

CHAPTER TWO

Excerpts from the Geological Repository in Durne

The problem with maps is that they are only two-dimensional.

Famous Gnomekin explorer Emmo Ebono

Durne... underground city, city of moss, and home of the Geological Repository. Opened only in the year 600, the Geological Repository already has gained fame at the centre for all things geological. Its public museum proudly presents the unique Strata Sample Collection, the Miniature Mines exposition, the Crystallomantic Artefacts display and for the young ones, the A-maze-ing Tunnel Tour and the sculpting workshop. However, for anyone intent on travelling the Underground Highway, its extensive Geological Repository Library is the true treasure chamber. Here, thousands of maps are

stored along with traveller's reports, geological lore books, treatises on excavation techniques, speleology textbooks, bestiaries on subterranean species, legends pertaining to the Underground Highway in ages long gone. It a well-kept Gnomekin secret where all these tomes, scrolls, sculptures and lore crystals came from in such a short period of time. Fact is that besides any unknown benefactors, the Geological Repository maintains standing orders with the Protectors Force to chart and report back any new information gathered on missions into foreign parts of the Underground Highway. In addition, the Geological

Repository occasionally hires freelance explorers for expeditions to map specific underground regions. Much of this information is available after purchasing a membership to the Geological Repository Library, but classified information or fragile resources may be viewed after making an appointment with the Geolore Masters who run the Library.

THE GNOMEKIN PROTECTORATE

“They want LIGHTS in the Underground Highway? You’d think those big-shot mages from Cymril can conjure up enough to illuminate their journey.”

From the minutes of the Inner Circle of Engineers, Durne, year 457

The Underground Highway is among the best roads in the Seven Kingdoms and sees a substantial part of all traffic in this region. For this reason, the rulers of the Seven Kingdoms agreed that the security of the Underground Highway below the Seven Kingdoms was to be given into the hands of the Protectors Force, which makes up the majority of the Durne military and are highly specialized in underground combat, with backup available from the other countries’ armies should conflict arise. The main tunnels below the Seven Kingdoms that fall under the responsibility of the Protectors Force are called the Gnomekin Protectorate and are marked regularly with a variation of the symbol of the Seven Kingdoms (a six-pointed star - a green hexagon at its centre representing Cymril and azure, crimson, aqua-blue, brown, orange and purple points, representing Astar, Taz, Vardune, Durne,

Sindar and Kasmir respectively, but down here the brown of Durne forms the centre). Many other tunnels, public and secret, exist as well in the region and may or may not be patrolled by the Protectors Force. It is easy to underestimate the power of these small troops as many invaders painfully found out; still many wandering monsters and raiders enter the Underground Highway through the secondary tunnels to make trouble in the world above.

THE SEVENTH ROAD

The Real Underground Highway

Everyone in the Seven Kingdoms knows about the Seven Roads and there being only six roads drawn on any map. The existence of the Underground Highway is no secret. Durne Avenue, the northern road out of the city of Cymril splits about a quarter mile beyond the city gates, where another gate, made of bright blue azurite crystals, leads into Station Seven or Deep-Down-Durne Station as it’s called in children’s songs. This is where the

Station Seven

Station Seven is a large building made of curled red iron and large clear crystal windows, like a giant greenhouse. An airdock allows skyships to moor. Inside, Station Seven is home to the station guard barracks, the Skylight Inn, and an indoor farmers market, which serves many a Gnomekin merchant. Immediately behind the gate, the road sharply slopes down towards a wide tunnel opening. The opening is decorated with the carved symbols of the Seven Kingdoms. On one side, just inside the opening facing outward stands the granite statue of a Gnomekin protector, on the other side, just outside the opening and facing inward stands the marble statue of a Cymrilian royal guard.

Underground Highway begins, and most Cymrilians have visited Station Seven, if only out of curiosity or for the majestic building and its indoor farmers market. Going down from Station Seven runs one of the best roads of the Seven Kingdoms. Its surface is smooth all the way, it doesn't get slippery because it's always dry and never extremely cold, there are no storms and only few difficulties in the terrain, such as steep slopes.

Following an ancient curving trail of unknown origin, the Underground Highway carves its way North through a thick layer of granite rock. After two hundred miles, the Underground Highway opens up into Durne Junction, an impressive cavern full of stalactites and stalagmites surrounding a dark lake that mirrors the many colours of prismatic crystals embedded in the rock. The surface road, that went underground into Tunnelrock Mountain at Tunnelrock Gate, joins the Underground Highway here for the last couple of miles to the city of Durne. At Durne Junction, the Home Guard division of the Protectors Force is stationed. From here, many smaller roads run to various destinations in the Kingdom of Durne too. Where the two big roads join, a crystal statue of a Gnomekin warrior hunting a Darkling stands as a memorial to the One-Day War in the year 67, when the Gnomekin drove a Darkling horde back into Urag.

The Underground Highway is a marvel of underground engineering. By order of the King and Queen of Durne, the Inner Circle of Engineers employed scores of skilled miners to transform what was once an uneven, winding and musty tunnel into a two hundred mile road, high and wide enough to accommodate carriages. Sections near the entrance are decorated by sculptors, painters and other artists on commission by wealthy merchants, nobles and city officials. Further along, the crude granite rock makes up the walls and ceiling, but the floor is smooth all the way. The Underground Highway is artificially illuminated and ventilated along the entire track.

Tunnel Lights

Resonant crystals exist in many forms throughout Talislanta. Tuned to other crystals, these rare magic stones emit whatever is absorbed by another crystal, usually sound or light. The prismatic crystals in the Underground Highway are tuned to emit the natural light caught by the crystal built into the spire of the royal palace in Cymril. Placed at two hundred foot intervals, these bright lights provide illumination for only a relatively small area, but they show the way ahead and give travellers in indication of the time of day. It took the Cabal of Crystallomancers over a century to grow enough fine-tuned crystals for the entire Underground Highway. These crystals need each other to propagate the light resonance and will not work outside of the Underground Highway. In between the prismatic beacons phosphorescent fungi growing on the walls. Most surface-dwelling races barely consider this illumination, and brightly lit caravans can frequently be spotted long distances away.

The road doesn't run straight ahead for long in most places, but according to legend, it follows the curves of an ancient trail. At some places, the Underground Highway goes as deep as two hundred feet below the surface, but mostly it runs at depths between fifty and one hundred feet. Steep passages are part of the track, but all can be climbed and descended by healthy people and beasts of burden in good condition. Maybe this ancient trail is the reason that travel isn't dull on the Underground Highway, as the road frequently passes grottos with spectacular sights. Among these are a pond with phosphorescent eels slithering with an eerie green light between the plants on the bottom, a grotto with an ever-present mist caused by a 'garden' of stone coral that sprays the air with a sweet smelling

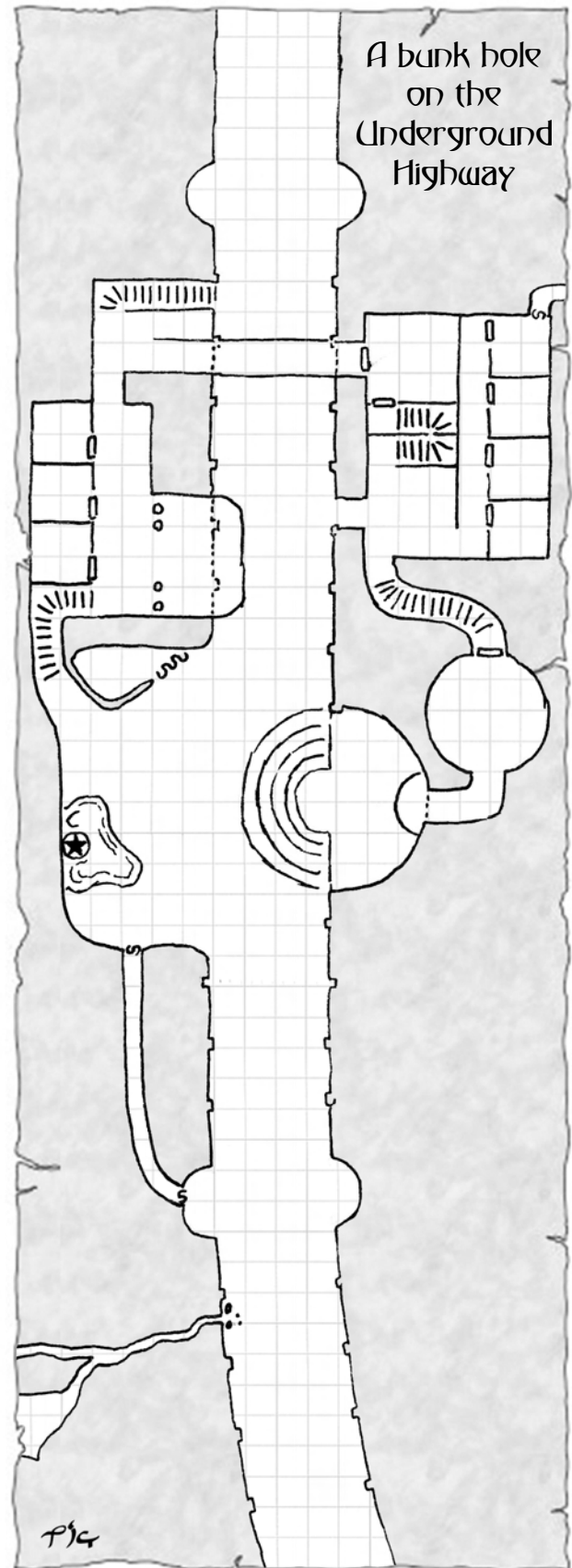
fluid that attracts insects, the fossilized body of a large geophage, and cave drawings of a long forgotten culture. Many smaller tunnels, some little more than cracks in the wall, split off from the Underground Highway, leaving the traveller to wonder where they all lead to.

At twenty five mile intervals, artificial caverns have been carved out at the side of the road. Called bunk holes by troops of the Protectors Force, these caverns serve as camp sites for travellers in peace time and as barracks in times of armed conflict. Fresh water is available here from natural wells or small waterfalls. Ever since the Underground Highway was officially opened by the kings of Durne and Cymril more than a century ago, a persistent tale has been going around about the existence of secret tunnels that lead from each of these caverns to a secret military command post. However, no one has ever been able to find an entrance to confirm the story.

The Underground Highway, though one of the safest roads in Talislanta, certainly is not free of dangers. It is infested with the same nuisances encountered on most civilised roads, such as beggars, peddlers and bandits. Connecting tunnels are home to a variety of wild animals and plants, such as cave bats, scarlet sporozoids, and chasm vipers. Occasionally, a lost exomorph or invading parties of satada or subterranooids pose a serious threat to travellers. The Protectors Force patrols the Underground Highway to keep it clear of dangers. Some Underground Highway patrols employ trained catdracs to help them detect invaders or to convey messages quickly.

Major Branches

Less well-known than the Seventh Road are the major branches of the Underground Highway running East and West through the soil of the Seven Kingdoms. Some fifty miles South of Tunnelrock, a remarkable tunnel opens up eastward from the main road. The portal to this tunnel is the sculpture of a land kra eating its own tail. This tunnel itself looks similar to the Seventh Road and equally well



to travel, but is much smaller and doesn't allow carriages to enter. The end of this road lies in Sindar, near the city of Nadir, from where a different path continues to Kasmir and Astar. A second major branch has its entrance at Durne Junction. It leads to the city of Valanis in Vardune, going North around the city of Durne, passing just south of Ironroot. This tunnel is the left-handed twin of the road to Sindar until it reaches Valanis. From there, less magnificent tunnels lead south to Vashay, passing beneath Aamanian soil in the bend of the Axis River, and from there to Vahana and Targ in the jungles of Taz and through the Cinnabar Mountains to Tor.

THE CYMRIL UNDERGROUND CONNECTION

In ancient times, the citizens of Cymril used to bury their garbage in underground caverns for lack of a river to wash it away and reluctance to dump it out in the countryside. Most of their waste is now disposed of magically, either by citizens who know how to themselves, or by public services. This has left the old sewer-tunnels exposed for people to make other use of. As all dark places, it is an attractive place for elements from the local underworld to build hideouts and storage places, to hold meetings, or to use it as a fast entry or escape route. Indeed it is rumoured that most older buildings used to be connected to the old sewer-tunnels and that many exit shafts have not been sealed properly. For examples, as yet unexplained escapes have occurred from the Cymril Court Dungeons south of Durne Park. If someone were looking to get in touch with criminal, rebellious or radical factions, for a place to conduct certain rituals well out of sight of prying eyes, or for an illegal dump site, the old sewer-tunnels would be a good place to start.

The nearby Seventh Road is a good facility to have at hand for those who frequent the sewer-tunnels below Cymril. It wasn't long after the arrival of the first underground residents that new tunnels were dug that connect the Cymril Underground with the



Seventh Road. These connections are a likely source of the constant supply of annoying peddlers, thieves, and escaped critters in the Seventh Road, who never passed the guards at Station Seven.

THE UNDERGROUND CITY OF DURNE

Tunnelrock and adjacent mountains are home to a huge complex of grottos, caverns and hollows connected in an apparently random way by a series of tunnels. Access to Tunnelrock and Durne is controlled by what the Gnomekin call 'tall tunnels', high enough to comfortably accommodate Sindar visitors and well illuminated. Most other passageways throughout these mountains are 'kin tunnels', no more than four to five foot in height and dark.

The capital city of the Gnomekin lies 200 feet below the surface. It is made up of moss-lined cave dwellings called nooks that are connected by a network of tunnels and underground streams and lakes. On most waterways, ferries are available or boats can be rented. Around the nooks, there are large caverns the Gnomekin use for growing food and breeding fish, and by crystallomancers for growing crystals. Sentinel posts are scattered throughout the city for security. Walking through Durne is a strange experience for most surface dwellers, even if they stay only in the high-roofed and well-lit Open Arms Nook dedicated to visiting dignitaries.

The Resonant Grotto

Near the centre of Durne lies a crystal grotto that attracts many visitors. This small cave contains a cluster of natural resonant crystals. These are a wondrous collection of various types of crystals that protrude from their rocky bed as if showing a certain pride in their peculiar nature. Of some crystals it is hard to image that they are natural and uncut. The thing that draws the people are the sounds emanating from them. Resonant crystals can emit sounds that other crystals of the same kind elsewhere in Talislanta pick up.

Encounters Along the Seventh Road

Use this table for encounter ideas or roll 1d20 to select a random encounter. Add a modifier of +1 to +10 according to the distance from civilized areas.

Roll	Encounter
1	Curious Gnomekin children
2	Merchant caravan
3	Magician and servants
4	Sindaran collector
5	Pharesian peddler
6	Kasmiran beggar
7	Discarded item(s)
8	Gnomekin Scout and catdrac
9	Entrance to the Slideways
10-11	Group of Gnomekin Protectors
12	Unoccupied hideout or lair
13	Bunk hole or sentinel post
14	Statue and/or fountain alcove
15	Unusual grotto, roll again: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1-4 A mass of insects 5-8 A tangle of vegetation 9-12 A water source 13-16 Resonant crystals 17-20 Other
16	Unlit stretch of road
17	Band of caravan bugs
18	Remains from a recent battle
19	Arimite troublemakers
20	Fossilized geophage
21	Colony of rock urchins
22	Interesting cave drawings
23	Infestation of root grubs
24	Ambush by bandits
25	Flurry of cave bats
26	Scarlet sporozoid
27	Chasm viper lying in wait
28	Wandering exomorph
29	Roving land kra
30	Invading war party, roll again: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1-5 Darklings 6-9 Satada 10-15 Subterranooids 16-20 Other

Unfortunately, it is almost impossible to tell where the sounds originated. A particular pastime for Gnomekin children is to come here and shout something in the expectation that someone, somewhere far away hears them. Parents are wary of letting their children play there too often, because of tales that voices performing dark rituals have been heard in the sounds of the crystal resonance.

THE DURNE SLIDEWAYS

While the sentinel posts protect the Gnomekin within the city, Durne has more extensive defences that have proven their value over time against, for example, the darklings and the satada. Foremost among these defences is a masterpiece of subterranean engineering called the Durne slideways. The slideways consist of an intricate series of stairways and elevators that lead to the start of a long polished slope, which in turn ends at the base of another series of stairways and elevators. Each Gnomekin protector possesses a piece of soft leather that has been rubbed with an oily soap for sitting on while riding the slideway. Using the slideway, the Gnomekin are able to move large numbers of troops and goods to all corners of Durne in a very short time. The slideways are small kin tunnels for their own defence. Like the rest of the kin tunnel network, there are many slideway slopes that end in pitfalls or other deadly traps. Maps of the Durne slideways are strictly military property. In peacetime, the slideways are allowed to be used for transporting trade goods under supervision of the Protectors Force.

IRONROOT

In the Seven Kingdoms and beyond, Ironwood is famous for providing extremely strong, durable wood. Much less well known is the underground forest called Ironroot. Ironwood trees grow single long roots that grow straight down and extract all metal elements from the ground. This flow causes a strong magnetic field to permeate throughout Ironroot. Along with the traces of metal, all

