hit points at first level. Vodyanoi can be of any chaotic alignment when played, as change from their normal chaotic evil. According to the article, vodyanoi range from 8½ to 10 feet tall, and 760 to 880 lbs in weight.

They live up to 250 years and can function at a maximum depth of 1,300 feet below sea level. A vodyanoi's vision is 2-3 times better than a typical human can see underwater.

We learn that vodyanoi are solitary, meeting occasionally to mate, possibly in legendary vodyanoi meeting grounds deep in the ocean trenches. They can communicate over vast distances using a low, rumbling language which is a dialect of the umber hulk tongue. Adventuring vodyanoi remain loners at heart, valuing their own interests over those of any group. Their bulk makes them incapable of wearing armor and they eschew weapons other than their natural ones. If forced to move on land, they must crawl (at a movement rate of 3) and begin to dehydrate after an hour. Vodyanoi have a superstitious fear of large whales.

From 3rd Edition onwards, vodyanoi are not treated as separate creatures, and are frequently simply referred to as aquatic umber hulks. Based on a description of the vodyanoi in the *Encounters in Faerûn* booklet packaged within the *Forgotten Realms Dungeon Master's Screen*, it seems that they have the same confusing gaze as their landbound cousins. The only differences between the two are that the vodyanoi has a swim speed of 20 feet instead of a burrowing speed, and 60-foot range *blindsight* instead of *tremorsense*. Even the size difference seems to fall away after 2nd Edition.

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### Umbur hulk variations

Umbur hulks play a prominent role in the Spelljammer setting because of their relationship with the spider-like neogi, and some undead variations have featured in Spelljammer lore. *SJA2: Skulls & Crossbows* has an encounter with two umber hulk zombies, in the service of a lich. More zombified umber hulks can be found in the undead army of another lich known as the Fool in *The Legend of Spelljammer*.

The article *Magic with an Evil Bite* in *Dragon #184* features a magical construct known as an undead hulk. Each limb, that head and the torso of an undead hulk must come from a different umber hulk, and are knitted together using a magical ritual known only to neogi. Once created, the undead hulk is under the absolute control of its creator, although it can be turned by a cleric as a special undead.

An undead hulk is essentially a mindless zombie. It has 10 hit dice, an armor class of 4, and retains the claw and mandible attacks of its living form (doing 3d4/3d4/1d10 damage). If it strikes with both claws, instead of doing claw damage it can crush its target against its own body, inflicting 6d4 points of damage. It gains 10% magic resistance, but its gaze no longer has a *confusion* effect.



**Undead Hulk, *Dragon #184* (1992)**

Zombies umber hulks were evidently common enough to warrant their own entry in the 3rd Edition *Monster Manual* v.3.5, where they are 16 hit dice monsters. Statistics for an umber hulk skeleton were provided in the article [Monster Mayhem: Sample Skeletons](#) on the Wizards of the Coast website, but that is a less impressive 8 hit dice undead.

*Player's Option: Combat & Tactics* uses a huge umber hulk for some combat examples, and notes that this is “a true mutant”. The *Book of Vile Darkness* suggests that a half-celestial umber hulk is possible, while the *Planar Handbook* has a fiendish umber hulk as a possible encounter on the Unseen Path in the plane of Pandemonium. Continuing the theme of planar hulks, the 4th Edition *Monster Manual* 3 introduces the abyssal hulk and the astral hulk.

Abyssal hulks were created when the earliest umber hulks burrowed so deep into the world that they emerged in other planes. Those that made it to the Elemental Chaos to feed on demon flesh began to warp to reflect their new environment. Abyssal hulks have acidic blood, and gazes which are more maddening than hypnotic. A victim of the hulk's gaze of chaos howls and shrieks as if crazed and attacks a creature of the hulk's choosing. Abyssal hulks sometimes burrow passages between different layers of the abyss.

Astral hulks are umber hulks that somehow migrated to the Astral Sea in the distant past. They devour the very substance of astral dominions like gigantic termites. Some theorize that they are the result of a primordial's scheme to undermine the gods. They are capable of eventually tearing a domain into nothing but a cloud of rocks and floating detritus—a reminder of the threat astral hulks pose to the dominions they infest. Astral hulks are concerned only with annihilation and their gaze can inflict a dangerous lethargy and suppress the instinct of self-preservation. Victims have been known to walk directly into an astral hulk's waiting mouth.

The 3rd Edition *Manual of the Planes* lists shadow umber hulks as residents of the Plane of Shadow, perhaps foreshadowing the 4th Edition shadow hulk. This idea is expanded on in the 3rd Edition *Tome of Magic*, where the dark umber hulk is presented as an example of the “dark creature” template used to create a reflection of an umber hulk found on the Plane of Shadow. It is faster, more insubstantial and harder to spot than an ordinary hulk. The adventure *Alliance at Nefelus* in *Dungeon* #165 has a group of four icetouched umber hulks working for a white dragon. They have ice walking (speed 5) and resist 10 cold damage, but are otherwise identical to normal umber hulks.



**Dark UMBER Hulk, *Tome of Magic* (2006)**



*Dungeon #85* has an adventure titled *Lord of the Scarlet Tide* which involves an infestation by a substance from a forgotten dimension that is known as scarlet rust. Strands of writhing fungus cover the body of an infected creature and its personality is destroyed by the plant. One of the infected creatures in the adventure is an umber hulk. It has the base abilities of a normal hulk, but can regenerate and can infect others with scarlet rust, either using its writhing fungal tentacles or by spitting a glob of concentrated rust at an opponent. Scarlet children, as infected beings are known, are vulnerable to sunlight, which causes them to become dormant.

There is another plant-controlled umber hulk in *DYV4-05: Urban Renewal*, a *Living Greyhawk* adventure. This umber servant has been animated by myconids and is covered in sweet-smelling, luminescent purple fungus. Another *Living Greyhawk* scenario, *PAL4-03: All Which is Forgotten*, includes a group of five pseudonatural umber hulks. In *VTF5-06: Faith and Love*, there are umber hulks that have become spellwarped and modified by the Ataphads—residents of a mysterious island chain in the eastern Dramidj Ocean. Finally, *IUZ6-02: Blue Scales, Red Secrets* has an elite advanced half-red dragon umber hulk.

The 4th Edition *Book of Vile Darkness* contains themes that can be applied to change a creature. One of these themes is “chaos beast” which is applied when a creature is directly touched by raw chaos. The infected creature suffers from corporeal instability and becomes an amorphous engine of destruction bent on spreading its chaos plague. One of the sample encounters in the book involves a chaos beast deep hulk.

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### Umbur hulk parts

According to the 1st Edition *Players Handbook* one of the material components for the *guards and wards* spell is a small amount of umber hulk blood. It remains a component in the 2nd Edition, 3rd Edition and 5th Edition versions of the spell, only sitting out 4th Edition. *Dragon #81* indicates that the cost of getting a flask of blood from an alchemist is 750 gp. *Player's Option: Spells & Magic*, on the other hand, pegs the price of umber blood as 20 gp; exactly what quantity this isn't specified, but it is enough for only a single spell. According to *Dragon #159*, umber hulk blood also has potential in making a more potent variation of the magical *termite shot* catapult stone found in the Spelljammer setting.

The 1st Edition *Dungeon Masters Guide* lists umber hulk eyes and shrieker spores as the ingredients of a *plant control potion*. According to the *Ecology of the Umbur Hulk*, as well as being used in potions and magical inks, umber hulk eyes are often sold to alchemical shops or wizards' guilds for a typical price of 100-400 gp. *FR4: The Magister* indicates that an umber hulk eye (petrified and probably reduced) is needed to make a *ring of x-ray vision*. It says that this is because umber hulks use x-ray vision to find their way while burrowing, but this x-ray vision isn't supported by any other umber hulk lore. Eyes of an umber hulk are also one of the ingredients the imp Druzil uses when concocting the chaos curse in the novel *Canticle*.

Two umber hulk eyes in a clear liquid can be found in the alchemy laboratory of Leptor the mage in *I7: Baltron's Beacon*, but it isn't clear if Leptor was planning to use them for a *plant control potion* or something else. Similarly, Alexonus Romdril was undertaking experiments involving umber hulk eyes in his alchemical laboratory prior to his death. The investigation of his murder forms the adventure *Death of an Arch-Mage* in *Dragon #111*.

*Dragon #423* details umber dust, which is created from the pulverized eyes of umber hulks. Black in color, it scintillates with an odd sheen when struck by light. UMBER dust is a highly toxic substance with a powerful psionic effect. As well as inflicting significant poison damage (3d8 points), the target of the dust becomes dazed and may start attacking nearby creatures, even if they are allies. An assassin using this dust can inhale a small amount before poisoning someone else. This will inflict some damage and temporarily daze the inhale, but thereafter they will gain some control over a creature that becomes poisoned by the dust. UMBER dust is most commonly manufactured and used by duergar and is usually delivered by wrapping it in cloth that can be unfurled towards a target with a flick of the wrist, or hidden in containers rigged to shoot the powder at an unsuspecting foe.



**Jarl's Trophy Hall**, *G2: The Glacial Rift of the Frost Giant Jarl* (1978)

Amongst the items on display in Jarl's trophy hall in *G2: The Glacial Rift of the Frost Giant Jarl* are the teeth and claws of an umber hulk. The teeth and claws are still in the trophy room in the 5th Edition adaptation of *Glacial Rift* in *Tales from the Yawning Portal* we even get an updated illustration. Each claw could be used as the component for the *claws of the umber hulk* spell from *Tome of Magic*. The cost of obtaining such a claw is 150 gp, according to *Player's Option: Spells & Magic*. According to a list of saving throws for material components in *Of Ships and the Sea*, umber hulk claws have a save of 9.



**Jarl's Trophy Hall**, *Tales from the Yawning Portal* (2017)

According to the *Ecology of the UMBER Hulk*, the hulk has a hide that is tough and damage resistant. Underground races, including kobolds and goblins, will make armor and shields should they happen upon an

umber hulk carcass. This armor resembles plate and has an armor class of 4. It can also be made into studded leather, which the derro in *WGA3: Flames of the Falcon* have done.

Umbur hulk mandibles make good hand-held weapons and if the claws are turned into spiked clubs and maces; these weapons do 1d4 damage. According to the 3rd Edition *Unearthed Arcana*, an umber hulk mandible can be used as a meta-magic component for a *daze monster* spell in order to quicken the spell. This is an expensive proposition, however, since a mandible has a minimum cost of 3,000 gp. As noted in *Forgotten Realms Adventures*, umber hulks mandibles are valuable to ivory traders.

The death cult priest Cyvrant in *Night Below* sculpts and mounts bones as a hobby, and has a threatening-looking umber hulk skeleton in his possession. The desk belonging to the ulitharid Akuloth (*Dungeon* #24) is made of umber hulk armor plates. In *The Doomgrinder*, there is a figurine of a drow female carved from the thigh bone of an umber hulk; it is worth 250 gp to a collector. In 5th edition, *goggles of night* can be fashioned from umber hulk carapace and troll leather, according to *CCC-GAD02-01: The Monster Within*.

In Melbourne Greystreet's museum in *HHQ3: Thief's Challenge* there are two scrolls scribed in elven moon runes on cured umber hulk skin. These contain prophecies of socio-economic events for the next three hundred years, but are listed as having a worth of "questionable". Vodyanoi skin may be fashioned into a sword sheath, according to *Dragon* #111.

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### Umbur hulks and neogi

The Spelljammer setting introduced a close relationship between umber hulks and the spider-like neogi, and this relationship was carried over into later editions, even outside of that setting. According to *Spelljammer: AD&D Adventures in Space*, the neogi keep umber hulks as slaves, and they serve as their personal bearers and soldiers. The umber hulks or "lord servants" are trained from birth to follow their "small lords" and care for their every need. Each neogi has one umber slave that it rates over all others, and who acts as its bodyguard and servant, but they can command other umber hulks, as if they were under a *charm monster* spell. Umbur hulks serve as the frontline raiders in ship-to-ship combat, scrambling across to grappled ships to carry off slaves and bodies alike.



*Spelljammer: AD&D Adventures in Space* (1989)

Umber hulk slaves play a role in neogi politics, with the most votes in elections going to the neogi with the most powerful umber hulk servant. This assumes that the neogi agree to a vote; trial by combat is a more common way of resolving disputes, with the contending neogi and their personal umber hulk slaves battling for domination. The losers are eaten.

A neogi without an umber hulk tends not to survive very long. A captain or overmaster of a spelljamming craft who loses his servant is able to choose a replacement from the umber hulks of his crew. This motivates the crew to take great care that no harm comes to the captain's umber hulk lest they lose their own. A more junior neogi who loses its umber hulk is considered to be an outcast and must somehow regain a slave or risk becoming a slave itself. The same is true of recently hatched neogi young. They are only considered part of the community once they have claimed and commanded an umber hulk.



*Spelljammer: AD&D Adventures in Space* (1989)

It isn't only ordinary neogi that keep umber hulks as slaves. Undead Old Masters (detailed in *SJR1: Lost Ships*) will usually have 4-13 umber hulk bodyguards.

When the neogi were updated to 3rd Edition in the *Monster Manual II*, their relationship with umber hulks was maintained. According to that source, neogi have a special *enslave* ability, but they don't need to use this to subdue or control their umber hulk slaves since the creatures are raised from birth to accept their neogi masters, as they were in 2nd Edition.



*Lords of Madness* dedicates an entire chapter to the neogi, and this also adds to umber hulk lore. The neogi are said to have bred umber hulks as slaves for generations. Every adult neogi has at least one umber hulk, presented to it when it reaches adulthood. Additional umber hulks might be awarded in recognition of a great deed or service to the neogi tribe. Having more than two is considered a great honor. A dead neogi's umber hulks are reassigned to another neogi. UMBER HULKS are responsible for keeping the neogi's other slaves under control. If a neogi dies, its slaves are freed from their mental enslavement. When these slaves try to escape, the dead neogi's umber hulks typically kill them.



**Neogi raid**, *Lords of Madness* (2005)

Neogi generally let their umber hulks do their fighting and they are willing to sacrifice the lives of their slaves if they need to do so to escape from a dangerous situation. A neogi will stay close enough to its servant that the umber hulk's gaze can reach any opponent trying to get close enough to hurt it. Neogi are sometimes carried on the backs of their slaves in special carrying harnesses. For travel in colder climes, this may be an insulated bag.



**Neogi and umber hulk**, *Lord of Madness* (2005)

Free umber hulks appear to have little sympathy for their enslaved relatives. They may even work as mercenaries for neogi, in which case the neogi will not attempt to enslave them, as they lack the capability to serve in the same way as the umber hulks bred into slavery. Similarly, enslaved umber hulks cannot adjust to life with freedoms and are content with their status quo.



*Dragon #427 (2013)*

Although 4th Edition ignored much of the lore of earlier editions, it did not tamper with the neogi/umber hulk relationship, listing them in the encounter groups with their neogi masters in the *Monster Manual 2*. In *Dungeon #168*, the adventure *Web of Chains* focuses on Ghorfal the Voracious, the neogi great old master of the Bloody Chain clan. When the adventurers confront him in his fortifications, Ghorfal is guarded by both neogi and umber hulks. In the *Chaos Scar* adventure *Pit of Delirium* in *Dungeon #190*, the neogi Yalax is guarded by his faithful umber hulk servant. The neogi get a second *Ecology* article in *Dragon #427*, but although this confirms the value of umber hulks as slaves to the neogi it doesn't provide any new information about the hulks.

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### Umbur hulks and other monsters

Even when they are not associated with neogi, umber hulks frequently occupy the role of servitor or slave race in D&D lore.

Illithids provided umber hulk slaves to their kuo-toa allies in *Kingdom of the Ghouls* in *Dungeon #70*. In *Dungeon Delve*, two umber hulks serve as guardians for a cabal of mind flayers. According to *Monster Vault*, illithids use trained umber hulks to dig tunnels. The ulitharid Akuloth in the adventure *Thunder under Needlespire* in *Dungeon #24* keeps two charmed umber hulks as guards. Mind flayers don't just use hulks as slaves, they also experiment on them. One of the illithid grafts described in the 3rd Edition *Fiend Folio* is a pair of grasping mandibles that strongly resemble those of an umber hulk. In *Dungeon #122*, there is no doubt about it, the illithid Sae'Taz has grafted mandibles from an umber hulk onto a giant praying mantis, and umber hulk antennae onto the head of a troglodyte.

The drow in *Shards of the Day* in *Dungeon* #60 have enslaved umber hulks at each of their guard posts. It is not clear how the drow control the beasts, but their enslavement is thorough enough that the drow can send the umber hulks on suicide missions to aid their own escape if necessary. The 4th Edition *Monster Manual* notes that drow have large numbers of enslaved umber hulks in their armies; they remain loyal servitors provided they are kept well fed. They are also used by the drow to dig tunnels, according to *Monster Vault*.

The stone dragon detailed in *Dragon* #134 has an *allies* spell-like power that allows the dragon to *charm*—amongst other things—umber hulks. Truly horrid umber hulks from the *Monster Manual* v.3.5 are occasionally found in the service of evil dragons or sorcerers, usually guarding something.

Tomb tappers, first detailed in *Dragon* #41, hate umber hulks, sometimes enslaving them from birth. The morkoth in *The Maze of the Morkoth* in *Dungeon* #70 has a brutish vodyanoi as one of its minions. The syllix, salamander-like creatures from the Spelljammer setting, keep umber hulks as convenient excavation tools in the adventure *Wildspawn* in *Dungeon* #71. Both the Al-Qadim and Planescape settings make reference to the use of umber hulks as slaves and troops by the dao, and this still the case in 4th Edition, according to *Dungeon* #199.

In *FRC2: Curse of the Azure Bonds*, a ghoul rides atop the back of an umber hulk, banging it on the head with a staff to direct it. UMBER hulks are one of the many types of creatures that the phaerimm inhabiting the Underdark of Faerûn's Anauroch desert control. In the Underdark city of Phaervorul, an umber hulk stands guard while its deepspawn nightmare master ransacks a magic shop (*P2: Demon Queen's Enclave*). The 4th Edition *Monster Manual* 3 has umber ravagers serving as hunting beasts for grimlocks and orcs.

Not every relationship umber hulks have with other creatures involves them being kept as slaves. The umber hulks in *WGR1: Greyhawk Ruins* keep cave fishers as *their* slaves. There are also several creatures with which the umber hulk has a more symbiotic or collegial relationship. According to the *Ecology of the Rust Monster* in *Dragon* #88, rust monsters sometimes follow tunneling umber hulks so as to consume any metallic ores left exposed by the umber hulk's passage. In *H2: The Mines of Bloodstone*, two umber hulks have formed an unusual alliance with a neo-otyugh and four rust monsters. They work together to find food. The 4th Edition *Monster Manual* notes that umber hulks will sometimes lair near a roper, in order to attack parties busy tangling with the roper. One of the random encounters suggested for Gloomwrought's Undercity in *The Shadowfell: Gloomwrought and Beyond* is with an umber hulk teamed up with a savage displacer beast and a cave roper.

*Dragon* #288 suggests that an umber hulk and a vampire could make good allies, given their immunity to each other's gaze attacks, and a lack of any desire to prey on each other. A similar article in *Dragon* #308 suggests vampire spawn as potential allies for the same reasons. The adventure *Home Under the Range* in *Dungeon* #134, mentions a duergar-umber hulk alliance, but doesn't provide any details. *Monster Vault* notes that duergar use trained umber hulks to dig tunnels. Although it doesn't classify them as allies, *Dungeon* #204 has cloaker lord working with umber hulks to make cooperative attacks against potential prey. *Lost Laboratory of Kwalish* includes an encounter in which an umber hulk and a xorn are either cooperating to herd adventurers towards each other, or acting as rivals that the adventurers get caught in the middle of. It is tempting to think this combination may have been inspired by someone's memory of the 1980 AD&D *Umbur Hulk & Xorn* miniature pack (see below).

Umbler hulks consider many creatures to be food, but according to the *Monster Manual*, umbler hulks eat primarily purple worms, ankheg and similar monsters and, of course, humans. This diet and preference remains in 2nd Edition, but their desire for human flesh seems to fade in later editions. The novel *Pool of Radiance* claims that worms are the preferred diet of umbler hulks. This is supported by *The Bestiary* book for the Dragonlance setting, which mentions Urkhan worms as a favored dish.

A few creatures, in turn, consider umbler hulks to be food. The near legendary thagar (or beholder eaters) detailed in *SJR1: Lost Ships* are known to dine on umbler hulks. Consequently, the neogi detest thagar and hunt them on sight. Plainsjan (relatives of gremlins) and anadjiin (fearsome humanoid reptilian/insectoid hunters) from the planet Anadia both consider umbler hulks to be a major food source (*SJR2: Realmspace*). According to *Heart of Nightfang Spire*, subterranean girallons consider umbler hulk a delicacy. *Lords of Madness* notes that umbler hulks are an occasional exotic dish for illithids.

They don't eat umbler hulks, but shard wolves, creatures made of jagged bits of stone, are known to attack umbler hulks. These wolves are detailed in *Dragon #293's Bestiary* article. Finally, there is one creature which instills umbler hulks with irrational fear. According to the *War Captain's Companion*, umbler hulks are deathly afraid of the mechanical jade spiders kept by drow spacefarers.

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### Umbler hulk gods

Ogrémoch, Prince of Evil Earth Creatures, can summon 1-4 umbler hulks per day, according to the 1st Edition *Fiend Folio*. *Monster Mythology* lists vodyanoi as worshippers of Panzuriel; they can advance to level 9 priests or level 5 shamans. Olyhdra, Princess of Evil Water Creatures counts vodyanoi among her followers, according to *The Inner Planes*.



*Dragon #214 (1995)*

*The Ecology of the Neogi* from *Dragon #214* details five neogi deities. One of these, a lesser power named P'kk, is the neogi god of fear and tyranny and takes the form of an umbler hulk with a neogi head. Kr'tx is also a lesser power with the portfolios of brutality and strength. It takes the form of a red neogi with continually burning claws and hair. Kr'tx is revered by the neogi's umbler hulk slaves and the favour of Kr'tx is always demanded before a major battle.



The abyssal hulks from the 4th Edition *Monster Manual 3* can be found in the ranks of almost every demon lord's army, but they are, in particular, gathered by Yeenoghu's minions to serve as guardians and watchers. They lurk beneath the ground on well traveled paths across the plane, ready to spring out to hack their opponents to death or force them over cliff edges. Astral hulks, detailed in the same source, are captured and trained to torture captives by servants of Zehir and Vecna.

Kuo-toa aren't known for their discernment when it comes to choosing beings to worship, but there is a group in the adventure *Pearl of the Sea Mother* in *Dungeon #204* who are worshiping the discarded shell of an umber hulk.

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## Umbur hulks and magic

Over more than four decades, there have been a wide variety of spells and magic items that mimic some of the abilities of umber hulks, turn people into umber hulks, offer protection from umber hulks or even turn umber hulks into digging machines. This section takes a look at the overlap between umber hulks and magic, starting with spells.

The article *A New Look at Illusionists* in *The Dragon #12* presents a variant illusionist class which includes a *gaze of the umber hulk* spell which essentially replicates the creature's gaze as a 4th level spell. This predates the *Players Handbook*, so would have been a class suitable for the original D&D game.

Although it isn't a required component for the spell, the magic-user Grimslade (detailed in *The Rogues Gallery*) carries a figurine of an umber hulk with him for concentrating on when casting *phantasmal force*.

The *claws of the umber hulk* spell is detailed in *Tome of Magic*. It is a 6th-level wizard spell that causes an extremely painful transformation of the target's hands. As well as granting the ability to make two claw attacks each round (each one doing 2d6 points damage plus any application strength bonus), the target of the spell is also able to burrow through earth or even solid stone as fast as an umber hulk would. *A Paladin in Hell* notes that casting this spell in the Abyss runs the risk of permanent corruption of the target, potentially leaving them with forever transformed hands. Another way to make the effects of the spell permanent is using *Allisandro's binding curse* from the Ravenloft *Forbidden Lore* boxed set. This spell allows the caster to make certain other spells permanent on a target, and it works with *claws of the umber hulk*.

The 5th Edition version of *claws of the umber hulk* isn't a spell, but a set of heavy, elbow-length gauntlets forged in the shape of an umber hulk's claws. Someone wearing both claws gains a burrowing speed of 20 feet and can tunnel through 1 foot of solid rock per round. A claw can also be used as a melee weapon, doing 1d8 slashing damage. The *claws of the umber hulk* are detailed in *Princes of the Apocalypse*, and are made by a dao forgemaster.

The *find minion* spell (from *Dragon #228*) is a 6th-level spell that is an advanced version of *find familiar* and provides a wizard with a more powerful minion. One of the possible creatures summoned by this spell is an umber hulk. The eyes of a wizard with such a companion change to resemble those of the hulk – blackened circles.

Several magic items can summon umber hulks. There are *statues of summoning* in *Labyrinth of Madness* that might summon an umber hulk. This possibility is complicated by the presence of a mind-switching artifact

in the same level of the labyrinth, which regularly switches consciousness of some of those within its range. This could lead to a PC inhabiting the body of an umber hulk, and gaining the creature's gaze attack. The text notes that while the gaze attack remains with the body of the mind-switched umber hulk, the mind now inhabiting it is not able to consciously control the gaze, so is presumably not able to switch it on or off, or selectively target enemies.

The article *101 Surprises in a Bag of Beans* presents a wide range of new ideas to spring on players reaching into a *bag of beans*. One of these is an umber hulk that, if slain, changes color and utters a prophecy before turning into dust.



*The Astromundi Cluster* (1993)

*The egg of night* is described in *The Astromundi Cluster*. This artifact resembles an obsidian egg, inlaid with precious gemstones in flame patterns. It is also referred to as the “black egg”. The material from which the egg is constructed picks up the thoughts of its owner, and the egg slowly changes its powers to provide what the owner most wishes. Since it is currently in the possession of neogi, it is configured to create umber hulk servants. If opened, and a gold coin placed inside, the egg will create a tiny portal to the Abyss, and construct a miniature umber hulk from the abyssal substance that flows through. This takes seven days, after which the tiny umber hulk emerges from the egg and, over the course of ten hours, grows to full size. The created umber hulk remains loyal to the owner of the egg for one month, after which, it gradually becomes less and less likely to obey commands. After a second month has passed, the created hulk will attempt to kill its master and seize control of the egg, so that it can create a portal back to the Abyss, through which it will escape.

The *jade flute* from *Dungeon #76* uses subsonic vibrations to summon and control burrowing creatures within one hundred miles. In the adventure *Earth Tones*, it is used to call six umber hulks to attack. A different type of magically-treated jade nauseates and repels umber hulks, and is corrosive to their hides. This substance is manufactured by drow and used to coat the mandibles and saw-edged legs of the giant animated stone spider statues that guard city gates. These constructs are known as *jade spiders* and are detailed in *FOR2: The Drow of the Underdark*.

The *staff of night* is first detailed in *Dragon #173*. One of its powers is to summon an umber hulk obedient to the wielder. It can do this once every seven days (or every tenday in the Realms). While grasping the staff, the wielder is immune to the *confusion* gaze of all umber hulks, not just the summoned one. In the revised *Forgotten Realms Campaign Setting*, the staff is presented as Lord Aumry of Shadowdale's *staff of the hulk*. In this iteration, the *staff* is made of twisted iron topped with a large claw holding a halved geode with iridescent violet crystals. When the staff is activated, the crystals glow and shoot out a purple beam which strikes the earth, summoning an umber hulk to serve the staff's wielder for up to 20 rounds. In most 3rd Edition sources it is referred to as the *staff of night* and made of black wood carved with runes of darkness, stars, night and one rune resembling an umber hulk; the staff crumbles to dust if the summoned beast is ever slain. In the version appearing in *Complete Arcane*, the summoned creature is now a fiendish umber hulk. In the *Magic Item Compendium*, it is renamed as the *runestaff of night*. In *FR2: Shadowdale: The Scouring of the Land*, it is renamed again to be *Aumry's staff of the night*. The description here matches the one from the *Forgotten Realms Campaign Setting*.

Several other magic items also grant protections against the umber hulk's gaze. When fitted over one eye, the *eye feather token* (from *Dragon #54*) makes the wearer immune to the effects of the umber hulk's gaze. One of the powers of the *rod of orbs*, detailed in *SJR1: Lost Ships* is to confer immunity to gaze attacks, including that of the umber hulk. *Spectacles of gaze resistance* (from *Dungeon #84*) provide a resistance bonus to saves against gaze attacks, including that of an umber hulk.

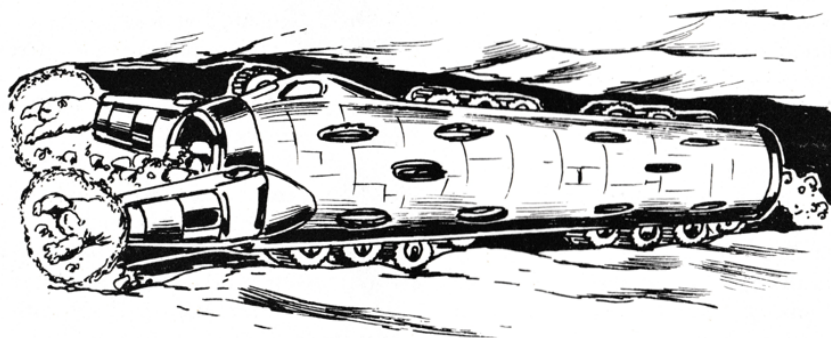
One of the many, many possible effects of a magical fountain, as described in *Bazaar of the Bizarre* in *The Dragon #34*, is to create a mental block preventing someone from drinking the water of the fountain from being aware of a nearby umber hulk.

An alternative to summoning an umber hulk is to turn someone into one. An umber hulk is one of the many possible creatures that someone struck by a *paddleboard of wondrous transformation* might change into, according to *Dragon #134*. A *gargoyle cloak*, first described in *T1-4: Temple of Elemental Evil* polymorphs its user into a gargoyle; according to *Encyclopedia Magica Volume I (A-D)*, one of the other creatures that has an associated polymorphing cloak is the umber hulk.

The *girdle of the umber hulk* from *Adventurer's Vault* is cut from the carapace of an umber hulk. It doesn't turn the wearer into one, but it does provide the ability to tunnel through the ground, and at higher levels, even through solid stone. The *form of the umber hulk* power from the underchasm darkwatcher paragon path in *Dragon #379* does change the warden or warlock into an umber hulk, at least partially. It provides insect-like eyes, sprouting antennae, a pair of sharp mandibles, and a gaze that dazes nearby targets.

Once you have an umber hulk, how do you get rid of it? The *flute of dismissing* from *Dragon #47* has the power to disrupt magics that bind summoned or conjured monsters, sending them back to their plane of origin. For

some reason, the umber hulk is listed as one of the creatures the flute works on. This is strange given that there is nothing in the creature's description indicating that it is native to anywhere other than the Prime Material Plane.



**Beldane's Subterranean Borer**, *AC11: The Book of Wondrous Inventions* (1987)

*Beldane's subterranean borer* from *AC11: The Book of Wondrous Inventions* is a sixty foot long tunnel bore, with a crew of three wizards, and three drilling arms each terminating in an umber hulk suspended in a globe of force. This device gets two full pages of detailed description from its creator, Ed Greenwood. Many of Greenwood's numerous contributions to D&D lore deserve acclaim. This is probably not one of them.

A slightly less outlandish digging machine features in *Dungeon #90*. It is designed in the shape of an umber hulk, complete with insectoid head, enormous mandibles and great claws. A hatch in the back provides access to a compartment, from which a small or medium-sized creature can operate the devices using a series of levers and pedals.

In *Night Below: An Underdark Campaign* there is a *crystal ball* set into a platinum hand-sized model of an umber hulk's claw. There is also a ceramic *alchemy jug* engraved with umber hulks. These unusual designs don't give the *crystal ball* or the *alchemy jug* any additional special powers.

In the adventure *Tears of the Crocodile God* in *Dungeon #209*, there are statues armed with *shatterspell shields*, which release a once off magical effect when struck. Each shield depicts a specific creature. The umber hulk shield slides the attacker five squares away from the shield's wielder and both the attacker and the wielder are left dazed.

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### Al-Qadim

*Cities of Bone* notes that umber hulks can be found in the catacombs beneath the ruined city of Moradask. According to *ALQ4: Secrets of the Lamp*, umber hulks and vodyanoi are some of the many creatures captured by the sandmen to serve the dao as slaves. One of the units of troops maintained by the dao in the Great Dismal Delve on the plane of elemental Earth is known as the Corpse-Tearers or the Four-Eyed Giants. It consists of 1,200 well-disciplined umber hulks specially bred for obedience. They are used for burrowing maneuvers and as shock troops.

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### Birthright

Although a pair of umber hulks is mentioned in the Birthright adventure *Sword and Crown*, it is also noted that the creatures are almost unknown in Cerilia. This pair dines primarily on stray elves and orogs.

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## Blackmoor

The Mystaran version of the umber hulk known as the hulker is found in Blackmoor. The statistics block from *AC9: Creature Catalogue* is reprinted in the *Monsters & Foes* section of *DA3: City of the Gods*, and they are listed on the “Envio Pod” encounter tables.

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## Council of Wyrms

In the encounter tables for Io’s Blood Isles, umber hulks are listed as possibilities for arctic subterranean and tropical subterranean locations. There are also saltwater vodyanoi listed as a possible encounter for tropical sea or coastal areas. The footnote states that these have 16 hit dice and attacks of 2d10+2/2d10+2/2d10 which makes these vodyanoi more powerful than any other 2nd Edition version.

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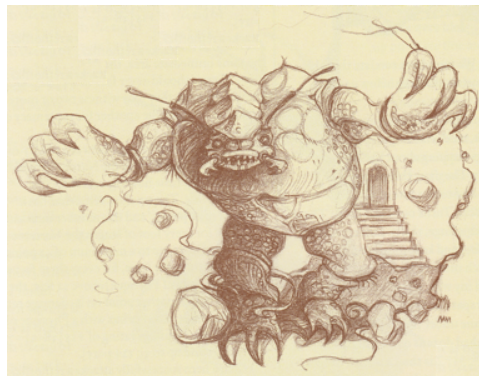
## Dark Sun

*Dragon Kings* states that no umber hulks live on Athas. As a result, the spell *claws of the umber hulk* is known as *claws of the earth drake*. According to *Defilers and Preservers: The Wizards of Athas*, the components for this version of the spell are a fist full of dirt and a bone shard carved into the shape of a drake’s claw. As we’ll see later, the complete lack of Athasian umber hulks doesn’t prevent them from showing up in the *Dark Sun: Wake of the Ravager* computer game.

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## Dragonlance

The first appearance of umber hulks in the Dragonlance setting is in *DL12: Dragons of Faith*. They inhabit an ancient tomb in Kendermore known as the Ruins. UMBER HULKS can also be found in the ruins of the city of Karthay. The encounters tables in *MC4: Monstrous Compendium Dragonlance Appendix* confirm that both umber hulks and vodyanoi are residents of Ansalon in 2nd Edition. They can also be found on the continent of Taladas, according to *DLR2: Taladas: The Minotaurs*.



*The Bestiary* (1998)

The monster book for the SAGA version of Dragonlance includes an entry for the umber hulk. The text reveals that the dwarves of Thorbardin have little stone statues carved into the wall, each containing a silver bell. These warn of the approach of umber hulks, described in *The Bestiary* as ten feet tall behemoths with an iridescent brown shell of legendary hardness. They have a pair of large outer eyes that sense heat, and a smaller inner pair for sensing motion. Their wispy antennae function as ears, and their massive taloned arms allow them to move unhesitatingly through solid stone. They are earth creatures and are so frightened of light that they never dwell less than five hundred feet from the surface. The umber hulks attack Thorbardin because the Urkhan worms that the dwarves have domesticated are their favorite meal. When they attack, they cause considerable damage and their confusing gaze causes much chaos. However, according to *The*

*Bestiary*, these umber hulks do not have a vicious nature, and have no taste for battle, and will often turn and run if an opponent scores just one or two damaging blows.

Dhamon Grimwulf and his companions fight an umber hulk in the novel *Redemption* after running into it while it is hunting for goblins. Interestingly, this specimen is described as having thick, green blood when injured. In 3rd Edition, there are umber hulk encounters in *Dragons of Autumn* (near Thorbardin's Northgate) and in *Price of Courage* (in the Shadowglades and in the Fey Wood). *Price of Courage* also features Snowflake, a monstrous half-white dragon/half-horrid umber hulk hatched from a corrupted white dragon egg.



Vodyanoi, *DLT1: New Tales: The Land Reborn* (1993)

Aquatic umber hulks also have a presence in the setting. A family of vodyanoi lives just offshore from Kendermore. They create pit traps along the sandy beaches. In the novel *The Companions*, Sturm and Caramon have a fleeting encounter with a pair of vodyanoi. In *DLT1: New Tales: The Land Reborn*, the good ship *Brightblade* is attacked by half a dozen vodyanoi one day after leaving the Qualinesti city of Porliost.

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## Eberron

The Citadel of the Closed Circle is a fortress located in the Khyber's Gate district of Sharn, sealed by magic. According to *Sharn: City of Towers*, a mind flayer recently emerged from Khyber along with several minions, including an umber hulk. It has broken the Citadel's arcane seal, and begun to extract disturbing and powerful relics from within. The implication is that umber hulks originate in Khyber, and this is supported by the *Player's Guide to Eberron*, which notes that the daelkyr used them as shock troops.

Beneath the githyanki settlement of Katal Hazath in the Greywall Mountains is a network of tunnels known as the Uluriak (githyanki for "tangle"). UMBER HULKS can be encountered wandering these tunnels, according to the *Explorer's Handbook*.

The *Adventurers League* release *Oracle of War: Salvage Bases & Missions* lists umber hulks on the encounter tables for the Mournland. In *DDAL-EB-16: The Dragon Below*, when the adventurers travel too deep into the sewers beneath Metrol Station they reach tunnels on the fringes of Khyber. An umber hulk is one of several potential encounters there.

Umbra hulks can be found on continents other than Khorvaire. According to *Dragons of Eberron*, truly horrid umber hulks can be found on the continent of Argonnessen. The ruins of the Qabalin, the first

necromancers of Eberron, lie in the depths of Xen'drik in a region known as the Ring of Storms. According to the encounter tables in *Dungeon #122*, umber hulks can be found in the region, sometimes associating with mind flayers.

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### Forgotten Realms

There are mentions of umber hulks scattered throughout Forgotten Realms lore. The revised 1993 *Forgotten Realms Campaign Setting*, includes Umber Hulk in its list of languages of the Realms and the creatures are clearly common throughout the Underdark, appearing on the encounter tables for the Upperdark, Middledark and Lowerdark in *Underdark*. They are usually encountered as nomadic hunters, and until 4th Edition they were not recorded as having any major settlements in the Realms.

There are specific mentions of umber hulks in most geographic regions of Faerûn. According to *FR1: Waterdeep and the North*, the coat of arms of the now-exiled Zoar family of Waterdeep consist of a realistic, severed umber hulk's head impaled on a bloody spear. In the “recent news and rumors in the north” section, *FR5: The Savage Frontier* recounts the escape of a huge beast from a passing Zhentarim caravan. Described as man-like with fierce beetle-like mandibles, the escapee could be an umber hulk.



**Fidelio and the Umber Lord**, *Expedition to Undermountain* (2007)

Not unexpectedly, umber hulks can be found in Undermountain. They are frequently found near the many gates scattered through the dungeon, waiting to pounce on bewildered or off-guard arrivals (*Ruins of Undermountain*). According to the plaque on the tomb of Adlon the Grim, there is a location named Umber Hulk Gorge within Undermountain (*Undermountain: The Lost Level*). Umber hulks are particularly numerous in the Maze of Madness.

One of the quests in *Expedition to Undermountain* involves retrieving the crystal-encrusted skull of a mutant umber hulk from an umber hulk lair. The mutations to its skull consist of horn-like crystalline growths jutting out of its head. They have given the umber hulk, referred to as a “psi-hulk”, several psionic abilities: *psionic lion's charge*, *biofeedback*, *inertial armor*, and *vigor*. When it is killed, the psi-hulk crumbles to dust, leaving only the crystallized skull. This functions as a magical item, boosting the wearer's intelligence (+2 enhancement bonus) when worn.

By the time of 5th Edition's *Waterdeep: Dungeon of the Mad Mage* umber hulk tunneling has connected the Lost Level to the rest of Undermountain and the creatures now roam the Lost Level freely in search of prey. That source also mentions umber hulks in Maddgoth's Castle and one in Arcturiadoom, although that one has been polymorphed into a scorpion and wished permanently so. It is now hiding inside an old shoe, perhaps the least likely location for any umber hulk encounter!



*Waterdeep: Dungeon of the Mad Mage* (2018)

A trading expedition from Blingdenstone to Mithral Hall was ambushed by an overwhelming force of umber hulks, according to *Drizzt Do'Urden's Guide to the Underdark*. The encounters tables for the nearby Wormwrithings in *Out of the Abyss* include a solitary umber hulk.

In the novel *The Two Swords*, Drizzt runs into a tribe of frost giants in the cavern complex known as Shining White. Amongst the trophies that they have on display in their great hall are the heads of umber hulks. In *Gauntlgrym*, the dark elf runs into one of 4th Edition's shadow hulks. In the following novel, *Neverwinter*, Drizzt's path takes him to Neverwinter, which is attacked by a force of umber hulks under control of the Abolethic Sovereignty. The hulks kill many citizens of the city before they are repulsed.

The antagonist in *Neverwinter* is Sylora Salm, a Thayan sorceress. During the course of the story, her champion, Jesty Rallewin, undergoes a ritual in which he is covered in hot oil and encased in strips of boiled and magically treated umber hulk hide. It takes five umber hulks to produce enough hide to cover Jesty. Once the strips harden, he has an almost impenetrable armored skin which, in addition to its other properties, grants resistance to lightning energy. In the novel *The Last Threshold*, the halfling warlock Effron Alegni has an umber hulk zombie servant that he keeps stored miniaturized in a glass jar.

The short story *The Fallen Lands* in *Realms of Shadow* is set in the Savage Frontier. The wizard protagonist and a group of Uthgardt barbarians take on a dark naga controlling an orc army, and the naga is guarded by a pair of umber hulks. Some time later, the protagonists of *Son of Thunder* find the remains of this naga and the umber hulks while searching the battlefield.

In the 5th Edition adventure *Princes of the Apocalypse*, umber hulks are found in the Sacred Stone Monastery in Sumer Hills, including one that has been blinded and had its claws removed by the resident Black Earth cultists. There is also an umber hulk in the Temple of Howling Hatred in the fortress-city of Tyar-Besil.



In the novel *Pools of Darkness*, two of the defenders of Phlan are discussing previous attacks on the city. In one of them, an army of giants attacked one side of the city, while a hundred umber hulks burrowed underground and attacked on the other side.

According to *Mysteries of the Moonsea* umber hulks live in the sewers under the city of Mulmaster and well as in the Zhentarim fortress known as the Citadel of the Raven. In the novel *Prince of Ravens*, the protagonists encounter umber hulks in the ruins of Sarbreen, below Raven's Bluff.

The circus of Dr. Trundles, first described in *FR9: The Bloodstone Lands*, includes an umber hulk as one of its monstrous wonders. The circus tours Impiltur, and the creature may be native to the northeast region, as umber hulks are found in the Bloodstone Mines (according to *H2: The Mines of Bloodstone*). There is a story of an encounter with an umber hulk in the mountains in the northwestern corner of Damara in *PG2: Player's Guide to the Forgotten Realms Campaign*.

According to *Elminster's Ecologies*, thousands of years ago a species of umber hulks and a strain of fire toads competed for ankheg larvae in the cavern beneath Giantspire Mountains. The umber hulk population grew to the point that the toads were forced to adapt to a diet of beetles and other insects instead. Both species continue to thrive in the region.

*The Athalantan Campaign* in *Dragon #228* jumps back in time some eleven centuries to the time when the kingdom of Athalantan existed in the Western Heartlands. Around this time, a young magelord named Eth "Stoneclaw" Munster slew an umber hulk, and then created a spell which gave him the creature's stone-rendering claws.

The 4th Edition *Forgotten Realms Campaign Guide* contains the first reference to a major settlement of umber hulks. Some 500 hulks dwell in the clanhold of Nezchenzûr, located roughly 120 miles northeast of the kuo-toan city of Sloopdilmopolop. A rough and dangerous place, umber hulks meet here to trade with each other. Although the community is rapidly growing in sophistication they are not yet open to trade with anyone who is not of their kind.

The *Living Forgotten Realms* adventure *CORE2-1: Killing the Messenger* features an umber hulk merchant named Zixzzuthzikyriin Xvixaithnic. He is nervous and passive aggressive, but will not meet another creature's eyes. He sells glue made from kuo-toa secretions and a variety of poisons from his stall in the Dark Weavings Bazaar.

Elfsong Tavern in Baldur's Gate is detailed in *Baldur's Gate: Descent into Avernus*. The tavern has a private dining space known as the UMBER HULK ROOM after the mounted umber hulk head hanging on the east wall. In *FRQ2: Hordes of Dragonspear*, umber hulks can be encountered in the labyrinth underneath Dragonspear Castle in the High Moor. *The Rise of Tiamat* mentions umber hulks in the vicinity of the Well of Dragons in the Sunset Mountains.

Although most intelligent monsters have been cleansed from the central agricultural region of Amn, umber hulks are still occasionally seen. They are somewhat more common in Calimshan, according to *FR3: Empires of the Sands*.

*FA2: Nightmare Keep* is set in the Veilstone Peaks northwest of Cormyr. A group of umber hulks dwells within the keep; one of their number was recently killed by a nearby band of undead marine scraggs.

According to *Volo's Guide to Cormyr*, the mage Endarthar of Wildwoods trains a variety of exotic servitor creatures, including umber hulks. There are umber hulks in the lower levels of Orvaskyte Keep in *Four from Cormyr*. The novel *The Council of Blades* mentions that trained umber hulks form part of an attack on the city-state of Sumbria, one of the Blade Kingdoms.

According to *Sea of Fallen Stars*, although vodyanoi are believed by the people of Serôs to be extinct, they still exist in very small numbers in the Hmur Plateau and the Mountains of Volar. Vodyanoi are one of the races the mythal at Myth Nantar prevents from entering the City of Destinies. Laaqueel, a malenti princess, fights a vodyanoi in the short story *One Who Swims with Sekolah* in the anthology *Realms of the Deep*, and comes close to losing her life in the process.

According to *FR10: Old Empires*, there is a family of vodyanoi living in the Akanamere lake in Chessenta. In the town of Oeble in the Border Kingdoms, two umber hulks work as bouncers in the tavern Talondance, according to the novel *The Black Bouquet*. According to *Shining South*, in this region, umber hulks are sometimes encountered as the spawned offspring of deepspawn.

In *FRA3: Blood Charge*, which takes place in the Raurin desert, two of the tests the adventurers must face in the Red Mountain Monastery involve umber hulks. One revolves around a magical sword and a miniature (four foot high) hyper-aggressive umber hulk, and the other a huge umber hulk who speaks perfect Common. Given the nature of these encounters, these are clearly not naturally occurring creatures.

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## Ghostwalk

In the *Ghostwalk* setting, umber hulks have been sighted in the damp caverns below the river and Phantom Hill. They also wander the caverns and buried streets below the city of Manifest.

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## Greyhawk

Given that they first appeared in *Supplement I: Greyhawk*, it isn't surprising that umber hulks have a presence on Oerth. They appear in the Underdark encounter tables in *MC5: Monstrous Compendium Greyhawk Adventures Appendix* and in several encounters in *WGR1: Greyhawk Ruins*, specifically in the Tower of War and the Tower of Zagig. Several of the umber hulks in the Tower of War are bound with adamantite chains, which are evidently impervious to their claws. In *Expedition to the Ruins of Castle Greyhawk*, umber hulks are listed in the encounter tables for the Tower of War and the Tower of Magic.

*WGR2: Treasures of Greyhawk* has a cross-over Spelljammer encounter set in the City of Greyhawk. It involves a group of neogi and a mind flayer ally who are in the process of setting up a slave-trading network in the Greyspace crystal sphere. As to be expected, this scenario also features several umber hulks. *From the Ashes* notes that umber hulks have been sighted roaming near the fork of the Jewel river in the Gnarley Forest. They also appear on the encounter tables for the Scarlet Brotherhood on the Tilvanot Peninsula in southeastern Flanaess. The late 3rd Edition adventure *Iggwilv's Legacy: The Lost Caverns of Tsojcanth* in *Dungeon #151* includes an encounter with two advanced umber hulks.

Umber hulks have also appeared in Greyhawk fiction; in *Master Wolf*, Mika-oba has to drag a confused Hornsbuck away by the hair to escape a pair of hulks.

Vodyanoi are listed on the encounter tables for both salt and fresh water depths in *MC5: Monstrous Compendium Greyhawk Adventures Appendix*. An aquatic umber hulk was kept in Castle Tealpeck in the Duchy of Ulek, as mentioned in *Dungeon #137*. According to the *Atlas of the Flanaess* in *From the Ashes*, freshwater vodyanoi have been reported in the great lake Nyr Dyv.

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### Historical Reference

The article *Thrills and Chills* in *Dragon #68* includes umber hulks on the encounter tables for a campaign set in the pleistocene epoch. In *Dragon #176*, *Playing in the Paleozoic* lists the vodyanoi as suitable for a paleozoic swamp encounter. The *d20 Future* book for d20 Modern suggests that an umber hulk would not be out of place in a futuristic encounter.

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### Kingdoms of Kalamar

Umber hulks dwell in the Underdark of the Kingdoms of Kalamar setting. According to *Blood and Shadows: The Dark Elves of Tellene*, the native mind flayers use them as slaves. It is possible that the Tellenian umber hulks have a somewhat different physiology to ordinary umber hulks, as there is some evidence that they are egg-laying. The unpublished manuscript for *Friend & Foe: Dwarves and Goblins of Tellene* notes that stone dwarves eat umber hulk eggs.

*Blood and Shadows: The Dark Elves of Tellene* also details the umber bulk, said to be a “lesser cousin” of the umber hulk. It is also referred to as a “dire whirli’ bug”. This creature is an unintelligent, two ton herd animal, which is somehow still “medium” size! It has a large chitinous shell, two pairs of beady black eyes protruding from the front, and stubby legs that propel it slowly along the ground, of which it has either six or dozens, depending on which description in *Blood and Shadows* you rely on. UMBER BULKS graze on lichens and other fungus. Females lay clutches of four to six eggs and calves reach maturity in just four weeks. They are farmed by the dark elves of Tellene for their gray meat, which tastes much like chicken. The milk of umber bulks is also consumed by the elves, sometimes sweetened.

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### Mystara

In the world of Mystara, the umber hulk is known as the hulker, and it is a relative of the hook horror. That wasn’t always the case though. In the entry for gargantua in the *Companion Rules*, the “umber hulk” is listed as one of the monsters for which gargantuan forms are rumored to exist. By the time we get to *AC9: Creature Catalogue* the umber hulk has been reclassified as a member of the hook beast family and it gets its own write up as a hulker.

The two Mystaran hook beasts, the hulker and the hook horror, are often encountered together and they share a common crude language consisting of talon clicks. The hulker is not as intelligent as its umber hulk relatives—it has an intelligence score of only 6—and it does not use tools or weapons. It does not have a societal structure, but a hulker will often function as the leader of a hunting band of hook horrors. The hulker shares the umber hulk’s appetite for human flesh, but has slightly broader tastes and relishes the meat of any humanoid creature.

Hulkers have an armor class of 2, 10 hit dice, and a movement of 60' (or 20' burrowing). They have three attacks, two claw attacks (2-12 damage each) and a bit attack (2-16 damage). Standing nine feet tall, they are larger (and have slightly more hit points) than an umber hulk, but do comparable damage. Like the umber hulk they are encountered in groups of up to four. The alignment of the hulker is listed as chaotic.

The text doesn't discuss the hulkers' eyes, except to note that they have excellent vision and infravision (with a range of 120 feet), but the illustration gives them six pairs of eyes, two large eyes and ten smaller ones located on its forehead. Despite having more eyes, the Mystaran hulker lacks the *confusion* gaze of its umber hulk cousin. When it was reprinted in *DMR2: Creature Catalog* the hulker's entry was expanded to note that the hulker's many eyes are the reason for its superior vision, with the smaller eyes being sensitive to heat and giving the infravision, while the widely-spaced main eyes provide binocular vision as good as that of cats in low-light situations. *DMR2: Creature Catalog* notes that hulkers are found predominantly in caverns.



**Hulker**, AC9: *Creature Catalogue* (1986)

The 2nd Edition *Mystara Monstrous Compendium Appendix* clarifies that the umber hulk is known as the hulker on Mystara, but it does not address the differences between the creatures, including the hulker's lack of a *confusion* gaze. The *Appendix* also confirms that vodyanoi are found in the setting, since they are listed on the encounter tables for freshwater depths.

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## Planescape

Umbur hulk is known to dwell in the Worm Realm, the 399th layer of the Abyss and the burrow of Urdlen, the mole-god of evil gnomes (*Planes of Chaos*). In the adventure *Dead Gods*, a slime-covered umber hulk is a possible encounter during a trip across the Outlands from Chariamur to Ironridge.

*The Inner Planes* places umber hulk in a number of elemental locations. The dao keep them as slaves on the Elemental Plane of Earth, as do the neogi who have chosen to make that plane their home. There are tales of frost-covered umber hulk on the Paraelemental Plane of Ice in the Chiseled Estate that is the home of Cryonax.

Hungry vodyanoi can be found in the Bottomless Deep of the Elemental Plane of Water. *A Guide to the Astral Plane* notes that vodyanoi may be found in the astral plane's Living Sea. They inhabit the astral reef found within the Sea.

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## Ravenloft

The umber hulk gets only a passing mention in the original *Ravenloft: Realm of Terror* boxed set, as a possible creature to use for a "returning beast" story hook. It is one of a succession of enemies that must be fought in a challenge in *The Forgotten Terror*, an adventure taking place entirely in the gemstone domain of Aggarath.



*RA2: Ship of Horror* has a perfunctory encounter with three vodyanoi (a mother and two juveniles). *Van Richten's Guide to Ravenloft* lists umber hulks as appropriate threats to use in a dark fantasy genre of horror.

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### Spelljammer

Umbra hulks are pervasive in the Spelljammer setting because of their close association with the neogi, and indeed, *Spelljammer: AD&D Adventures in Space* suggests that the profusion of umber hulks on many worlds is because they have spread with the travels of the neogi.



*Undermountain: Stardock (1997)*

The earth body Anadia in the Realmspace sphere is inhabited by large numbers of umber hulks, the result of efforts by the neogi to set up a slaving colony preying on the native halflings. The neogi eventually abandoned these plans as the umber hulks tended to raid only food and water, and largely left the halflings alone. The Anadian umber hulks are now communal creatures and gather in bands to continue to raid the halflings' polar settlements. Part of their motivation for the raids is the lack of water in the equatorial

regions. The umber hulks themselves are prey for plainsjan and anadjiin, two predators native to Anadia. Anadia is detailed in *SJR2: Realmspace*.



*Undermountain: Stardock (1997)*

Also in *Realmspace*, sometime in the 11th century DR, the illithids inhabiting the ringed planet of Glyth used umber hulk slaves to carve out an outpost on the asteroid known as Stardock. There are still umber hulks there where adventurers visit centuries later, in *Undermountain: Stardock*.

The Vanishing Planet Nehzmyth in *Krynnspace* consists of fetid swamplands filled with thick vegetation. As detailed in *SJR7: Krynnspace*, neogi and their umber slaves dwell in caverns beneath the surface, from whence they wage war against the treants that dominate the surface. Vodyanoi dwell in the planet's abundant lakes. Most of these are feral creatures, but the neogi also capture and breed vodyanoi to supplement their umber hulk slaves.

The neogi ambassador Griktha (from *SJA4: Under the Dark Fist*) owns an umber hulk named Spinesnapper who, unbeknownst to the ambassador, has some difficulty telling neogi apart. Several times Griktha has come very close to being accidentally killed by his own servant.



*The Legend of Spelljammer (1991)*

According to *The Legend of Spelljammer*, the leader of the neogi on the legendary craft is named Coh. His umber hulk servant is named Orik, and is the main reason Coh's leadership is currently unopposed. Orik is marked on the forehead with the interlocked rings which are the symbol of his master, to whom he is unswervingly loyal. Orik bullies the other neogi slaves, but does not kill any without Coh's permission. Unusually for an umber hulk, Orik has attempted to learn common, and while his diction is slow and slurred, he is able to communicate his ideas. Orik has trouble understanding why anyone would *not* choose to be owned, especially if they have a master as wise as Coh. This belief led to overenthusiastic recruiting initiatives, which Coh eventually had to order Orik to stop.



*The Legend of Spelljammer* (1991)

Orik's arch enemy aboard the Spelljammer is the lich known as the Fool, who has subverted many of the other umber hulks on board to serve as his zombie slaves. Most of these umber hulks vanished while tunneling into the body of the Spelljammer, a practice permitted by Coh's predecessor, but which Coh has now forbidden. There are approximately twenty umber hulks left aboard the Spelljammer. This is too few for each of the neogi on board to have a personal servant, which is a cause of considerable tension. They reside in the Hulk Tower in the Citadel region of the ship.

Four of the five umber hulk encounters in *CR4: Deck of Encounters, Set One* involve neogi spelljammer craft. In *Escaped Slave*, an umber hulk slave has managed to escape from a ship that has set down for supplies. In *Sinking Ship*, a neogi Deathspider has crashed into a lake. The only umber hulks to be found here died in the crash. The same is true in *Crashlanding*, when the neogi have crashed into hills rather than a lake. Finally, in *Spiders and Flies*, the heroes must protect a hamlet from neogi seeking to boost their slave numbers before a major space battle. These neogi have a number of living umber hulks with them, but they are keeping them in reserve for the upcoming battle.

There are two more Spelljammer-themed encounters in *CR5: Deck of Encounters, Set Two*. *Black Bart*, an encounter designed to take place in wildspace, involves a renegade neogi whose crew was mostly decimated in a recent skirmish. Unlike most neogi, the renegade does not dislike other races, but instead can't stand other neogi. It is willing to negotiate for safe passage for itself and its remaining crew, including two umber



hulks. The second encounter, *Spider Sandwich*, takes place on the Rock of Bral. A neogi seeks the adventurers' assistance to rescue a hostage and the neogi's umber hulk servants from a mind flayer. Things are not likely to go well if the heroes accept, as the neogi has little to contribute to any fight.



*Spelljammer #2: The Rogue Ship, Part Two (1990)*

Spelljammer had a short-lived run of comics in the early 1990s, which followed a motley crew traveling through space. In issue #2, they encounter a neogi mindspider and have to deal with an umber hulk raiding party. Perhaps it's just the strange lighting effects of the phlogiston, but those umber hulks sure are purple!

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### Miniatures

Umbur hulks have been well represented over more than four decades of D&D miniatures. The first official release was in Grenadier's 1980 AD&D blister pack #107: *Umbur Hulk & Xorn*.



*Grenadier #107: Umbur Hulk & Xorn (1980)*, image from [DnDLead](#)

Released by TSR in 1983, the *Umber Hulk & Dungeon Treasure* isn't technically a miniature, but part of the *Official Advanced Dungeons & Dragons Toys* line of PVC figures.



*Umber Hulk & Dungeon Treasure* (1983), image from [Alex Bickmore's Super Toy Archive](#)

Next up was a licensed miniature from Citadel, *ADD77: Umber Hulk*. Each blister pack came with one of three different heads.



*Citadel ADD77: Umber Hulk* (1986), image from [Lost Minis Wiki](#)

When Ral Partha took on the D&D license in the late 1980s, the umber hulk was one of the first miniatures produced. This version looks notably less squat than its predecessors.



*Ral Partha 11-404: Umber Hulk* (1987), image from [DNDLead](#)

The last umber hulk miniature made of metal was released by Wizards of the Coast to accompany 3rd Edition D&D. It reflects the more insectoid appearance of that iteration of the creature.





*Wizards of the Coast 40051: Umber Hulk (2001), image from [Lost Minis Wiki](#)*

In 2003, Wizards of the Coast switched to pre-painted plastic miniatures. The first set, *Harbinger*, included an umber hulk as figure #78 of 80.



*D&D Miniatures: Harbinger #78: Umber Hulk (2003), image from [MinisGallery](#)*

The next set to include an umber hulk was *Desert of Desolation*. This figure was called an umber hulk delver to distinguish it from the *Harbinger* one.



*D&D Miniatures: Desert of Desolation #57: Umber Hulk Delver (2007), image from [MinisGallery](#)*

Variations of the umber hulk delver were released twice more. In December 2010, a transparent winter umber hulk was that year's Christmas gift for WotC staff, and in 2021 a repainted version was included in the *Sting of Lolth* set for the *Dungeon Command* miniatures game.



*D&D Miniatures: Winter Umber Hulk (2010), image from [MinisGallery](#)*



*Dungeon Command: Sting of Lolth (2012), image from [MinisGallery](#)*

The first umber hulk miniature for 4th Edition was the shadow hulk in the 2008 *Against the Giants* set. This figure was one of the huge-sized miniatures included in the set.



*D&D Miniatures: Against the Giants #29: Shadow Hulk (2008), image from [MinisGallery](#)*

Soon after the release of 4th Edition, WotC stopped producing miniatures in-house, and returned to a licenced format. Gale Force Nine were awarded a license to produce a line of resin miniatures they called the *D&D Collector's Series*, and this included the most detailed umber hulk miniature released to date.



*D&D Collector's Series 71017: Umber Hulk (2013), image from [Gale Force Nine](#)*

The licence to produce pre-painted plastic miniatures went to WizKids. Their *Monster Menagerie* set includes an umber hulk that has coloration resembling that of a lobster more than a traditional umber hulk.



*Icons of the Realms: Monster Menagerie #42: Umber Hulk (2016), image from [MinisGallery](#)*

An unpainted version of the same miniature was also released as part of the *Nolzur's Marvelous Miniatures* line in 2020.



*D&D Nolzur's Marvelous Miniatures 73193: Umber Hulk (2020), image from [Wizkids](#)*



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## Computer games

Umber hulks have featured extensively in more than three decades of D&D computer games. The earliest umber hulks in *Secret of the Silver Blades* are reasonably recognisable in portrait form, but the picture used for combat is underwhelming. The hulks do have thick armor plates, claws and mandibles, but somehow when the parts are combined, the result doesn't quite look like an umber hulk.



*Secret of the Silver Blades* (1990), image from [DOSBoxMom](https://www.dosboxmom.com/)

In *Spelljammer: Pirates of Realmspace* umber hulks are, predictably, standard crew on the neogi ships. The artwork is nothing special, but they are at least recognisably umber hulks.



*Spelljammer: Pirates of Realmspace* (1992), image from [Duke Donuts](https://www.duke-donuts.com/)

By the time we get to *Treasures of the Savage Frontier* in the Gold Box series, the art has been upgraded, and the umber hulk looks a lot more menacing.



*Treasures of the Savage Frontier* (1992), image from [aulddragon](https://www.aulddragon.com/)

The mines in *Dark Sun: Wake of the Ravager* are infested with umber hulks. These are the umber hulks that *Dragon Kings* categorically stated do not exist on Athas.



*Dark Sun: Wake of the Ravager* (1994), image from [Let's Play Archive](#)

The *Menzoberranzan* umber hulks coincide with the brief period during 2nd Edition when umber hulks had four eyes of equal size.



*Menzoberranzan* (1994), image from [Astro Monkey](#)

The path through the UMBER Hulk Labyrinth in *Icewind Dale* is marked with red gemstones. According to the game, umber hulk eyes can't detect the particular red tint of the gems because their eyes are covered by a strange, clear skin which protects them from debris when they tunnel. These umber hulks are also less bulky, reflecting the more insectoid appearance favored from 3rd Edition onwards.



*Icewind Dale* (2000), image from [SuperDave17](#)





Promotional image for *Icewind Dale* (2000), image from [Forgotten Realms Wiki](#)

According to the Wizards of the Coast [website](#), the umber hulks in *Baldur's Gate II* have a special preference for dog stew. The game also has an amateurish painting of an umber hulk which functions as a plot device to be able to access a caged umber hulk in the Asylum Dungeon.



*Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn* (2000), images from [squee913](#) (painting) and [Baldur's Gate wiki](#) (screenshot)

*Icewind Dale II* appears to have a slightly upgraded version of the same insectoid hulk we saw in *Icewind Dale*.



*Icewind Dale II* (2002), image from [rpg crawler](#)

*Neverwinter Nights* and its sequel *Neverwinter Nights 2* both feature umber hulks, with the sequel using the truly horrid umber hulks from the *Monster Manual v.3.5*.



Promotional image for *Neverwinter Nights* (2002), image from the [Internet Archive](#)



*Neverwinter Nights 2* (2006), images from [NWN2Wiki](#) (in-game model) and [SuperDave17](#) (screenshot)

*Temple of Elemental Evil* includes both umber hulks and vodyanoi.



*Temple of Elemental Evil* (2003), screenshot from [Dolwin87](#), vodyanoi model from Troika Games

By the time we get to 2015's *Sword Coast Legends*, extensive 3D modeling is required before a monster can be included in the game.



*Sword Coast Legends* (October 2015), image from [ArtStation](#)

The umber hulk was added to *Dungeons & Dragons Online* with Update 31 in 2016.



*Dungeons & Dragons Online* (2016), image from [Dungeons & Dragons Online](#)

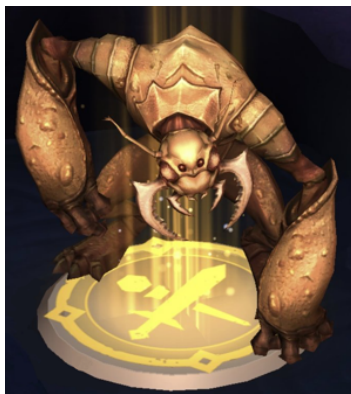
There is an umber hulk in *Idle Champions of the Forgotten Realms* that has been magically enhanced by a wizard's magic. It hurls rocks at the party.



*Idle Champions of the Forgotten Realms* (2017)



The umber hulk has also made the leap to mobile games, appearing in 2019's *Warriors of Waterdeep*.



*Warriors of Waterdeep* (2019)

## Umbur hulk names

Kothogg, Mulgrek, Orik, Spinesnapper, Ultok, Yulo, Zixzzuthzikyriin Xvixaithnic.



*The Official Advanced Dungeons and Dragons Coloring Album* (1979)

## Comparative statistics

							
Edition	Original D&D	BECMI	AD&D (1st Edition)	AD&D 2nd Edition	D&D 3.5 Edition	D&D 4th Edition	D&D 5th Edition
Source	Supplement I: Greyhawk	AC9: Creature Catalogue	Monster Manual	Monstrous Manual	Monster Manual v.3.5	Monster Manual	Monster Manual
Size		Large (9 feet)	L (8' tall, 5' wide)	L (8' tall, 5' wide)	Large	Large	Large
Type					Aberration	Natural magical beast	Monstrosity
Alignment	Neutral	Chaotic	Chaotic evil	Chaotic evil	Usually chaotic evil	Unaligned	Chaotic evil
No. Appearing	1-4	1-4 (0)	1-4	1-4	Solitary or cluster (2-4)		
Armor Class	2	2	2	2	18	30	18
Hit Points	8 hit dice	10 hit dice	8+8 hit dice	8+8 hit dice	8d8+35 (71 hp)	238 hp	93 (11d10+33)
Speed	6 (1'/turn burrowing)	60' (20')	6" (1"-6")	6, Br 1-6	20 ft., burrow 20 ft.	5, burrow 2 (tunneling)	30 ft., burrow 20 ft.
Abilities		Intelligence 6 Morale 10	Int Average	Int Average (8-10) Morale Elite (13)	Str 23, Dex 13, Con 19, Int 11, Wis 11, Cha 13	Str 26, Dex 16, Con 20, Int 5, Wis 14, Cha 11	Str 20, Dex 13, Con 16, Int 9, Wis 10, Cha 10
Senses		Infravision (120 feet)		Infravision (90 ft.)	Darkvision 60 ft., tremorsense 60 ft.	Perception +13, darkvision, tremorsense 5	Darkvision 120 ft., tremorsense 60 ft., passive Perception 10
Saves		Fighter: 10			Fort +8, Ref +3, Will +6	Fort 33, Ref 28, Will 27	
Reach					10 ft.	2	5 ft.
Attacks	2 claws, 1 bite	2 claws/1 bite	3	3 (THAC0 11)	2 claws + 11 melee and bite +9 melee	Claw +18 vs. AC	Claw +8 melee weapon Claw +8 melee weapon Mandibles +8 melee weapon
Damage	2-12/claw, 2-8/bite	2-12/2-12/2-16	3-12/3-12/2-10	3-12/3-12/1-10	Claw 2d4+6, bite 2d8+3	2d6+8	Claw 1d8+5 slashing Mandibles 2d8+5 slashing
Special Attacks			Confusion	Confusion	Confusing gaze	Grabbing Double Attack, Confusing Gaze	Multiattack, Confusing Gaze
Special Defences			Nil	Nil	None	None	None
XP		1,000	1300 + 12/hp	4,000	CR 7	1,400	Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)
Treasure	5% 1-10 x 1000 copper 30% 1-12 x 1000 silver 25% 1-8 x 1000 gold 10% 1-10 gems and jewelry 30% any 3 maps or magic plus 1 scroll	50% 10-40 x 1000 gold 50% 1-6 x 1000 platinum 25% 3-18 gems 25% 1-10 jewelry 35% any 4 magic items plus 1 scroll	50% 10-40 x 1000 gold 50% 1-20 x 1000 platinum 30% 5-20 gems 25% 1-10 jewelry 35% any 4 maps or magic plus 1 scroll	50% 2-20 x 1000 gold 50% 1-10 x 1000 platinum or electrum 30% 3-18 gems 25% 1-6 art objects 35% any 5 magic items	Standard		

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