

# THE UNDERGROUND HIGHWAY

Bart Savenije

Book Two of the Lost Books Of Talislanta

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# CHAPTER ONE

# Travelling Underground

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*This is where our lands truly begin, son. Here at Tunnelrock Gate, where the surface road from Cymril descends into the Tunnels that lead to Durne. From here, the Underground Highway will take you anywhere you want to go. When you grow up and join the Protectors Force you will see many wondrous places that are somehow connected to our home. Terra has taught us to travel where the surface races don't even know it's possible. Trust in her to lead you. And now we must go back home, son, for Terra won't prevent mom getting angry if we're late for dinner.*

Lessons by a Gnomekin father

---

Rock being pulverised under the progressive attack of giant jaws...

The trampling of soldiers boots echoing rhythmically...

The 'plok' of water drops falling on soft stone, slowly eroding it away...

The screams of creatures trapped and killed by other creatures...

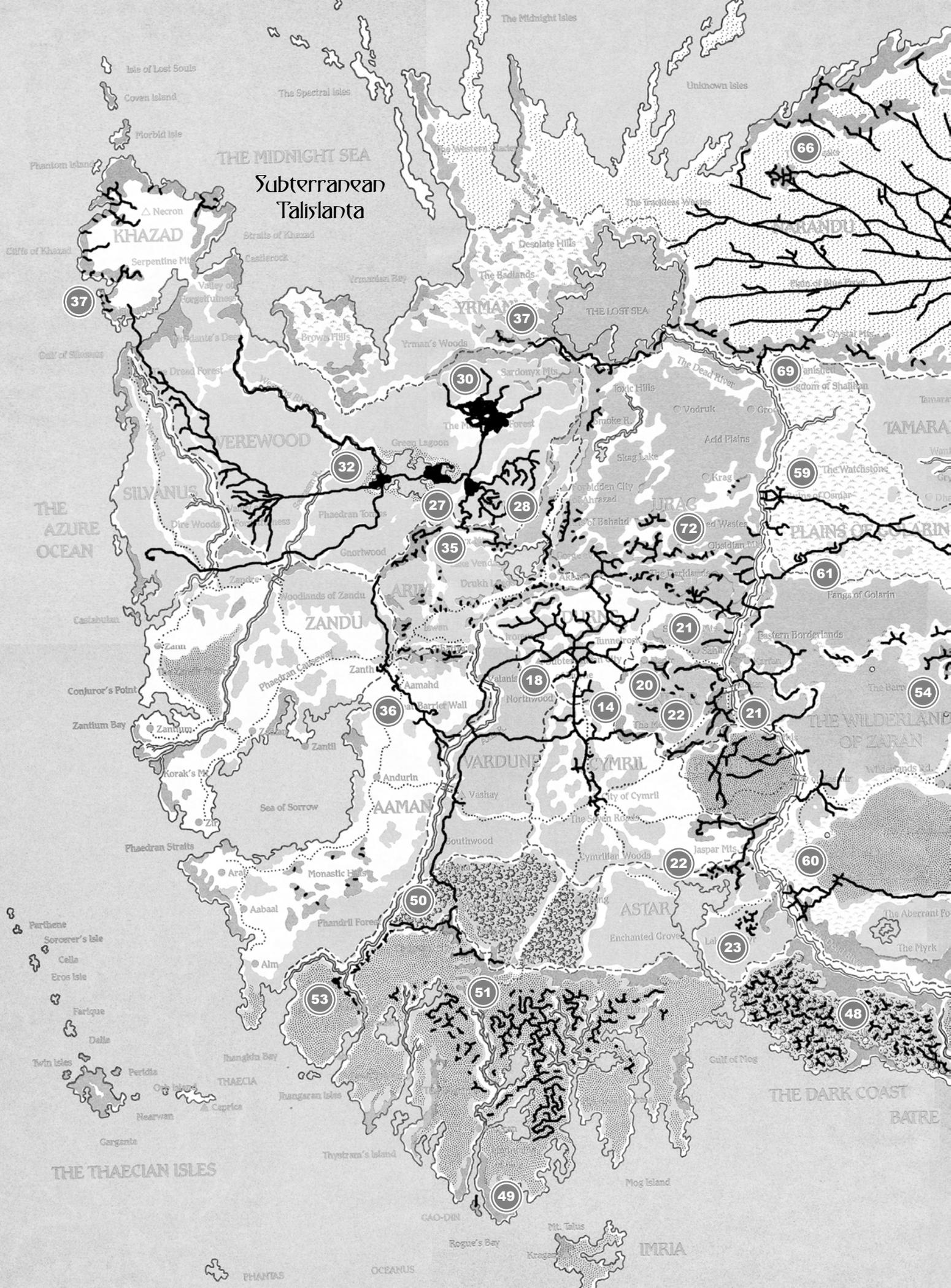
The trickle of a small stream finding its way through a cave...

The majestic rumble of a collapse...

Endless silence...

These are the sounds that define the Underground Highway throughout the ages, over and over again, from the birth of the land to its final destiny. For without light, describing this realm to surface dwellers is impossible for lack of words that define the intricate atmospheres found underground. For how would one convey to an Aamanian priest the clay-iron-like smell of air just a degree colder that indicates the presence of water in a layer of solid granite, or the difference in the sound of breaking rock that is a mere consequence of it cooling down or that indicates an imminent collapse to a Kang warrior? Perhaps the Gnomekin and the Vajra possess a vocabulary for some of these things, but even their jargon is not apt to describe the dynamic growth and decline of this vast network of tunnels, passages, rivers, caverns

Subterranean  
Talisanta



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THE AZURE OCEAN

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Castabulan

ZANDU

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Zantium

Zantium

Korak's Mt

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Sea of Sorrow

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THE SEA OF ICE

THE SEA OF MADNESS

THE QUAN EMPIRE

THE CRESCENT ISLES

NEFARATUS

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Sard Island

and other hollow spaces in the Talislantan continent over the ages.

The only way to really know the Underground Highway is to explore it and learn. Let's start our journey and bring some light into the darkness of this subterranean realm of Talislanta.

## HISTORY

What is known today as the Underground Highway is the result of millennia of forces of nature, magic and hard labour working their ways through Talislantan soil. Traversing it is like wandering through a history book. The legendary Underground Highway from Phandril to Golarin and the one travelled today below the Seven Kingdoms mysteriously mix with the burrows of the legendary Urkra and the eroded streams of the Western Waterways. This amalgam of different origins of spaces in a myriad of geological layers makes the Underground Highway as colourful as life under the twin suns.

From the Time Before Time, some parts of the Underground Highway were created naturally, through the forces of erosion and eruption, geological pressure and collapse. Ever since major cultures started to flourish in various eras, additional tunnels and rooms were carved by hard labour or use of magic. Over time, long stretches disappeared or opened up to the skies as the result of disasters or neglect and new sections appeared as quickly whenever nature or people found a way or a need. Almost a living thing itself, the Underground Highway grows and decays constantly, and theories saying that this occurred according to some greater plan have never held much ground. Despite the organic ways by which it developed over time, as a consequence of its unpredictable rise and fall, the Underground Highway isn't a whole. Many tunnels don't connect or can't be crossed because of flooding, chasms, cave-ins,

or wild magic. Other parts aren't even underground, but run from one tunnel entrance to the next through old river beds or canyon floors. Many a section goes nowhere at all. Yet, the Underground Highway is well named, because many species, sentient or not, use it for living and travel throughout the entire continent of Talislanta. And so it will be until the end of times.

## THE FORGOTTEN AGE

The age of which only legends remain. Due to its place in the Omniverse, Archaeus has probably been under the influence of other spheres from the day of its creation, if powers from those planes didn't have a hand in that as well. If there is any evidence left that tells about the creation of the world, it is likely to be found underground. From that time on, water eroded stone and washed away clay; tectonic pressures broke rock masses leaving empty spaces in between to drain the water collected above; where tunnels connected to the surface, draughts of wind dried humid spaces and polished through pores until there were new tunnels. Doubtlessly openings appeared where they should not have, creating gates into other dimensions. Whether it is through these that the first life appeared, or that the Green World emanated into the matter of Archaeus waking elementals that started roaming the world above and below, the world got populated by a variety of races who left traces of their existence behind. On rare occasions unfamiliar fossils are found that can not be related to anything alive today, and shimmerings of powerful ancient magic are discovered that are likely not of this world.

There is no doubt that the mythical race of the Thane knew how to build underground. Their elaborate tombs and mausoleums extend deep into the rock beneath Khazad. There are tales by explorers that some graves are dug so deep they might not even be in this world anymore. However, the sanity and trustworthiness of these brave adventurers has been doubted as often as not. Some claim that the carvings on the stone pillars or the pattern of those pillars on the land hold the secret to a

map of the subterranean network of burial chambers that hide an enormous wealth in treasures. Indeed, the dead city of Necron is buried under the sands of the region and it remains to be discovered whether time covered it with sand or the Thane made it sink beneath the surface or maybe even built it there in the first place.

The Mirin of L'Haan say that beneath the thick layers of ice, there are signs that the white region in the North used to be fertile plains in the days of the First Folk and later, until the Ice Giants claimed the region. Rare reports from explorers who ventured into this area mention tunnels through the ice down to solid earth where they discovered rare non-magical artefacts of unknown origin. The strange dietary need of the Ice Giants to first freeze any organic food to make it digestible has also led to the discovery of forgotten frozen corpses of unfamiliar races, probably millennia old. Unfortunately, no such corpse was ever transported to the civilized world in order to back-up these claims.

The Maruk and other people from the Wilderlands of Zaran and the Plains of Golarin have legends about the origin of the Kra. According to their tales, most of the tunnels beneath the western Wilderlands were made by the spawn of an ancient serpentine creature. In the early days of the world, a gargantuan snakelike monster, later named the Urkra, fell from the heavens and crashed into the Maruk Mountains. When, after years, it recovered enough from its celestial descent to move again, it turned its back on the sky and started to burrow into the earth. According to this legend, Serpent Pass is the now-eroded canyon created by its rough landing and the slope down towards a huge round opening into the ground evidence of its final escape from the skies. No expedition ever returned to confirm the existence of such a creature beneath the Wilderlands. Of course this could be considered evidence in itself...

Throughout the lands of Talislanta legends from the Forgotten Age can be found. It's

worthwhile to sit down and listen when the old folks rehearse the tales of their people. While much of these tales can be referred to the realm of the imagination, keep in mind that it is likely some truths are hidden among the fantasy that just may save your day sometime and let you live to tell your tales back home on long evenings around a warm fire in the hearth.

## THE ARCHAEN AGE

Legends describe the early Archaen city of Phandril as sandstone polished to beauty by elemental magics. Given the greatness of the Archaen race, it seems fair to assume that earth magic, and later thaumaturgy too, were used in the creation of this city and its majestic towers. It then follows that the Archaen mages didn't use this magic aboveground only. Indeed, ancient lore regarding the Last Dragon War provides hints that in addition to disabling the Watchstone, the Archaen mages created a huge underground highway to quickly move armies of Archaen and Sub-Men troops close to the city of Golarin unnoticed. It is possible that this road extended as far North as Kharakhan, if the speed with which this city was taken is any indication. It is likely that this subterranean road remained in use for trade and diplomacy between Phandril and the Four Nations until the War of the Four Nations. It would certainly have been abandoned, if not blocked or destroyed to defend Phandril against the Necromancer King Drax and his armies. No mention of this highway has been recorded since the Archaen Cabal declared the Age of Heavens.

The Drakken were never known to dig deep. Several Sub-Men tribes, however, may well have resided in caves and tunnels. These would for the majority be of natural origin, but it is quite possible that these tribes developed mining techniques to expand their living space and make it more comfortable. Ancient, relatively crude but artificial cavern complexes were found to exist in the Sapphire Mountains, the mountain range between the South-eastern Wilderlands and the Kang Empire and in the Khan Mountains.

Unfortunately, following the departure of the Archaens to the sky cities, little lore of the affairs on the ground found its way into the archives above. If any treasures remain to be found in the Sub-Men hideouts, they would be of value to any historian or collector.

In the course of history, the lands between the Dead River and the Volcanic Hills have been the scene of many battles. Spoils of ancient battles got buried under thick layers of dust and soil. Burial mounds slowly levelled into the earth and disappeared, and there must be quite many mass graves scattered all over those plains. If one would know where to look and find their way through Land Kra tunnels, Satada passages, unstable ruins of ancient sewers and grave robber digs to such places, it should, at least in theory, be possible to find many a treasure chamber full of miraculous items.

## THE GREAT DISASTER

Then came the apocalyptic end of the Archaen culture. The rupture of the tectonic plates that severed continents from the rest of the world and the random occurrence of massive surges of magic wreaking havoc in mountains and seas alike as they cleft their way through the world destroyed many of the existing tunnels while creating new ones. It was as if a surgeon cauterised all of the many veins through which Talislanta was bleeding to death with a single motion and the continent sprouted a whole new vascular system in its body, but was left with many scars. The creation of the Lost Sea and the Dead River made new passages accessible that were flooded before. Also the tunnel-ridden canyons in Northern Sindar find their origin in these times. The layer of Ice in the Narandu increased spectacularly, becoming thick enough for a new race of subarctic creature to make burrows in. The first recordings of the Western Waterways can be traced back to shortly after the Great Disaster, as can tales about the existence of the Colourful Caverns in the East. The first appearance of the Subterranoïds is further evidence that the Great Disaster caused a magical stampede

even deep below the world's surface and the Underground Highway would never be the same again.

## THE PHAEDRAN AGE

When the Great Disaster finally had run its course, the land masses settled again in a more or less stable configuration. During the last six centuries, nature and rogue magic have kept themselves relatively quiet. Land Kra have always been a danger to travellers along the Underground Highway. The Satada have gradually become an ever increasing threat, as has the appearance of the new underground race of Subterranoïds. Following the establishment of the alliance of the Seven Kingdoms, the Gnomekin from Durne further excavated existing tunnels leading South from the Tunnelrock Mountains and so created what is today commonly referred to as the Underground Highway. With their capture by the Quan, the Vajra had to abandon their extensive underground homes for a life in slave camps. Any chance of discovering the extent of their access to the Eastern Stretch of the Underground Highway has been brought down to a minimum due to the Vajra's passive resistance. The same goes for any knowledge the Sunra might have about underground waterways in that area. Recently, the Gnomekin have started to chart the Underground Highway beyond the Seven Kingdoms area and established the Geological Repository in their capital city, Durne.

# TRAVELLING UNDERGROUND

## THE UNDERGROUND HIGHWAY

The name 'Underground Highway' doesn't do justice to this vast network of subterranean passageways. It is impossible to

describe the paved road from Durne to Cymril along with the muddy canals below the tree roots in the Southern swamps and the lava lake hidden beneath the Volcanic Hills together in only a few words. Each stretch of the Underground Highway is unique, with its own peculiar properties. If there is anything experienced Gnomekin explorers have learned, it is how much they have still to learn about the deep world. The public and secret passages of the Underground Highway in the Seven Kingdoms are well-known and easy to travel. To walk in the caverns of soft rock below the Western Lands requires watertight high boots and wind-shielded lanterns. Travel through the burrows of the Land Kra is fast, but means going ever deeper into more dangerous territory. The icy slideways in the North may seem like spectacular fun, until that dead-end turn proves to be worth its name. Sure, the hollow carcasses of fallen giant bombo trees sunk in the Southern marshes are an inviting escape from the swarms of biting insects, but is it worth the risk of the rotting roof caving in, flooding the tunnel with mud? The Underground Highway is a marvellous place and provides ways to travel long distances quickly or avoid certain hazards from the surface. But a wise traveller learns as much of the road ahead as he can, because the Underground Highway is truly a different place than sunlit Talislanta.

## LEARNING THE ROCKS

Darkness is the most common obstacle encountered on the Underground Highway, and the one most often underestimated. The easiest solution is to bring torches or lanterns. Many an inexperienced traveller, however, forgets that flames require oxygen to burn and deep down in tunnels without ventilation, oxygen can be a preciously scarce commodity. When travelling through humid passages, torches tend to get wet and fill the air with a choking smoke. Safer, but more rare and costly light sources include glowing fungi, crystals or magical items. The major drawback of bringing light is, of course, that it can be seen from far ahead in the dark and tends to attract unwanted attention. Another

disadvantage is that it ruins your vision beyond the immediate radius of illumination. If any light, no matter how dim, is available from the surroundings, it is advisable to extinguish any light sources and rely on the sharpened sensitivity of your eyes and other senses. Natural light sources come in many forms, as light falling in through holes in the ceiling, phosphorescent plants, crystals, bugs, magical illumination, or ghostly mists, to name a few.

Next, travellers quickly discover that navigating underground isn't as easy as on the surface. The Underground Highway below the Seven Kingdoms is quite unique in having road signs to indicate the destination a tunnel leads to. Anywhere else, the responsibility for correctly navigating this three-dimensional network of subterranean passageways can't be put on someone else's shoulders. Awareness of the surroundings can be a great help in underground navigation. Having some knowledge of geology is most valuable to interpret changes in the rock walls in relation to where the various exits of a cavern lead. Limestone is abundantly present in the West, obsidian below Urag and the Volcanic Hills. Smooth walls indicate the presence of water and mosaic multi-layered walls are evidence of the forces that were at work during the Great Disaster. The same goes for animal and plant lore as, for example, rock urchins will only be found close to the surface and root grub only live in the South of Talislanta. If breathing becomes difficult and fatigue comes quickly, that is typically a sign of very deep tunnels where ventilation is minimal and oxygen is available in limited supply.

The Underground Highway plays tricks with the mind. Not only the darkness, but also being confined to narrow enclosed spaces, the many slopes and turns that make scouting ahead impossible, the need to be constantly aware of your footing and the stability of the roof have driven many explorers to, and sometimes over, the edge of madness. Even experienced travellers admit that this can be a tense experience occasionally, but they also

tell about the peaceful silence and reaching a meditative state walking through dim, quiet tunnels. However, all agree that time is impossible to keep track of underground and even the seasons are unnoticeable more than 20 feet underground. The best is to rely on your own biological clock and eat, drink, move and sleep when your body tells you to.

Be sure to pack enough supplies and gear before starting out underground. The Underground Highway can be a barren environment, although there are spots of abundance to be found. Once the sun is out of sight, there are no more opportunities for shopping. Surface activities to make the life of the survivalist a bit more comfortable, like gathering wood for fire, hunting for food or gathering edible plants, sipping up dew to quench the thirst, or climbing a tree for shelter or escape from some wild creature, are all a lot more difficult in a dark, dry tunnel with only two exits. Don't forget to bring a pick axe, spikes, rope, and a hammer, too. No matter how famous the guide who said that tunnel was clear only a week ago, if after three days

travel you are faced with a caved-in section or a chasm, without the right equipment all that's left to do is turn around and go back up. Wear sturdy, watertight and warm clothing. Some spaces are only wide enough to crawl through over sharp edges. The atmosphere deep down is very constant and mostly not extremely cold, but it's cool enough to feel chilly if not properly dressed and prolonged exposure to low temperatures when wet can be deadly.

Finally, enjoy travelling the Underground Highway. For well-prepared travellers it is no more dangerous than going under the open sky. The Underground Highway promises unique experiences that cannot be found in the light of the twin suns and the seven moons. Crystalline caves filled with sounds from unknown places, sliding through tunnels of ice at high speed, native underground cultures, and the chance of finding buried treasures out of legends are just a few of the things that should compel any adventurer to go below ground, if only once in his lifetime.

## CHAPTER TWO

# Excerpts from the Geological Repository in Durne

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*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-mazing 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

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*“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

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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

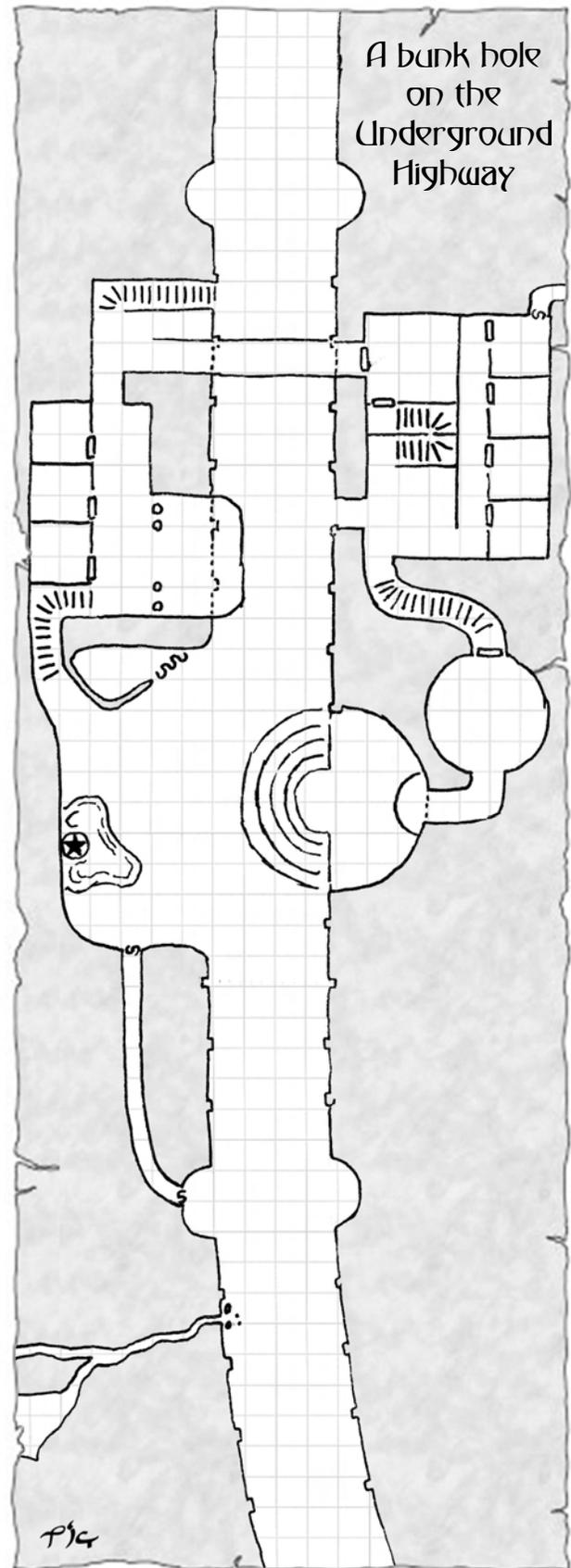
fluid that attracts insects, the fossilized body of a large geophage, and cave drawings of a long forgotten culture. Many smaller tunnels, some little more than cracks in the wall, split off from the Underground Highway, leaving the traveller to wonder where they all lead to.

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 subterranoïds 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 crystalomancers 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 in the Gnomekin Protectorate

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"> <li>1-4 A mass of insects</li> <li>5-8 A tangle of vegetation</li> <li>9-12 A water source</li> <li>13-16 Resonant crystals</li> <li>17-20 Other</li> </ul>
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"> <li>1-5 Darklings</li> <li>6-9 Satada</li> <li>10-15 Subterranooids</li> <li>16-20 Other</li> </ul>

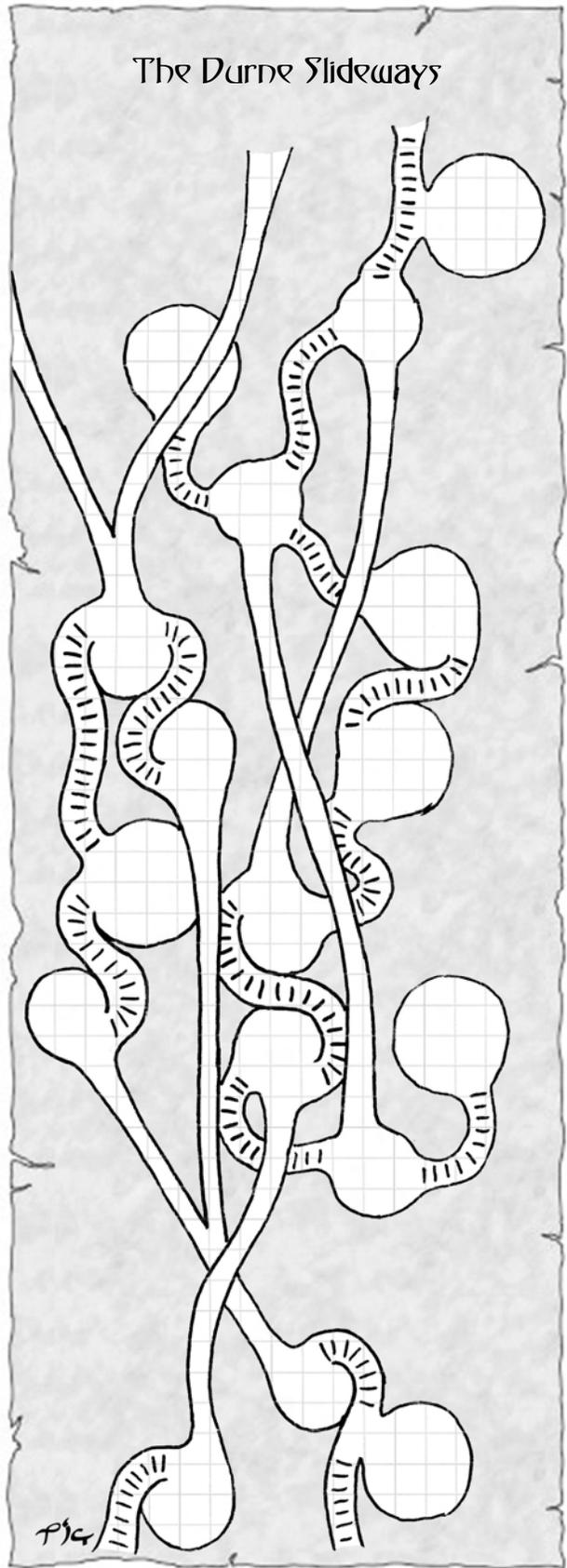
Unfortunately, it is almost impossible to tell where the sounds originated. A particular pastime for Gnomekin children is to come here and shout something in the expectation that someone, somewhere far away hears them. Parents are wary of letting their children play there too often, because of tales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



water is extracted from the earth, leaving no more than a thick layer of powdery dust that whirls up in suffocating clouds if disturbed. The dust is flushed away after a day of heavy rainfall, creating an ever deeper and strange cavern below Ironwood, filled with metallic poles that are the ever-deeper growing roots of the trees above. A strong magnetic field surrounding each of the roots makes it extremely awkward to traverse this cavern while carrying iron or steel equipment. Without iron, it is easy to cross this dusty place, but it's amazing how widely iron is used in making weapons, armour, tools, buttons, hooks, keys, cutlery, lanterns, etc. Evidence of this fact can be found all along the edge of Ironroot. The main entrance to Ironroot is by a side tunnel from the Underground Highway between Tunnelrock and Durne.

## SINDAR CANYONS

This is one of those places where the Underground Highway isn't underground all the time. Sindar is a strange land of towering mesas and odd rock formations. The shadows of the mesas and corridors of overhanging rock make ideal passages to sneak through this country. The strong Satada presence in Sindar has created a series of hunting paths that allow an easy crossing at the ground level of the land. At various points, these paths cross the Sindar branch of the Seven Roads, which also runs along the canyon floors. The hunting paths frequently enter into the sides of the mesas and canyon walls to reach the next canyon or a dried up river bed at the other side. In some mesas, there are passages all the way to the top. When discovered, the Sindarans make them collapse for security reasons, preferring to control access to the top of the mesa by the exclusive use of winch platforms. However, the Satada have proven that it's hard to destroy these tunnels thoroughly enough to prevent them from being restored. The one exception is the passage up the Nadir mesa, which connects at the bottom to a major branch of the Underground Highway to Durne. This entrance to this passage is blocked with a carefully hidden

door. Even if found, its intricate lock is designed by dual-encephalon minds and will boggle all but the most intelligent persons. Upwards, the passage is filled with traps and strategically placed shooting holes. Sindaran rods of alchemy are most effective in the narrow spaces of this passage. A group of armed Sindaran guides are present here to escort visitors up the mesa tunnel to Nadir and playing Trivarian in their spare time. From here, the tunnel proceeds underground in a southeast direction to the other side of the mesa. There it exits onto the canyon floor. A series of hunting paths, mesa passages and geyser pipes leads southeast into the mountains bordering Kashmir. Smaller paths lead east, towards the Sapphire Mountains, where a few tunnels allow passage into the Dead River.

Dry as the land is on the surface and in the mesa tunnels, hidden water sources are known to exist scattered through the underground realm. Just follow the dry bed of a stream to its source and there is often an entrance to the subterranean, or one can easily be created with a pick axe or the right spells. Created by high-pressure jets forced through the cracks of the yellow rock, many of these 'geyser pipes' are high and wide enough to walk through comfortably. Further down, walking often becomes wading as water doesn't evaporate here as fast as it does on the surface.

The underground streams below Sindar are notoriously dangerous to travel. Although the water level in most geyser pipes is nowhere any more than knee deep, occasionally tectonic pressure, seismic forces and erosion cause geysers to break free from their pressure domes hidden deep in the Sindar rock. When that happens, these pressure domes create violent water spouts that sweep away everything in their path until they find release in a spectacular fountain at the surface. Broken bones, battered weapons and tools, loose coins and small treasures litter the Sindar canyon floors as evidence of these aquatic eruptions. Geyser pipes are unexpectedly smooth. Though created by

force, rocks and sand polished the rough edges as the water is propelled through the pipes. Navigating geyser pipes is relatively easy. Water spouts always go from deeply hidden pressure domes upwards, so the direction towards an exit is obvious. Several pressure domes are home to a kind of sulphur-loving algae that thrives under hot and dense conditions. When exposed to air, these algae undergo a metabolic change that causes them to emit a pale yellow sulphurescent light. This change can be sustained only for short periods of time, and streams over three days old lose this natural lighting unless refreshed by another water spout. That said, in the dry lands of Sindar under the heat of the twin suns, an outdoor water source generally dries up within half a day. Algae in geysers that reach the surface are subject to very strong sulphurescent reactions and create Dromelight Fountains, a spectacular sight at night that is unique to Sindar.

The mesa passages are the complete opposites of geyser pipes. These passages are dark dry paths, barely wide enough to allow one person at a time to pass through. Bringing bulky equipment into these tunnels is out of the question. Passages wind their way through the rock in all three dimensions. The number of side tunnels splitting off from the passage is limited, which facilitates navigation but leaves few options for escape routes or alternative ways when running into a collapsed tunnel. The yellow Sindar rock is relatively soft and easy to dig through if needed, provided you carry the right tools. Some tunnels open up in the side of a mesa high above ground and make excellent scouting posts.

The strong satada presence is by far the highest threat to anyone traversing the Underground Highway through Sindar. The Sindarans haven't found a complete explanation for what makes Sindar so attractive to the satada, but bits of information extracted from captured satada warriors indicate they are searching for something that was lost to their race here in ancient times. Satada are usually found in bands of four to

twenty individuals and are highly aggressive, but even a lone Satada lying in ambush in a mesa passage can be a lethal risk. Beside the Satada, Sindar is home to chasm vipers and the occasional subterranoïd or land kra. Malathropes have been known to moved in from the Dead River once in a while. In the mountainous border in the north, Darklings and Stryx have been spotted, but these creatures rarely venture into the Sindar canyons.

## THE SAPPHIRE MOUNTAINS

Bordering the Darklands in the north and the Dead River in the east, the Sapphire Mountains effectively isolate the Sindar lands from their less than friendly neighbours. A low mountain range, the Sapphire Mountains would not be a major obstacle if not for the violent storms that frequently plague its barren passes. Historically, the Sapphire Mountains contain only few tunnels, but in the last couple of centuries, ever more tunnels appeared, mostly by mining expeditions. The Sapphire Mountains would be a rich source of sapphires, if not for the Satada, darklings, subterranoïds and land kra making mining a hazardous enterprise. At least three major tunnels through the Sapphire Mountains, all starting out from Sindar as abandoned mines, give access to the floor of the Dead River. The deeper parts of these tunnels are of satada or land kra origin.

## THE DEAD RIVER

This is another stretch of the Underground Highway not honouring its name. This winding chasm crosses Talislanta from the Lost Sea to Baratus Bay. Its depth ranges from forty feet in the north to one hundred and twenty feet south of Kasmir. The easiest way to travel are where paths exist at the top of the river's banks. More concealed travellers usually prefer the dark shadows and undergrowth of its depths. Most of the Dead River bed is not very difficult to travel. At its origin, footing is slippery due to a permanent layer of ice. Along the middle of Urag, the western bank is coloured in orange, ochre and

purple by the chemical wastes spilling over from the Acid Plains. Walking must be done with care to prevent stepping in a foul pool of acid that eats away good boots in mere hours. The wonder of this place comes from the eastern bank, which is covered with bright green ivy and other vines. The bend around Kasmir is notorious for land kra crossing the Dead River to and from the Wilderlands. Between the southern jungles and swamps and the Topaz Mountains the Dead River runs a rugged course through dark grey, sharp rocks. After heavy rains, it may be difficult to travel these parts without a high risk of suffering serious injuries, because murky water makes it impossible to see where hands and feet can safely be placed. Throughout the entire length of the Dead River, the remains of ships and water creatures are buried and are sometimes brought to the surface again. The Dead River is a main junction of the Underground Highway. Tunnels of various origins opened up onto the river bed ever since the river ran dry, leading to underground places east and west of the river along its entire course. This makes the Dead River an attractive site for underground travellers to plan the next part of their itinerary from. Unfortunately, most tunnel entrances look very much alike and more than one adventurer made a mistake in counting tunnels and unwittingly chose to travel a deadly road instead. Behemoths, malathropes, chasm vipers, Za bandits, and Satada are known to use these routes intensively for their respective purposes.

## THE LAND KRA BURROWS OF KASMIR

Kasmir is infamous not only for the suspicious attitude of its residents, but also for the numerous land kra inhabiting the desert lands. Actual encounters with land kra are infrequent, but when they happen, often nothing is ever heard again of the unfortunate party. Kra activity in this region leaves the lower layers of rock riddled with an ever changing network of kra burrows. The largest of these burrows are the oldest, and are supposedly created by a giant type of land kra

that supposedly no longer exists. For some reason, land kra avoid these burrows themselves. In contrast, the common smaller land kra burrows are common places to encounter these horrors of the rocky depths.

The Kasmir desert is a shifting dunescape on top of a hard bedrock composed of alternating layers of yellow and brown rock. These layers run more or less horizontally, making depth navigation easy. Land kra prefer to move through the soft layers of sand at the surface, where they can usually be spotted by the long 'wurm trails' that they leave behind. Their lethal reputation, however, is caused by kra who wake up deep below the surface, and burrow straight up through hard rock without easily detectable signs, and devour the source of their disturbance. In the darkness of the burrows, these 'kra pits' are hard to detect and pose a hazard to underground travellers.

From the Sindaran border, two major roads transect Kasmir's rocky bottom. A connecting series of large ancient burrows approaches the city of Kasir from the North and a similar series of tunnels runs eastward and used to end in the Dead River close to the military outpost Ikarthis. This opening has been destroyed for defence purposes and the military contingent at Ikarthis regularly patrols this part of the Underground Highway and a specialist squad of Gnomekin sappers makes sure any new kra burrows meet the same fate. Kra burrows are too widespread to control all access from the Dead River into the Kasmir underground though. As the Kasmirans wouldn't dream of risking an invasion from below, the tunnel to Kasir leads up to the surface at a strategic distance from the town. The Underground Highway continues through the Old Royal Mine, south of Kasir in the Jasper Mountains.

## THE JASPAR MOUNTAIN MINES

Just as the Sapphire Mountains form the northern border of the barren countries that are part of the Seven Kingdoms, the Jasper

Mountains form the natural southern barrier with the green kingdom of the muses. This barrier is of strategic value because of its extreme richness in minerals. It is the most important source of black iron in the Seven Kingdoms and of gold in Kasmir, but also quartz and amethyst are mined here in large quantities. Most precious is the mine in the most south-western peak in Astar that provides tiny amounts of the coveted black diamond. Due to this discovery, the Jasper Mountains are now literally riddled with mines started by prospectors hoping to become rich quickly. Most of these mines were eventually abandoned as no valuable ores were found and are no longer safe to enter.

Mine entrances are easy to recognize for their wooden frames of support beams, the abandoned camp sites and large piles of rubble nearby. Mine shafts in the Jasper Mountains slope downward until they reach the rock layers where mineral ores are expected. The majority of mines start as small enterprises with few labour resources available. Therefore, mine shafts tend to be narrow, roughly cut passages with minimal attention given to support. Notorious among those are the so-called 'stairway mines', that go down so steeply that steps needed to be cut out in the floor and lack platforms at regular intervals to allow for support beams. A wrong step means risking a bumpy and deadly drop to the bottom of the shaft. When the depth of the mineral layers is reached, corridors extend in any directions the prospectors felt their luck would lie. Mines that were excavated with the aid of skilled geomancers are characterised by the lack of such a maze of corridors and have only one or two digs running straight towards a mineral vein. Such mines are of little use to the subterranean traveller because they inevitably run into dead ends. Persistent prospectors, however, created networks of long, winding corridors that frequently connect as different people were intent on mining the same mineral sources. It is possible to traverse the Jasper Mountains from the Old

Royal Mine at Kasir to their most southern foothills next to Lake Zephyr.

## BROWN ASTAR

From the foothills of the Jasper Mountains a road leads south to meet one of the Seven Roads running from Lake Zephyr to the city state of Danuvia. There it ends. The forest south of the Astar branch of the Seven Roads is much denser than the sylvan glades that make the rest of Astar such a lovely land. Tiny dirt paths enter this forest. Muse living space is concentrated around Lake Zephyr, and only few muses are encountered here. Deep inside this forest, an unknown part of the Muse race is hidden. One in every five hundred Muses at puberty becomes extremely sensitive to the emotions of all living things around them, including animals and in rare cases also the life flow of some plants. Muses bearing this burden can't adapt to the highly social life of their people. Being constantly overwhelmed by strong impressions from all around them, they collapse or go mad, unless they separate themselves from their kin. In their search for peace of mind, these Muses discovered that certain hollow trees give access to a system of grottos deep in the dark brown soil, and they made a new home there. These grottos are known among the Muse population as Brown Astar, while the Muse community living there refers to the surface lands as Green Astar. Brown Astar is kept a secret to foreigners, so as not to disturb the quiet that the Muses living there so badly need.

Hollow pillow trees give access to a tunnel into the dark brown soil of Astar. Some fifty feet below the surface they open up in a series of large, interconnected spherical caves. Over thirty such caves have been found, all of them looking more or less identical. In the centre of the cave there is a still lake devoid of life. Around the lake grows a forest of thin trees with pale yellow bark and white leaves. The soft ground is covered with a thick layer of deep purple moss and ferns. At the edge of the cave the fertile soil is too thin for trees to take root and is filled with all kinds of edible,

One of the  
Caverns of  
Brown Astar



inedible and even poisonous plants and mushrooms. Throughout the grottos, earthwhisps fly around lighting the place up with their fluttering wings, the veins of which are filled with a white-glowing fluid.

Brown Astar is a very secluded place. From each cave, there are at least two ways up to Green Astar through hollow Pillow trees. In two caves the lake in the centre extends into a stream that disappears between the roots of the pale yellow trees. It is conceivable that these streams have a connection with Lake Zephyr.

## THE MUSES OF BROWN ASTAR

The Muses of Brown Astar are as beautiful as their surface-dwelling kin, although they carry an aura of melancholy around them. In the pale light of their forests, their translucent robes, as well as their skin, hair and wings carry the suggestion of a palette of warm colours that can't quite be determined with certainty. Except for the things described below, the Muses of Brown Astar are the same as their families above.

### SOCIETY

Due to their overly sensitive telepathic mind, the Muses of Brown Astar are solitary creatures. The grottos are large enough that they aren't bothered by each other's presence, but they are still always aware of all other muses nearby. In the grottos, the Muses found the earthwhisps living there and developed a close relationship with them. The earthwhisps live independent lives and don't serve the Muses. Instead, they trade the fluid from their glowlands in exchange for memories of the world above that they seem to find a marvellous experience. Muses maintain relations with several earthwhisps and each whisp is free to trade its glowing fluids with different muses.

### CUSTOMS

The Muses of Brown Astar appear even more aloof and disinterested than those of Green Astar. They actively avoid strong

emotions and thoughts both in themselves and others. As a consequence, the Muses don't have passionate sexual relationships but may develop romantic, stable relationships that may last for several years or even decades. Even in such relationships, Muses live solitary most of the time.

### GOVERNMENT

There is no government at all in Brown Astar. When it comes to decision making, their sensitive telepathic minds pick up each others feelings regarding the matter at hand, giving them a kind of direct democracy that isn't found anywhere else on Talislanta.

### THE ARTS

In Brown Astar, the Muses are very artistically inclined. As an escape for their thoughts, feelings, and passions, they create intricate paintings all over the grotto walls painted in the glowjuice they trade with the earthwhisps. These paintings always present very strong images and can't be looked at without feeling the emotions put into it. Glowpaintings are temporary in nature and fade away in the course of a month. Brown Astar is a silent place where no music is made. Muses sometimes dance to a silent tune in their head, triggered by a memory from their youth.

## THE SUBTERRANOIDS

Subterranooids are massive bipeds who mostly dwell far below the caverns of Durne, but are known to travel the Underground Highway throughout the entire continent of Talislanta. They have a rocklike exoskeleton with crude features, brown, grey or black in colour. They grow sharp spikes on all major joints, which are the largest at the shoulders. Subterranooids dress in leather loincloths. Subterranooid parties encountered away from their homes are almost always armed with swords and shields of an unbreakable black metal of unknown composition. Subterranooids are immune to heat and flame. They can see in total darkness, but are very sensitive to bright lights. The exoskeleton of dead subterranooids

locks into place and transforms to solid rock. The creature inside quickly dries out and the exoskeleton crumbles to dust within a year for lack of maintenance.

## Ancestry

Little is known for sure of the subterranooids. They don't occur in any stories from before the Great Disaster, suggesting that they came to Talislanta some six hundred years ago. They may have arrived through a rift in the Omniverse or they could have been created by wild magic surges deep in the earth. Some scholars claim they are a magical hybrid of Satada and rock demon. Others are of the opinion that they are earth elementals warped by fighting the Stain in the Green World and no longer able to live there.

## Society

Subterranooid clans reside in the deepest underground caverns and tunnels, where creatures from the surface don't survive long for lack of fresh air. They live on a diet of fungi, moulds, insects, animals and have a limited ability to digest raw minerals. Subterranooids live in clans of exactly 33 members, and always operate in teams of three, called triads. Triads have specific responsibilities within the clan. Clans are independent and ignore each other most of the time. All communications between clans are done by specific triads. Subterranooids only reproduce when their number is reduced. All members of a clan can be male or female as needed, but they can be only gender at a time. It takes a subterranooid three months to change sex. Infant subterranooids are born as gelatinous creatures. Their slimy skin is covered with pebbles and stone splinters; this slowly hardens out as a provisional exoskeleton. When they can feed themselves, young subterranooids are locked in a cave, where they feed on minerals only. After one year, they are strong enough to break out of the cave. Fully grown, they are then ready to take their place in a triad.

## Customs

Able to navigate underground by some innate sense, subterranooids can turn up anywhere. Although they seem to prefer existing tunnels, subterranooids are skilled miners in solid rock. Their heavy weight and lack of subtle movements makes it difficult for them to move through softer soil types. Subterranooids won't easily go into muddy terrain for risk of getting stuck. Tales of their nature allowing them to move through solid rock probably came to life because someone saw a subterranooid eat rock, but they are not true. Raw minerals and metals are essential nutrients to subterranooids, and they eat small pieces of rock and ore to supplement their diet. The triad responsible for forging weapons mix digested minerals with the metal of the blades on which they work.

## Government

One triad of each clan acts as the absolute leaders of that clan. All triad members are responsible for each other's acts. Only acts that endanger the clan are considered crimes and are punished by expulsion of the triad from the clan. If the triad of leaders have endangered the clan, they are killed and another triad takes their place. Young subterranooids then fill up the ranks until the clan counts 33 members again. Banned triads go insane and become feared killers.

## Magic and Religion

At least one triad of each clan is capable of magic, usually geomancy. One of the magic-capable triads is responsible for the rituals of worship of an entity that may be an arch-demon or true elemental. Alchemists assume that some kind of magic is involved in the creation of the subterranooids' unbreakable equipment.

## The Arts

Subterranoïds are not known for appreciating art. Other races see an artistic value in their mysteriously etched swords. For their excellent quality, however, these rare blades most often end up in the hands of warriors rather than those of art collectors and antiquarians.

## Language

While able to speak the Elder tongue, subterranoïds usually communicate in Sign and a kind of sound code in which they use their shields as a gong; the echoes of the ringing carry much farther in the tunnels than would a voice.

## Defences

Subterranoïds are masters at underground combat. Deploying a combination of combat tactics and traps they are deadly opponents underground. Above, they suffer from the light. Triads use special tactics that combine maximum defence of each other and rapid coordinated attacks to break the enemy's guard.

## Commerce

Subterranoïds are completely self-sufficient and do not trade with other clans or races. The Arimites maintain a minimum of contact with subterranoïds, and some claim to have bartered with them.

## World View

Subterranoïd clans are entirely independent. They defend if attacked and raid for things their clan needs. They may or may not maintain relations with inhabitants of the Green World or the Demon Realm.

# THE WESTERN WATERWAYS

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*Water, water, and more water... Bah, give me solid rock anytime.*

Unknown Gnomekin engineer

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Except for Arim and Khazad, the Western Lands are largely made up of rich, humid soil on top of thick layers of marl, limestone, clay, sandstone and other soft materials. One has to go quite deep to reach hard rock. As a consequence, water stayed in the upper layers and carved out a vast subterranean network of rivers, lakes and grottos there. Emmo Ebono made good use of them during his mapping expeditions and travelled many a mile underground by canarge in company of his Fan-Ra-San guide.

## THE DEAD LAGOON

Coming down from the Sardonyx Mountains one arm of the Sascasm river simply ends in the Green Lagoon. According to an old Dhuna legend, this part of the Sascasm does not actually terminate there. In forgotten days, they say, it was called the Dead Lagoon, a sump that forced the river to go underground, its hidden tributaries going on for many miles. The Dhuna bury their dead, because of revelations saying that the ancient practice of sending the dead away on the river to the Dead Lagoon is not permitted to them. While most scholars denounce the Dhuna tale as pure nonsense, it holds true in the core. In later ages, without the care of the disappeared civilisation, the opening into to underground realm got partially blocked by debris and the Green Lagoon was formed above. Being fed by the Sascasm river, the drain still exists at the bottom of the Green Lagoon, and is the source of a waterfall into a

cistern that is the ancient Dead Lagoon. The water falls down from the ceiling into the clear water of a lake in the centre of a grotto that has been carved out from the dark brown rock.

The lake is large but shallow, nowhere more than knee-deep. Whether it is the echoing sound of the waterfall in the otherwise silent lagoon, or some other unfathomable thing, a faint feeling of ancient power lingers here. No life exists in these waters and although the water of the Sascasm river is drinkable and the lake is crystal clear, the atmosphere of this place doesn't quite invite its consumption, almost as if it were holy water. If legend is true, this lake works as a power source for revealing and defensive magic as long as the water keeps flowing. Whatever ancient powers are unleashed if ever the flow of the water would dry up is anyone's guess.

A narrow corridor guides a fast stream of excess water to another waterfall into a lake in the next cave. The grotto that is entirely filled with the deep waters of this second lake is very uneven. Light sources reflecting on stalactites, rocks in the water, and other structures in the cave walls cause many shadows that make it difficult to see where exits might be. As this lake is one of the major water sources to the rest of the Western Waterways, there are many streams out of this place. Only few are large enough all the way through to be used for travel. Some exits carry invisible markings over them that can be revealed by magic, though the meaning of these has been forgotten. Most of the marked exits can be used to reach other places. If the currents in the water are studied with care, it will become obvious that one other river, coming from the north, contributes to this lake instead of flowing away from it.

## FORGOTTEN SHRINES

From the east side of the second lake in the Dead Lagoon, several deep but narrow streams wind into the dark soil of Witchwood. The narrow passages with low ceilings and sharp bends only allow the smallest of vessels

to pass. The dark, brittle and damp soil through which these streams run, gives an oppressive feeling and are no place for claustrophobes. Falling overboard is not a good idea here, for the muddy walls provide nothing in the way of footholds, and burying the point of a boat in them risks not being able to get it loose again. The water is surprisingly cold, and grows colder as the streams get deeper into Witchwood soil, but it never freezes. Sound doesn't carry far down here. These shallow waters split many times and other streams join without any signs of where they might be heading. Towards the centre of Witchwood, there is no longer any current in the streams and the oppressive feeling becomes more intense. It's a feeling like being in a room with increased atmospheric pressure without ventilation and someone invisible is staring at you. Staying in this area for more than a few hours is enough to raise the hairs in anyone's neck. After several days, paranoia becomes a very real and overwhelming emotion.

Continuing upstream, eventually the water becomes shallower and dries up. A muddy path leads upward and becomes hard sand and finally solid rock. These paths all end at a circular room, one of a number throughout Witchwood. Large obelisk-like stones are set in the wall and are carved with strange symbols and glyphs. Each of these rooms lies directly below one of the stone circles in Witchwood and holds the same ancient magic. It is conceivable that the magic involved in a summoning ritual above resonates in this room, increasing the power of the ritual. This would explain the power of the Dhuna to wield such ancient magic to create their witchgates. Another theory is that these rooms become the actual portal that brings the summoned entities into the world before they are gated to the world above. It is better not to think about what would happen if a ritual backfired and a being from whatever dimension the Dhuna were communing with broke free and began roaming these tunnels. Otherwise, these forgotten shrines are perfect places to study ancient magic, as the glyphs

Forgotten Shrine  
Beneath the  
Witchwood



Fig

and runes on the stones here are not as faded as above. These shrines are particularly sensitive to summoning magic and any summoning spell cast here benefits from a +5 bonus.

## FAN SEA

A single large river coming from the north is the only other source that contributes to the second lake of the Dead Lagoon. This slow, wide river, coursing through a large tunnel, can easily be travelled by small boats. The water of this river is clouded with sand, but it brings a fresh air, as after a spring rain. Away from the Dead Lagoon, the walls of the tunnel grow ever thicker layers of moss, that remains white instead of green for lack of sunlight. The moss first grows at the water level, but upriver it quickly covers the entire tunnel. Occasionally a kelpilly floats by, white flowers floating on circular beds of tangled weed up to three feet across. In bloom, they give off a very strong scent into the water, that lingers in the bed of kelp and attracts fish going from flower to flower, promoting the reproduction of these plants. This water makes a very exotic perfume and brings a decent sum of money in some markets. These waters are also rich in fish, and starvation should not be a problem with a fishing rod, net or trident at hand. Cooking, of course, is a different matter without any land about that is large enough to build a fire on, even if dry fuel were available. For miles, this river goes in a north or northeast direction. Gradually, stalagmites and stalactites begin to appear and over several miles become more frequent, making manoeuvring a vessel more awkward and hazardous, as the murky water hides sharp peaks just below the water level that are quite capable of piercing the hull of a small fisherman's boat and unpredictable undertows can make such accidents happen. Beyond this long and hazardous barrier, the river is easy to travel for several miles again, until it opens up in a huge underground sea, right below the Mushroom Forest.

The sight of this sea is spectacular and no one enters without spending a moment to take in the scene. In the darkness of the dome, thousands of lights twinkle brightly up above, like stars in a moonless night sky. A permanent light drizzle falls from the sky, causing an amazing visual phenomenon. As the light from the "stars" breaks in the droplets, bands of rainbow colours float through the dark sky like pole light. Occasionally, larger drops shoot through these multicoloured curtains as flashes of a single bright colour. The light is bright enough to see by and to illuminate the mother-of-pearl city that lies in the centre of this sea, Aqiniss, home of an aquatic race called the Fan-Ra-San.

## THE FAN-RA-SAN

The Fan-Ra-San are an offshoot of the Sun-Ra-San of the Eastern Lands. They are an aquatic race, though they are capable of spending up to six hours out of the water without problems. While the Sun-Ra-San kept to the open seas, the Fan-Ra-San clans also hunted in lagoons, up rivers and in lakes. Smaller and more slender built than their cousins, the Fan-Ra-San share the silver-scaled skin and deep-blue eyes. They have gills below their cheeks and their arm pits, a fin-like protrusion along their spine and their webbed toes stand very far apart for maximum propulsion in the water. Most Fan-Ra-San are clothed only in loincloths with decorations made of shell and water plants. Guards wear armour made of overlapping hard shells. Its mother-of-pearl finish is beautiful and difficult to target in the heat of a battle.

## Ancestry

The Fan-Ra-San share the same racial history as their Sun-Ra-San kin. They fled the Eastern Lands along with the Sun-Ra-San, but stuck to coastal areas and ventured up rivers and lakes as well instead of the open sea. When the Great Disaster struck, they found themselves trapped in a system of underground lakes and no longer able to stay out of the water for long periods of time. They

literally became a lost race for centuries and made their home in the underground confines of Fan Sea. From here, they explored most of the Western Waterways, but kept to themselves when they saw other races.

### Society

The Fan-Ra-San built the city of shells, Aqiniss, from the shells of a species of large shellfish that lives at the bottom of Fan Sea. Both the inside and exterior of these tough shells are covered in mother-of-pearl that gives them their multicoloured, shiny appearance. Homes are mostly underwater, but a friendly competition in decorating a house with beautiful spires above the water level has created a marvellous construction in the light of the artificial stars overhead. The extended family is the core of the Fan-Ra-San society. Couples mate for life and afterlife in a ceremony called the “merging of souls”. Children are raised by the parents and grandparents, and training in Fan-Ra-San culture and aquaculture begins at age two.

### Customs

Like their kin, the Fan-Ra-San have a great love of learning, and they treasure their history and culture. Children learn to read and write the ancient Sun-Ra-San script and rehearse the stories of their people until they know them by heart. Records of pedigrees and important events are kept by family elders etched in parchment scrolls made of the cured scales of certain types of fish. The Fan-Ra-San have accepted the separation from their kin and adapted to their new home. The Western Waterways are their domain and they take pride in collecting as much knowledge about it as possible. The coming of age rituals of the Fan-Ra-San involve taking part in a discovery expedition into unknown parts of the Western Waterways. The Fan-Ra-San developed an intricate way of mapping waterways growing a three dimensional miniature map in coral. A form of aquatic botanomancy called aquaculture is taught to any child who proves to have a talent for it.

### Government

By ancient tradition, the Fan-Ra-San are a democratic people. Their leader, called “Eminence”, is elected by popular vote. This individual is assisted in all matters by a council of eleven elected advisors, called the Council. The Council may overrule the Eminence with a two-third majority. The Council also acts as the Fan-Ra-San’s judicial system.

### Magic and Religion

The Fan-Ra-San have specialized in a form of aquaculture that is similar to botanomancy, but uses fish, shellfish and water plants instead of plants that require soil to grow; aquaculturists have abilities similar to Botanomancers, but with aquatic species. One of the hybrids the Fan-Ra-San bred is the aqus, a four-legged aquatic creature favoured by Fan-Ra-San guards as mounts (see Chapter 5 for more information). Mount and rider can move swiftly underwater without causing much rippling at the surface of the water and are very agile in aquatic combat.

Following their transformation during the Great Disaster, the Fan-Ra-San felt that their ancestral god Aqus abandoned them and a long religious crisis followed. Unwilling to forget their god completely, they named their city after him, Aqiniss, in memory of Aqus. The lack of moonfish in their new environment meant that the spirits of the dead had to go elsewhere. Eventually, they took up worship of a fresh-water deity named Seol, to whom they built a shrine near the Dead Lagoon. They moved the shrine into a temple in Aqiniss. The Fan-Ra-San believe that their dead rise up and join the spirits of the ancient worshippers of Seol as sparkling lights on the dome over Fan Sea. The bodies of the dead are put in coffins made from shells and sunk to the bottom of Fan Sea.

Fan-Ra-San feel that tending to the god is a shared responsibility, but requires full-time attention. Being a practical people, any adult can become a priest by taking a simple vow. Priests can leave their position again by

another simple ceremony, but may join the priesthood again whenever they wish. Social responsibility makes sure that there are always several priests attending the temple.

### The Arts

The Fan-Ra-San are skilled in the processing of shells, fish scales, plant material, and coral into pieces of art as well as useful items. They take great pride in crafting beautiful spires on the tops of their homes, making Aqinnis into the wondrous city that it is.

Like their kin race, Fan-Ra-San song is often haunting and sorrowful. The “Lament for a Lost Race” is one of their most intense songs. Fan-Ra-San sing exclusively underwater, in the same way as the Sun-Ra-San, considering it vulgar to hear their songs performed in air.

### Language

The Fan-Ra-San speak the ancestral tongue they share with the Sun-Ra-San and the Sunra, called Sun-Ra-Sa. Over the centuries, the Fan-Ra-San picked up a smidgen of other languages from parties adventuring in the Western Waterways. Common names are hyphenated; male names begin with “Fu”, while female names begin with “Fa”. The second syllable always begins with an “R”, as in Fum-Ras, Fug-Rin, Fun-Ra (male), or Far-Ris, Fan-Ros, Fam-Rif (female).

### Defences

Having faced few threats, the Fan-Ra-San maintain only a minimal army. The Water Guard has a permanent underwater station at the barrier downriver to the Dead Lagoon. Other, well-hidden outposts exist throughout the Western Waterways, but are used only when needed. All soldiers are trained in aquatic combat and are skilled riders of aqua mounts. Underwater surprise attacks are a commonly used tactic to quickly deal with invaders. Aqinnis city defences include harpoon-throwers.

### Commerce

The various Fan-Ra-San families in Aqinnis and surrounding area trade among each other, using coins made of blue coral as currency. Blue coral is the only type that occurs naturally in the Fan Sea, and only sparsely at that. Coins are crafted exclusively by the priests on orders of the Council. Fan-Ra-San keep their existence hidden from other races, but are known to barter with individuals or small parties encountered in the Western Waterways in disguise.

### World View

In time, the Fan-Ra-San discovered passages that would lead them to the ocean again. However, adapted to fresh water now, and under the influence of a new god, they decided to remain secluded in the Fan Sea. They see the entire Western Waterways as their domain, to be respected by anyone who travels there. From the waters of the Sascasm river, the Fan-Ra-San secretly observe other races, but more from a curiosity to learn than a desire to establish relations with them.

### THE THREE SISTERS

West of the Dead Lagoon lies a strange formation of smooth blue rock, called the Crying Eyes. From two large openings water falls down into another lake, named the Lake of Tears. This big, deep lake is the home of a deceptively violent species of aquatic predators, called tearfish (see Chapter 5 for more information). These slender and gracious silver and purple striped fish with large wavy fins and tails possess a strong flexible set of jaws set with a razor-sharp row of needles for teeth that penetrate and rend leather with ease. Tearfish are hunters that innocently approach their prey, showing off as beautiful and playful animals. Then the group of tearfish attack the victim suddenly. The surface of the lake looks like it is boiling as the creatures fight to get their share of food.

Tearfish are named well, for not only do they tear apart their victims up into small enough pieces to eat, but also because they

process indigestible bits into a dark red goo that they excrete from an opening just behind their eyes, as if they were shedding tears. As a consequence, the water is slightly salty and has a reddish hue. Fan-Ra-San tales claim that these fish feed on the dead of an ancient civilisation, and that the bottom of the lake is a treasure store. In fact, tearfish only live on fresh meat and refuse to eat carrion. Whatever is to be found in the depths of the lake was left by those unaware of its dangerous inhabitants.

The Lake of Tears feeds three large underground rivers, called the Three Sisters. According to a Phaedran legend, three divine—or more probably divine-looking—sisters tried to persuade a handsome hero from the north to marry one of them. At the moment the hero would have made his decision, a giant came along and bashed him on the head with his giant club so hard that only his blue skinned head remained above the ground. The three sisters sat down in shock and wept. They shed tears until they were all dried out and died, but by then these three rivers had formed.

The most northern river is the underground twin of the Weeping river, running its exact course underground. The Northern Sister, the youngest, was the golden one. Her tears mixed with the water and gave the soil its yellow colour. The river easily carved a way through the soft sandstone, bending this way and that to circumvent blocks of granite and other hard stone. Like the Weeping river, it is a narrow, fast river that can be travelled by small boats that are easily handled. As it progresses, the river dives deeper and becomes wilder. There are no banks and a trip on this river must be travelled to its end in one go. Deep beneath the source of the Weeping river lies the death spiral of the Golden Sister, a small lake that is one violent vortex draining the water to places unknown. At the side of the lake is an artificial pier where boats can be moored. At the end of the pier, a long spiral staircase was cut out in the rock, by people long forgotten, and leads

## Encounters in the Western Waterways

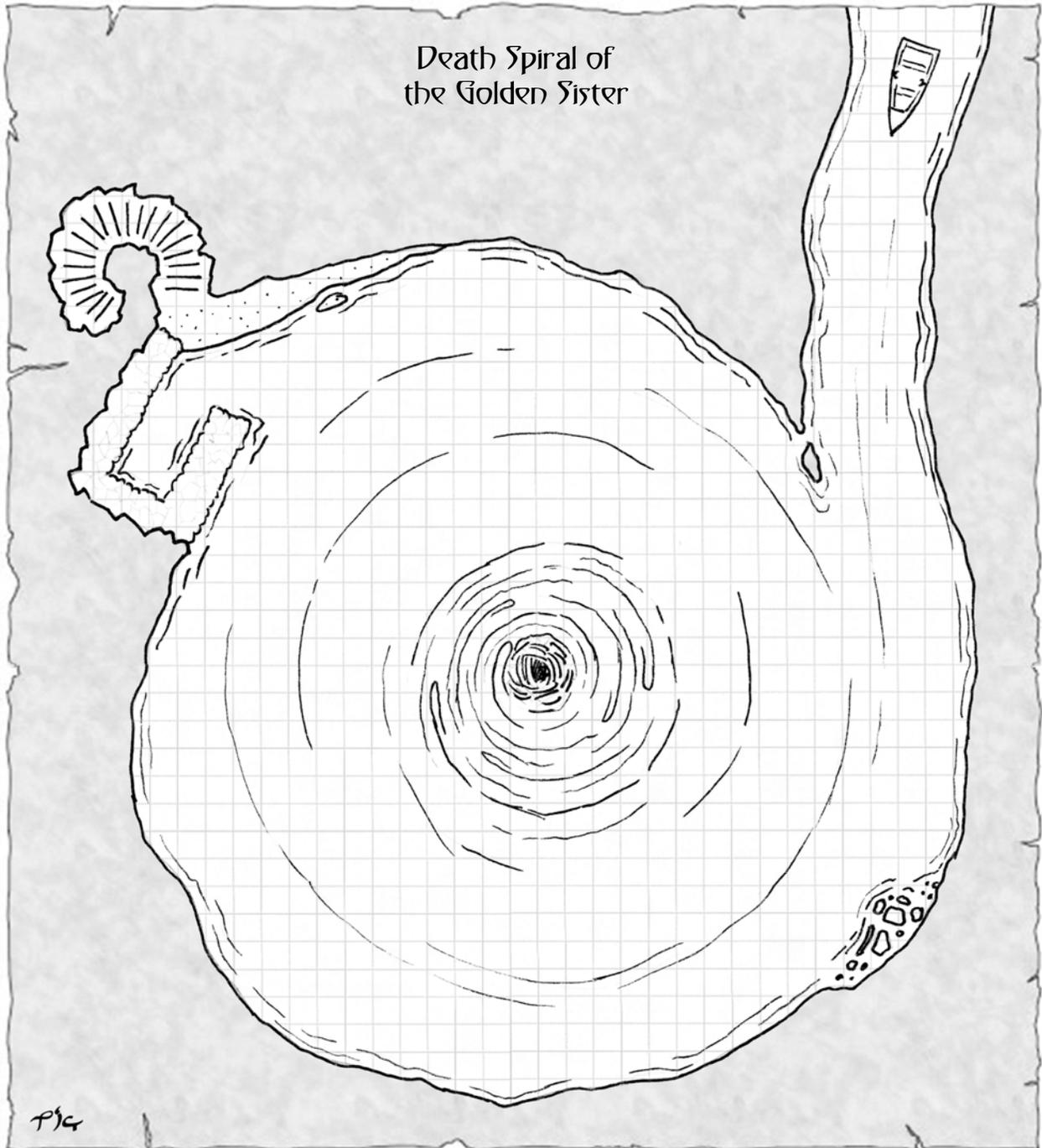
Use this table for encounter ideas or roll 2d20 to select a random encounter. Subtract 5 for northern and eastern encounters (Fan Sea and Witchwood). Add 5 for western encounters (Lake of Tears and the Three Sisters).

Roll	Encounter
up to 1	Fan-Ra-San aquaculturist
2	Fan-Ra-San fisherman
3-4	Fan-Ra-San Water Guards
5	Kelpillies
6	Scavenger slime
7	Strange glyph or runestone
8	Coven of Dhuna witches
9	Wandering Sarista magician
10	Summoned entity, roll again:
1-4	fiend
5-8	figment
9-12	ghast
13-16	night demon
17-20	water demon
11	School of angorn
12	Plant demon
13	Adventuring scholar
14	Gang of neuromorphs
15	Skalanx
16	Safe mooring
17	River kra
18	Triad of Subterranooids
19-20	Rough current or rapids
21	Arimite mining crew
22-23	Tranquil lagoon
24	Scarlet sporozoids
25	Darkling spy
26	Sudden waterfall
27	Arimite trader
28	Reclusive Gnorl
29	Rag-tag band of treasure hunters
30-31	Remains of lost expedition
32	Weirdling
33	Mandragores
34	Ghost ship from Khazad
35+	School of tearfish

all the way up to the top of a small hill, deep in the forest.

The Middle Sister was the black one. Her tears, mixed with strong anger, went in a straight line west into the soil of the Werewood, turning the earth black. Where the anger lost its strength, near the Valley of Forgetfulness, the river suddenly splits into

many smaller streams, most of which eventually spill their water into the Necros river. A few streams steer away from the Valley of Forgetfulness into the grounds below the Dread Forest. These streams take on the black colour of the rock they run through. By slowly dissolving this stone, or maybe fed by vengeful feelings of the Black Sister, the waters turn acidic and carve an ever deeper



path into the rock. Any vessel or organism that stays in those waters for any length of time slowly gets eaten away. Only on well-lit nights, the Sarista dare to relate a legend that tells about dark ghosts from Khazad sailing their vessels of black mist on the Necros river. As ghosts can't cross the open sea, it is speculated that there might exist a passage below the ocean floor into Khazad. If this is true, the Black Sister would certainly be a candidate.

The Southern Sister, the oldest, was the silver one. With a calm sadness, her tears streamed south through Gnorlwood soil, where they turned west into Silvanus. Her tears give the ground its silvery grey colour and her strong will and big heart made this the largest of the three rivers finding its way through the hardest of rock. Calmly, the Silver Sister follows a low-roofed, smooth tunnel into Silvanus without any place to stop or choose between different paths to follow. There the river ends in a hidden pool deep in the forest. The Sarista know this pool as a place of serenity and revelation, where the reflection of the moons tell about things to come, where the best water is found to make potions, and where Death won't come until Time forces it to visit there.

## THE ONYX MINES

South from the Dead Lagoon there is very narrow tunnel, just wide enough to crawl through. It's recognisable by black and white lines of a very sharp grained sand on the bottom of the trickle that runs through it. This sand is ground onyx and the tunnel is a backbreaking passage into the mountain range carrying that mineral's name. The only reason for taking this torturous road is because it's the only known underground road into Arim from the north. It's a bad mining area, so there never are many people around. Unfortunately, this region of the Onyx mountains is instead a favourite area of subterranoïds, who for some reason are attracted to these mineral-rich rocks, even though they don't seem to use much of the ore themselves. They have, however, dug many tunnels through these

mountains over the centuries and it's not uncommon to encounter a triad or two on their way to unknown destinies.

On the Arim side, the mountains are rich with mines set up by the Arimites. The higher mountains bordering Gnorlwood are a rich source of garnets, sards, and silver. The latter is mined under strict control of the Exarch's soldiers as it is used to mint Arim's own currency. The hills near Iswan and Shattra are the most important source of black iron in the Western Lands. The high peaks north of Lake Venda hold a few veins of emeralds, carnelians and beryls. Mines can be found scattered all through the Onyx mountains, operated by humourless Arimite mining crews, who are all too eager to break the daily routine to deal with a couple of intruders, who are no doubt after their valuable ores or spying for the Ur clans. The Arimite crews are probably the most experienced with the customs of the subterranoïds, as they share the underground realm beneath the Onyx Mountains. Arimite miners make use of tunnels abandoned by the subterranoïds, and there even exists basic forms of communication and barter between the two races. The Arimites have thus become very familiar with the Underground Highway within their territories, and can quickly move from one part of the country to another faster than would be possible overland. This knowledge is also one of the reasons that their mining operations are among the most profitable in all Talislanta, yet it makes them a target for scholars and adventurers who wish to learn more about the subterranoïds, a fact which the surly Arimites do not enjoy. As a consequence, more than one overconfident and nosy visitor has found himself the target of a contract with the Revenant Cult.

There is one section of the Onyx Mountains that contains merely one subterranean passage, and that one leads to the Cliffs of Bahahd and the road to the Forbidden City of Ahrazad. This passage runs fairly high through the cliff side and frequently opens up to caves that overlook the canyon below. The

caves in the Cliffs of Bahahd are the well-known location to go searching for moonstones of immense size and impeccable colour. The popularity of these sites with adventurers and treasure hunters has made it equally popular for the Stryx as a place of easy pickings. Every once in a while, the Ur use the cliff passage to send a small army of darklings to pester the Arim leader in his hidden palace and test the strength of the capital's defences. Some people say that it is only a matter of time until the Ur will muster an army that is big enough to conquer the city and wipe out the Arimite's government, with the rest of the country to be following the same fate soon after.

## SPY'S FATE

Unknown to almost all Aamanians and Zandir is the fact that from the most western edge of the Onyx Mountains, a very small tunnel runs below Zandu, crossing the Great Barrier Wall at a depth of thirty feet, through Aamanian soil. The tunnel splits up in a delta of tunnels that connect to the Axis river, some 30 miles north of Vashay. This tunnel was incidentally discovered by a Zandir thief hiding from the Aamanian inquisition in the well of an abandoned farm a little outside Aamahd. Ever since, this tunnel has become the domain of certain criminal elements from both Aamanian and Zandir societies, who run an expensive smuggling operation here. On both sides of the Great Barrier Wall several secret and well-guarded exits to the surface exist. From official sides, the existence of this tunnel and its current function are categorically denied, but knowledge of it in government circles would go a long way to explaining how both countries can maintain such a high level of intelligence on each other without spies ever being caught at the gate through the Great Barrier Wall. This route is also used as an escape for Aamanian heretics or to circumvent the diplomatic isolation of Aaman by the Seven Kingdoms. The many open connections with the Axis river combined with its small capacity make it a very unreliable route that can flood in mere minutes when heavy rainfall raises the water

## Amerdeiro's Journal

I had the White Lilly's crew drop the anchor well out of reach of those cursed stone faces. Instead of risking my precious vessel, I selected the best six hands of the crew, boarded the sloop, and left the Lilly in the capable hands of the first mate. Thinking back, half our luck must already have been spent on having calm waters, where the currents usually drag a vessel wherever they please. Perhaps best that we didn't know how.

Between two nasty sharp teeth we sailed into the mouth of one of the stone demons that mark the cliffs. Along with the darkness, the abrupt silence surprised us. While outside, the cries of the Wailing Mountain had sent shivers along our spines, but the oppressive silence made those big men a little smaller. Unable to see much in the light of the lanterns, the sloop repeatedly hit the rocks, as if the demon was saying nicely that it didn't want us there, yet in our pride we went on. After the first turn we lost what little daylight we had. That's when the foul wind rose up from the demon's throat to sicken all of us. But we went on with empty stomachs, as our employers promised to pay very well indeed if we would return with any artefacts of an extinct tribe he called the Thane.

Past the next bend, the whispering started. Too faint to distinguish the words, the tone of cursing chants could not be misunderstood. Not a dozen heartbeats later, a sharp rock penetrated the hull of the sloop and two of the crew pulled in their oars to make repairs and scoop the water out of the boat. The whispering chants continued.

(continued)

level in the Axis river. Less ethically inclined minds might conceive this as a suitable way to get rid of unwanted elements. The western branch of the Underground Highway of the Seven Kingdoms must pass below the Axis river close to the point where Spy's Fate surfaces. If an entrance into those tunnels exists, then those who know of it can keep secrets very well. Besides, there are other ways to cross the Axis.

## THE CLIFFS OF KHAZAD

Although virtually impossible to reach, the giant diabolical visages that are carved in the sides of the Cliffs of Khazad, have openings for mouths that lead into the interior of the Khazad peninsula. Few captains dare to challenge fate and sail the dangerous currents and sharp rocks surrounding these cliffs. Even fewer tried and survived. And those who did never bragged about it, and that is usually not a good sign for prospective adventurers. The story of Amerdeiro, captain of the White Lilly, is one of the rare tales about these caves (see sidebar).

## THE DARK TONGUE

The Badlands are sparsely-wooded steppes, not suited for any kind of underground travel. From the coast to the Sardonyx Mountains, a black iron path crosses the Badlands. This mysterious phenomenon disappears into a huge cave in the foothills of the Sardonyx Mountains. This site is scattered with bones of various species. If not home to the Wildmen of Yrmania, creatures like the yaksha, tundra beast, or muskront may have taken shelter here. As often in the wild lands, the transition of ownership of a lair is not always a peaceful event. Besides the common residents from the Badlands, this place sees frequent visits from Satada hunting parties, where the Satada seem to avoid the rest of the Badlands. This has led to the suspicion that this cave might conceal the entrance to a tunnel complex that is connected to realms where the Satada feel more at home. The occasional presence of night demons suggests that these tunnels might also be connected to

## Amerdeiro's Journal

(continued)

In the light of the lanterns our shadows seemed possessed of a life of their own, a life that didn't look like it had much of a future. Next we knew, it started to rain. Yes, I know, we were in a cave! Water ran along the ceiling of the cave and streamed down from the many spikes that decorated it. We lost another man on the oars to help scooping out the water and keep us afloat, so fast was it pouring down on us.

When we'd at last passed the rain, everything went dead silent. Then a low gurgling started. We felt it before we heard it and fear overtook each one of us. The gurgling became louder and more ominous, as if the demon was trying to throw up. The rotting stench had drained most of the strength from our muscles when finally the tidal wave came. It was full of the wreckage of ships that sank in these waters and some not too long ago because half the bodies in the water were not the Lilly's men. Halfway out, the sloop was smashed to splinters in a bend and the impact forced the air out of my lungs. If it wasn't for the second mate keeping me above the water, well, I'm sure the first mate would have recited some good paradoxes, like he did for the five men we had lost by the time the second mate and I reached the safety of the Lilly again. No matter how much they will pay, I won't order the Lilly near those demons ever again, but I must admit that new white streak in my hair worked miracles for my reputation among the crew and my patrons.

those through Narandu leading to the Black Pit. The Wildmen never seem to have bothered to find out.

# THE EASTERN STRETCH

The gnomekin have not charted the Underground Highway this far east. What little is known for sure, Emmo Ebono learned from Vajra engineers.

## THE ANCESTRAL HOME OF THE VAJRA

### The Vajra Hivocities

The traditional territories of the Vajra below the hills bearing their name are nearly forgotten except by the Vajra themselves. In the Opal Mountain mines and the catacombs of the citadel of Karang Vajra songs can be heard, softly music from their basso voices. Songs about their ancestral home, recited only when no guards are nearby. These songs tell about the Queen's Chamber with each of its walls decorated with mosaics made from precious stones, glowing gold, orange, yellow and brown in the light of the hearth, about the Nursery with growing eggs lying in their incubator beds of delicately sculpted jade, about the Prayer Hall to Terra, the earth goddess, a large circular hall with Terra's mirror, a floor of plain brown rock polished so smooth that it reflects a Vajra's image in the goddess, about the Corridor of Time spiralling outward telling the history of the Vajra in its carved walls from the foundation of the city onward... until the year 82. Evacuated and sealed by the Quan, these cities lie now abandoned, prey to the force of time.

If one would know where to find an entrance and be able to break the seal, a wondrous realm would be revealed. A collection of hive-settlements lie spread throughout the Vajran Hills, each connected to the others by long winding tunnels. Vajra cities are nearly impossible to map as corridors curve in all three dimensions,

seemingly without logic or direct connections between any two places, which are never built at the same depth. The low ceilings don't allow most races to walk upright. It takes a Vajra to make sense of these mazes and feel at home here. Nobody, however, will have a hard time appreciating the craftsmanship of this place. Floors and walls are all polished smooth, highlighting the natural layers and minerals of the rock they are carved in, doors turn on their hinges at the touch of a finger, each room is connected by a intricate system of water pipes and illuminated by cultivated globs of phosphorescent fungi suspended from the ceiling, lighting the room in any of colour of the rainbow.

Despite its apparent chaotic design, some sense can be made of it by one who takes the time to study it. Chambers close to the entrance are military domain. Barracks, mess halls, training areas, armouries, smithies and defensive structures can be found here. It is easy to misjudge these rooms, as equal attention has been given to their polished and decorated walls as anywhere else. Spread out around the army lie the domains of the workers. These include dormitories, moss farms, storage rooms, mineral mines, tool shops, gem cutting and sculpture studios, temples, schools, and other locales for the daily routines of Vajra life. In between the clusters of soldier and worker domains lies deep in the earth the royal domain surrounded by the nurseries, servants quarters and burial chambers. There is only one such cluster in each of the Vajra's cities.

Somewhere deep, deep in the subterranean realms of their homeland, some say at the very heart of the world, lies the essence of the Vajran race. A dark space filled with a lake of magma so hot that its glowing body is covered by a black layer of scorched air. This is the Dark Fire, that burns in the soul of every Vajra. From opposite sides of the cave, a narrow ledge of an unknown type of rock, resistant to the immense heat, leads to the centre of the Dark Fire, but stop twenty feet short of each other. This symbolized the

Vajran soul. It is possible to get close to the heart, but come too close and you risk being consumed by the Dark Fire. The ledges each begin at a tunnel that leads back to the city, although the locations of the upper entrance are one of the closest guarded secrets of the Vajra.

According to Vajra legend, their homes may be left abandoned, but they are not left undefended for any plunderer lucky enough to find a way in. The Dark Fire is a living thing and protective of the home of its caretakers. Adventurers who claim to have found the Vajra cities mentioned encounters with what might be different incarnations of the Dark Fire. Some talk of lava demons, although these creatures are commonly too big for the low corridors. Others tell about a cloud of superheated air moving through the city. Yet other tales recall a Vajra spirit with eyes that shoot rays of magma. Of course, it is quite possible that these stories are worth no more than the price of a couple of beers.

## HARAKIN RAIDING TUNNELS

Cold and inhospitable, the Opal Mountains form a natural barrier to protect the Eastern Lands from the invaders. Of course they attract their share of adventurers hoping their luck will lead them to a deposit of precious blue diamonds, but the cold storms and frost demons have left few expeditions to set up a proper dig. Left to their own devices, such mines collapse quickly enough, leaving the peaks of the Opal Mountains a prospective but effectively useless area for those who prefer to travel underground.

Like any barrier though, the Opal Mountains too are far from a perfect one. There are passes that can be taken when not blocked by snow. The rough waters of the Strait of Harak have ground many caves in the sea side of the mountains. Harakin war chiefs sent out scouts to explore these tunnels and while many never came back, it turned out that there is at least one way through the heart of the mountains into the Quan empire. At the Quan learned soon enough, this road is large

enough to accommodate large war bands along with their dractyl mounts. How the Harakin get creatures from the sky through the dark confined spaces below the mountains is anyone's guess. Despite frequent patrols by Kang trackers, the entrance on the Quan side of the Opal Mountains has never been discovered by the Quan.

Information extracted from Harakin prisoners has revealed—for what little relief it brings the Quan—that the journey under the Opal Mountains is a dangerous one. It is easy to get lost in the tunnel if the connection with the war caravan is broken. No troops that left the body of the army have ever been seen again, as if they were suddenly swallowed by the dark. Ominous sounds can be heard from time to time, varying from a distorted rumble to crushing and screeching, always muffled, always suggesting that the source of the sound is closer than the sound itself leads to believe. Although there are no open attacks on passing war bands, it seems that no caravan makes it through the mountains without suffering losses in troops. People get detached and lost, or a dractyl panics and kills its handler, or fewer people depart from a campsite than arrived without anyone ever noticing where they went. If the war chiefs are in on the cause of these disappearances, they never let it be known, claiming that if a Harakin can't take care of himself, that's his own problem.

## THE CITADEL OF KARANG

The Citadel of Karang is the first line of defence in the Quan empire against Harakin raids from the Opal Mountains. In addition to its defensive importance, it is also one of the biggest slave camps housing Vajra miners. From the Citadel of Karang, Kang troops escort gangs of Vajra miners on their weekly trip to mines in the western side of the Opal Mountains, to dig up metal ores and precious minerals for the Quan. At the end of the week, the Vajra are moved back into the Citadel of Karang.

At Karang, the Vajra miners live in a tunnel complex built below the citadel. This

crisscross maze of tunnels and rooms was built in exactly the same way as a traditional Vajra city. The Quan who run the citadel never understood the organisation of Vajra society and didn't recognise that the old division in soldiers and workers still exists. To the Quan, they are all miners. However, should an occasion for revolt ever arise, the apparently open corridors of the Vajra camp may prove to become a well-defended bastion overnight. Safe in the knowledge of holding the hibernating Vajra young hostage, the Quan pretty much left the Vajra to their own devices when constructing a new home. In a continuous effort of passive resistance, the Vajra work on these tunnels have never stopped. Unknown to the Quan, they constructed a huge network of tunnels through much of the northern Quan Empire. Currently, connections exist into the Sinking Land, to the Mazdak Drains at Moon Lake, and further south as far as the Vajra camp at Kangir. Trusting the goddess Terra to watch over their ancestral homes until better times arrive, the Vajra never dug tunnels back to their former homes under the Vajran Hills. It is likely that the Vajra discovered the entrance to the Harakin invasion route, but if so, they never told the Quan.

## LAVA LAKE

Given the hazards on the surface of the Volcanic Hills, few people consider the possibility that this area might also be traversable below ground level. That is not to say that this is the safer road, but it certainly will be a trip to remember. The Volcanic Hills are a dynamic terrain, where sinkholes and craters appear and disappear as eruptions and cave-ins occur. Openings into the interior of these lands are easy to find, but knowledge of where exactly tunnels are going becomes outdated rapidly due to the geologically hyperactive character of the area. While navigation can be difficult, finding your goal isn't. All tunnels and lava rivers, despite all their detours, eventually course to a huge underground lava lake below the centre of the Volcanic Hills. This cavern is a magnificent sight. The orange-yellow light from the slow

## Encounters Beneath the Volcanic Hills

Use this table for encounter ideas or roll 1d20 to select a random encounter.

<u>Roll</u>	<u>Encounter</u>
1-2	Sauran war party
3-4	Exhaust of hot fumes and smoke
5-6	Field of obsidian shards
7-8	Hungry drac
9	Ambitious pyromancer
10	Nesting draconid
11	Hidden side chamber
12	Sudden volcanic eruption
13	Unleashed earth demon
14	Strange blue crystal boat
15	Raknid workers
16	Lavafish
17	Relentless ravenger
18	Solitary vasp
19	Vengeful pyrodemon
20	Bound shedim

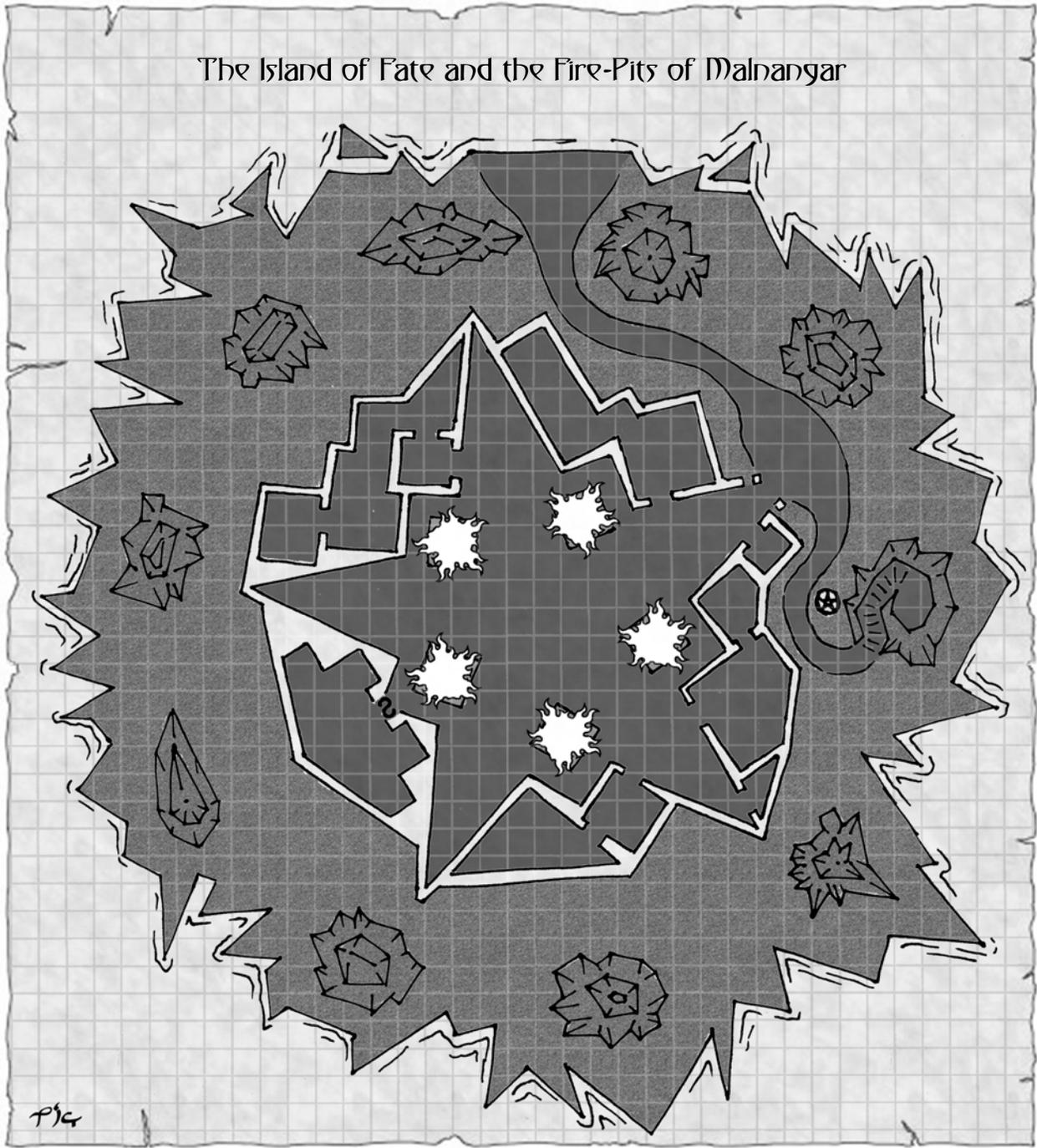
waves of the boiling lava brightly illuminates this place with shimmering effects not unlike those seen on the ceiling of an indoor pool. The air above the lake is filled with ominous dark grey clouds of smoke, as if suggesting that a thunderstorm might break loose any moment.

At the centre of the lake, invisible from the edge of the cave, lies the Island of Fate, a large rock of rough obsidian, its surface covered with razor-sharp edges and spikes. The island is barren, save for one impressive construction. Almost as if organically grown from the surface, tall stone circle of gnarled obsidian monoliths surrounds a stern building of white ivory that has somehow been made resistant to the sulphurous atmosphere in the cave. In the atrium of this building, five pits, positioned as corners of a pentagram, each spout a pillar of white-hot flame into the air all

the way up to and through the ceiling. These are the infamous Fire-Pits of Malnangar. It is in these pits that the cult of black wizards known as the Torquarans sacrificed almost the entire Xambrian race in the early Archaen Age. The Fire-Pits and the Obsidian Circle originate from the Forgotten Age, but the building, although thousands of years old, was

created in a more recent period. Void of figurative decorations, it does not reveal its history. Knowledge of the ancient symbols that line the otherwise plain walls is lost to the world today, but careful study reveals that they are part of some dark magic, necromantic or demonic in nature. Given that it was built around the Fire-Pits of Malnangar, a historian

### The Island of Fate and the Fire-Pits of Malnangar



could easily link it with the first necromancer king Drax or its master, the shaitan Zahur, who might have used the magic of this place in their escape from this dimension and the wrath of Diabolus.

The underground passages in this area come in three kinds: tunnels, lava rivers and chimneys.

Tunnels are made of rock that is either glassy, hard, and sharp; or porous and brittle. Due to the omnipresent layers of soot and dust, not to mention the ever-moving shadows and glows, it's often impossible to tell what kind of rock the environment is made of. The sharp lavaglass rock is tough on the soles of any shoes, and it might be wise to bring an extra pair. A walking stick or staff is another valuable asset to test the strength of the ground ahead. Just remember that a wooden pole won't last long in this place.

Lava rivers are created after an eruption has subsided, but around Lava Lake, these rivers are major thoroughfares of themselves. Lava rivers flow through odd-shaped tunnels without walkways at the sides. Without a proper (and usually magical) means of transport, these boiling rivers cannot be travelled safely. The Orogovians around their campfire tell tales of blue crystal boats that hover above the lava on a cushion of vaporising essential ice. Other stories involve big lavafish willing to carry travellers on their back for a reward. There is even a legend of a demonic entity commanded by its master to provide ferry services. If this is true, this creature was most likely a shedim in service of the shaitan Zahur, and if it still exists and serves this task, then its master must be alive too, somewhere in the Omniverse.

Chimneys are vertical shafts through the rock, created by eruptions. These shafts exhaust the hot fumes and smoke that permeates this realm. Although they form quick routes between tunnels at different levels in the underground realm, the choking

and steaming hot air makes a climb or descent all but impossible.

## SASSAN'S MANSION

Contrary to the legend of Phaedran times, Sassan the unstable fire-mage survived his appointment as emissary to the Volcanic Hills, though barely. Roughed up by the Saurans and toyed with by pyrodemons, Sassan eventually came to command the respect of the inhabitants of the Volcanic Hills. The Saurans say that he could command Dragon Rock to erupt at his will, although this seems an exaggeration even for a master wizard of the Phaedran Age. Several tales make mention of a fire wizard living in the crater of Dragonrock, so it is likely there is some truth in the matter. After Sassan's eventual demise, the stabilizing spells around his mansion weakened and it sank into the depths of the volcano, where it presumably still lies hidden in a protective magic shell. It is conceivable that it might be found if someone were mad enough to organise an expedition north from Lava Lake.

## THE SAURAN CONNECTION

As one of the few people to maintain friendly relations with the Saurans, the Orogovians learned of an underground passage between the Sauran settlements of Sathra and Sathir. The Saurans themselves don't use it for other purposes than storage, but they allow the Orogovians to use it to travel quickly between the towns. The Saurans consider the tunnel useless, because it doesn't allow room for fighting battles and hiding is for cowards. Only when waging an open war with the Kang, a branch from the tunnel through the mountains in the east is used to supply the Sauran armies.

## THE MAZDAK CASCADE

In the ancestral lands of the Mazdak tribes in the mountains bearing their name, caves were found with primitive drawings made by this people. Although the peninsula of the Mazdak Mountains consist of a soft, porous rock, the Mazdak never extended their

territory below the surface of Talislanta. The rain, however, did. Erosion created a three dimensional spider web of tiny drain holes, converging through ever bigger drains collecting the water, and eventually reaching several caverns deep in the heart of the mountains where all the water comes together in a cascade of bigger and smaller lakes deep below the hills. It doesn't require skilled miners to dig away the top layers of rock to reach man-sized drains that lead down to the Mazdak Cascade. These lakes are the breeding grounds of the moonfish, creatures that the Sunra believe may be the reincarnations of their dead. Moonfish communicate by singing. Their songs are picked up by other sentient beings telepathically. Above, moonfish only sing at night, but in the everlasting darkness of the Mazdak Cascade, they sing all the time. Their complex melodies form strange harmonics that reverberate on the cave walls, the echoes fitting in with their song as consonant undertones.

While the waters of the Mazdak Cascade are easy enough to travel with any kind of vessel or even by swimming, for those who know how, the telepathic song and echoes penetrating the mind from all sides are enough to drive people mad. Dual-encephalons suffer from this effect twice as fast as normal people. The madness lasts for as long as the song is heard. Those who have suffered from it say that the song drives the spirit out of the body and keeps it suspended above it. The enlightened soul understands the song of the moonfish, which, apart from their basic animal urges, is about travelling among the stars where other races that once visited Talislanta still live. The vastness of the empty space between the stars reflects aspects of the terror of the Void and would be enough to cause insanity if not for the light of the stars and balm of song tying the soul to this world. Victims of the moonfish song are vacant hulls. The body is awake and responds to basic stimuli and commands, but lacks the will to act on its own accord. Once returned in their body, victims are faint from the alien visions and require some rest to get themselves

together again. The visions are too incomprehensible for normal minds to grasp and will be forgotten quickly. However, whenever a moonfish song is heard again, even on the surface of Talislanta, the victim is struck by terror of a dark void waiting out there to for a chance to visit Talislanta again. It's an effective defence of the species' ecological niche.

From the Mazdak Cascade, a mineral-rich river leaves the Mazdak Mountains underground in a north-western direction. Beyond the foothills of the Mazdak Mountains, the river runs through the southern tip of the Vajran Hills, turning west through the earth of the Cerulean Forest to surface as a tributary to Moon Lake, where it ends.

## GUERRILLA ROCKS

Torture of Mondre Khan captives revealed that the Khan Mountains and the Ku-Chang Plateau contain underground passages that the Mondre Khan use. Much to the Quan's frustration, scouting parties aimed at finding these passages never discover more than shallow caves and natural hollows too narrow to travel through. The Mondre Kahn are known to lack any magical aptitude, yet they are able to suddenly disappear without a trace, at least in their own territories and on the Ku-Chang plateau. The only logical conclusion is the existence of a system of tunnels that for some reason has eluded the Quan. This has become a sensitive point at the imperial court in Tian, as the Quan suffer the same inability to find the underground passages through the Opal Mountains used by the Harakin.

The secret of the Mondre Khan is a strange natural phenomenon they call spindle holes. The rough rock of the east coast is solid and hard, but because of its inflexibility it tends to crack easily with temperature changes. This can cause great lumps of rock to become loose but stay contained by the rock around it. Rainfall slowly erodes these lumps into spindles that can turn freely in their seclusion. In some spindle holes, the water found its way out through the cracks, which

eventually formed a series of drainage tunnels large enough to move through. Over time, erosion wore away the outer layers of the spindles, which gained ever more room in their sockets to the point where an agile man might crawl all the way around it to disappear in the drainage tunnel.

The existence of spindle rocks in the hills of the Mondre Khan territories and the Ku-Chang plateau is no secret even to the Quan. They also know that spindle holes are useful hiding places for refugees and will poke a spear or sword in the opening to draw them out. But on their hunts for the Mondre Khan, it never occurred to them to lay down their unwieldy weapons and take off their cumbersome armour to have enough freedom to crawl around the spindle to look for close inspection. Hence the existence of drains large enough to accommodate a man has so far escaped them.

It is only a matter of time until the Quan discover this secret, but the Mondre Khan are not too worried about that. The drainage tunnels are rarely interconnected and don't form an underground network. If one is discovered, the rest will remain safe until one by one they have all been found, though it is unlikely that the Quan will ever find them all. For all they know, Fate may change the world again long before that ever happens. Drainage tunnels always end up in a lower place, but are long enough to take the Mondre Khan well out of sight of the Quan patrols. The abundance of water means that exits are often hidden by extensive plant growth and the Mondre Khan know better than to leave obvious traces. Experienced Mondre Khan can cover long distances overland by stringing together the short stretches between spindle holes and drainage tunnels.

## THE COLOURFUL CAVERNS

The Variegated Forest earns part of its name from the layered multi-collared rock on which it grows. This landmass is made up of almost all geological rock types that can be found throughout Talislanta. The variety of

minerals in the soil are taken up by the trees and affect their colour. Within the Variegated Forest, little stone huts can be found that give access to a staircase down into the earth. These lead to a collection of large caverns hidden in the bedrock.

The Colourful Caverns are an amazing sight that never fails to surprise first-time visitors. This large complex contains caverns of any single colour of rock as well as chambers made in rock that consists of multicoloured layers. All types of rock and ores that exist throughout Talislanta are present somewhere in these caverns, including all the valuable ores and minerals that can be found in them. These caves would be an attractive target for adventurers looking for a quick way to get rich, if not for the fact that the existence of these caves is known to very few people besides the Kalixa, a race of small people that calls these caverns their home.

The Colourful Caverns possess two clusters of naturally resonant crystals. One is a collection of crystals of many different types that reflect sounds from other resonant crystals all over Talislanta. The other bed contains a large group that consist exclusively of orange jacinth crystals. These crystals possess properties that make them valuable gemstones for magic resistant items. How this strong resonance of magical resistance works is unknown. It doesn't seem to affect the use of magic in the Colourful Caverns, but it may assist the Kalixa Keepers in the performance of their task.

## THE KALIXA

The Kalixa are small in stature, with an alabaster-like appearance. Hair in various hues of brown is stuck to their round heads as if it were sculpted from clay. Their eyes can be in any bright colour, but always with yellow pupils that move restlessly, as if afraid to miss anything. Yet the composure of the Kalixa is the complete opposite, almost regal. They never seem to be surprised or swept away by flaring emotions. The Kalixa wear practical

tunics and shoes of a crude, durable cloth that looks like canvas and is dyed in bright colours.

## Ancestry

In many ways, the Kalixa look like the Green Men of the Dark Coast, except that where the Green Men are merged with all things living and changing, the Kalixa strive for unchanging stability. Some scholars claim that the two races form two sides of the same coin. If so, a link with the Archaen sorcerer Viridian also might exist for the Kalixa. The Kalixa themselves don't seem to be interested in this matter. In the history of the Kalixa, the Great Disaster holds a central place as the event that nearly killed their race. The Kalixa gave everything they could anywhere in Talislanta in an attempt to stabilise the rogue forces of magic that were changing the world. In the end, only a few families survived in the Colourful Caverns.

## Society

The Kalixa are a gentle race that takes minute care of their environment, making sure that all stays as it is. The maintenance of a static environment is the core task of the Kalixa race. Through a divination ritual at birth, a mate for life is chosen for the newborn. Male children move in with the family of their chosen mate. In the constant climate of the Colourful Caverns, there is no need for the Kalixa to build homes. Each family chooses a niche in one of the caverns as their own, and the choice is respected by the other families. Families have strict duties, such as growing the fungal cultures the Kalixa use for food, the making of tools from a type of stone specifically selected for that purpose, or teaching the children. The family performs those duties for the entire population of the Colourful Caverns. The Keepers are the core of the Kalixa society and are in charge of all repairs. Each keeper is surrounded by half a dozen hand-picked assistants, who are exempted from their family's duties. Keepers train their assistants in a strict master-student relationship.

## Customs

The Kalixa see the world as two opposite forces that must be kept in balance: change and stasis. They are quite aware of the excess change that has been going on outside their home since the Great Disaster and see it as their task to anchor the world from the never-changing realm of the Colourful Caverns. The Keepers can feel the forces in the world tearing at their homes and are constantly searching for things that have been changed or are busy making repairs to places other people would never notice that something was different. The Kalixa still aren't as strong as they once were, and few Keepers ever leave the Colourful Caverns to fight the change beyond the stability of their homes. Once a day, all Kalixa sit down to meditate on the state of the world. This ritual, they claim, anchors the world to its place in the Omniverse.

## Government

The Keeper's rule is absolute in Kalixa society, although it is hard to tell. Their life is governed by strict traditions and rituals. The Keepers do not allow change to come into their lives when they can avoid it. As all Kalixa share in their observations during meditation, they lack the urge to go against the established rules. Within the boundaries of their culture, Kalixa are free to do as they please. There is no crime among the Kalixa. If someone gets too excited, he is calmly advised to spend a full day in meditation by one of the Keepers. If visitors misbehave, they may wake up back on the surface without any memory of how they got there.

## Magic and Religion

The Keepers are skilled in a natural form of thaumaturgy that allows them to detect even the most tiny of changes that time brings to everything. They possess powers of repair that allow them to heal the earth as well as creatures and man-made things. The Kalixa Keepers are the only known entities that are able to affect time, and then only in a very limited manner. Anything healed or repaired by a Kalixa is put in a temporary stasis,

making it resistant to further change. A living creature healed this way will find that the affected body part is immune to physical harm for at least a week. The Kalixa believe in a balance of change and stasis, but see these as natural phenomena, not supernatural. They have rituals celebrating both, although rituals of change haven't been performed much for several centuries. When a Kalixa dies, the Keepers conduct a magical ritual that disintegrates the body.

### The Arts

Kalixa love colours. They are dressed in colourful clothes and wear chains and bracelets of polished pebbles of all kinds of plain rocks and gems that can be found throughout the Colourful Caverns. Anything they make, including common utilities, is created from a material that is specifically selected for that purpose, regardless of the value of the material, and is beautifully decorated. For example, the Kalixa make quartz spoons, flint knives, and basalt drinking cups, emerald broom handles, granite tiaras, and amber buttons for their tunics. To the outsider, these collected items make little sense, except that they bring good value on markets elsewhere.

### Language

Kalixa are fluent in High or Low Talislan, Quan, and the Elder Tongue. They speak a mixture of these tongues depending on which is best suited to express their thoughts. They will try to stick with one language when talking to outsiders, but old habits die hard and conversations may be very confusing.

### Defences

The Kalixa are a peaceful race, unwilling to harm others for the change it brings. There is no military among the Kalixa, but the time-affecting and thaumaturgical powers of the Keepers are suited to deal with most situations.

### Commerce

The Kalixa are not interested in trade. Their race is self-supporting in their chosen habitat, and they have no wish to introduce new things in their society. Likewise, the Kalixa are not keen on giving away their items, for the insecurity of what they might be used for outside the Colourful Caverns. In their own way, however, the Kalixa are generous people and will reward anyone who helps them to further their cause.

### World View

Ever since the Great Disaster, the Kalixa race has been recuperating from their effort to bring stability into the world again. Keepers have kept their race within the safe confines of the Colourful Caverns to isolate them from the rest of the world until they are strong enough to take a more prominent place in the world again. While most Keepers have their hands full maintaining stasis around their homes, an increasing number of Keepers travel into the world to do their work there. To avoid unwanted attention, travelling Keepers usually pose as Gnomekin.

### CICZ SPRING AND THE MANDALAN STREAM

Ever since their owners' enslavement by the Quan, the Sunra dragon barques have been under tight control. The Quan regulate all naval activities within their waters and exploit the Sunra as sailors and shore crew. As have most races in the Eastern Lands, the Sunra have organised a passive resistance against the Quan domination. Almost-forgotten Sunra lore mentions more rivers that connect to the Inland sea beyond those on the surface. These are the Cicz Spring and the Mandalan Stream. While the dragon barque ruled the eastern waters, no one bothered to find out where these waters ran, or if they even existed. Pushed to find new ways, these names were remembered, and their locations found.

## The Cicz Spring

On the bottom of the Inland Sea, hidden among forests of sea weed, the Sunra found a strange mausoleum: a big, square block of jade with a large hole in the centre. Built from jade and overgrown with coral, it is difficult to notice unless someone knows what to look for. The thing that gives its existence away is a strong current emerging from the hole. Swimming into the mausoleum against the current reveals four graves in the walls of the circular opening. The graves are marked with the High Talislan symbols for C, I, C, and Z. Whoever these people were has been lost in time. From the graves, the tunnel continues down into the very bones of Talislanta in a southwest direction. It takes a skilled swimmer to continue against the ever increasing current into the dark depths. The tunnels ends in an underground spring that is so turbulent it looks like it's boiling. The wild currents pull the swimmer every which way if he lets go of the metal rungs that have been fastened in the ceiling of this pressure dome. The unlucky victim's chances of survival are small at best. The rungs lead to another tunnel through which another stream of water is forced out in a southern direction. Shooting like an arrow through the water, the swimmer will eventually leave through an exit in a rock on the bottom of the Bay of Cicz. It's a rough journey, and occasionally travellers do not make it, but it allows the Sunra a route for covert activities away from the prying eyes of the Quan and their Kang guards.

## The Mandalan Stream

The danger of discovery is greater on the more easily travelled Mandalan Stream. Most who know if this short, underground stream's outlet in the sewers of Jacinth believe it originates from a spring in the Quan Forest. The truth, however, is that the Mandalan Stream branches off below ground from a bend in the Shan River that turns from northwest to north. Like Cicz spring, this stream is completely submerged and can only be travelled by aquatic species. Unlike Cicz spring, though, the Mandalan Stream is calm and poses no danger other than the fact that

both of its ends lie in plain view for any passing Quan or Kang to see.

## THE RAJAN CONNECTION

Over the years, many entrepreneurs have undertaken mining expeditions into the Jade Mountains. Some have conducted successful operations for several years, but in the end, all of them became the victims of raids by Chana witchmen or 'misunderstandings' with the Nagra or Rajan spies. From the mountain city of Irdan, the Rajan have always been looking for secret ways into the Quan empire. None have been found that can be used to quickly move large companies of troops for a surprise attack, but following the difficult hollows that run deep down this mountain range, several connections have been found and used successfully for spying activities.

The Rajan Connection is a difficult path to travel, and the Rajans maintain a well-trained squad of spies who are expert speleologists specifically for this strategic resource. It's a constant climbing of steep rocks, jumping narrow chasms, wriggling around stalagmites and taking short dives to the next section. Leather bags made watertight with wax or oil are a speleologist's most prized possession down there. Not only are they good for keeping food and spare clothes dry, they also keep lights dry, can be used to search for air chambers when underwater and provide some protection against sharp rocks. Navigation is not a problem as such, for, if any, there is usually only one way to go and it's not going to be an easy road. A few major obstacles, like wide chasms or too narrow tunnels, have been taken care of by means of twin-rope bridges or cutting out additional moving space. Despite the wealth for which the Jade Mountains are known, none of the famous black diamonds or gold is to be found at this depth. Instead, the fossilised bones of extinct creatures are numerous here and suggest that once there was room for life. These days, the life forms encountered may in fact be more dangerous.

In addition to spying activities, the High Council of the Nihilist Cult has explorers on a

constant search for the sealed sanctuary of Urmaan. This sanctuary supposedly contains three thousand chests of arcane goods and (they hope) also some indication of where Urmaan hid his one hundred and forty volume Transcripts, filled with ancient lore of black magic. Ever since the legendary magician's disappearance, Chasmrock has been a likely candidate. The black depths of the many deadly chasms that tear through this mountain are the ideal hiding place if one could find a safe way down. Rather than a safe way down, it is conceivable that the access to the sanctuary might instead be a safe way up from the Rajan Connection. If this is true, not only has it been sealed, but hidden as well, and is no doubt protected by powerful wards and forbidden curses.

## SECRETS TAKEN TO THE GRAVE

The Greylands are the ideal battlefield and have seen repeated violence from the Forgotten Age onwards. The places are scarce where digging deep enough wouldn't reveal fragments of an old helmet or the tip of an arrow from one ancient civilisation or another. What is of more interest to the underground traveller, however, are the remnants of ancient trenches, siege tunnels, burial mounds and forts. Left to their own devices after the battle, the organic parts of these feats of engineering decayed. Where sand and dust settled and became hard enough to carry weight before the structure collapsed, tunnels were created and forgotten. If the rumbling feet of land dragons didn't cause their collapse, many such tunnels must still exist in the soil of the Greylands. None of these territories are mapped and only a fraction of them are known even to the Vajra. To persistent adventurers, these grounds may reveal some of the secrets that the soldiers of old have taken to their graves. With luck, it might even be worth the effort and a couple of pick axes.

# ROOT CANALS

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*Madness! If you really want to go underground in the swamps, then you can step out of this boat and just wait for a while.*

Anonymous Gnomekin engineer

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Because they are ill-suited for tunnelling, wetlands, swamps, and jungles remain largely uncharted by the Gnomekin. Be that as it may, tunnels do exist in various forms, from hollow giant trees, fallen over and sunk in the mud, to waterways roofed over by mangrove air roots. Most knowledge that has been written down originates from tales of traders and adventurers who visited those lands.

## DEODAR SUBWAYS

Time is a strange thing in the western rainforests. The Green Men may not see it that way; for civilised people, the rhythms of the jungle are impossible to understand. Where a flower may bloom for only one night in a year, a giant deodar can stand for ages. But when its time comes, such a tree comes down with a magnificent crash in mere seconds. Then it takes days, weeks at the very most, until it is completely grown over again by other jungle vegetation and disappeared from sight and forgotten.

Or is it? There is little that can topple a giant deodar, unless it has been eaten away completely from the inside and lost the connection with its root system. A common tropical storm will then break it like a match. It is unknown what eats at the core of the deodars, but it's a fact that only the marrow is eaten and the tough, durable bark is left alone. The remains of the unfortunate tree becomes a giant hollow tube hidden in the floor of the rainforests.

The Green Men leave these subways alone, but all manner of insects and beasts make their homes in them. And where there's food to be had, there are predators all the way up the food chain that use them to get from one place to another. Thus, these giant tubes have come to form a badly-connected network of hidden subways through the rainforest.

## LOST TREASURES

According to Zandir legend, the eastern jungles, now the domain of the Azahu, were once ruled by the Baratus, a submen race of pirates. Upon capturing a windship, the Baratus' reign of the region really began. They captured more windships and became the terror of many Archaen societies until their sudden and complete disappearance following the Great Disaster. The Baratus revered two things, true elementals, which were their gods, and treasure, especially magic items. The mountains and cliffs of the eastern jungles supposedly hold the lost remains of Baratus settlements. Suspicious as all pirates are, it is certain that the Baratus didn't leave their treasures unguarded and for all to see when they were out raiding.

Each Baratus crew had its own port of call in the jungle, be it in the form of a stone temple, a hidden lake, or a large cave in a cliff side, or anywhere they could moor a fair-sized airship away from prying eyes. Some of these may be the unknown ruins that legend places in the Azahu lands. Each crew made sure that their stash would be locked away safely. With plentiful pickings in the rest of the continent, it would be against pirate etiquette to raid each other's hideout, but each society has its rotten eggs, especially if most of the eggs don't smell too fresh to start with. But, wealth draws adventurers like a moth to a flame and the Baratus figured that they might as well burn themselves. Each Baratus lair is riddled with traps and it would not be beyond a genius captain to trap some of the obvious traps as well just to be sure. Like the Baratus pirates themselves, the traps tend to be of the spectacular kind, like fireballs, ceilings

coming down, poisonous gas pouring in, and the like. Some traps are technically advanced and suggest the hand of a Yassan technomancer. Whether the Baratus took them as part of the crew or as prisoners is unknown. The Azahu quickly found out that they didn't have enough patience to figure out how to disarm the traps, and they leave the Baratus hideouts alone. Nowadays, many of these locales are the favoured residences of Bat Mantas.

To maintain contact in case something happened to a crew's airship, the Baratus created underground connections between their hideouts. These tunnels are only slightly less dangerous than the ones leading to the vaults. Apparently, trust didn't come cheaply among the different crews. Apart from the many traps, these tunnels are easy enough to travel. They are dug out large enough for two grown men to walk easily side by side. At intersections, symbols indicate where each tunnel leads, although knowledge of the Baratus symbology was lost when the race was cut off from Talislanta.

## THE SEA FLOOR TUNNEL

In the ocean south of the Mog swamps lies the small rocky island of Gao-Din. Now an independent kingdom, it started its inhabited existence as a penal colony of the old Phaedran empire. Far from the mainland and with no means to escape, security was tough but by no means watertight. The prisoners were able to start mining a tunnel secretly, intending to dig an escape route to the mainland safe from the aquademons plaguing the waters. Exactly how they did this, and where they left the large masses of rock they must have carried out of the mine is anyone's guess these days. The entrance to this tunnel is as big a secret of the Gao citizenry as the seven passwords required to gain access to the city. The obvious rumours put it in the Throne of Thieves, the royal house. This being the former warden's dwelling makes this highly unlikely, unless the King of Thieves has had the entrance relocated.

Tales say that the Gao tunnel goes straight down a narrow shaft deep into the heart of the island. It's a long descent on a ladder of uneven rusty metal rungs in the granite wall. Apparently, the shaft is narrow enough to feel cramped, but large enough to make a painful drop to a certain death when not knowing or forgetting which rungs are loose. From the bottom of the shaft, a horizontal tunnel just high enough to let a man walk upright runs in a northern direction. Some stories say that this part of the tunnel is plated with gold. Others say that it's a maze with a long line of tiny diamonds in the ceiling leading the way out. There are other tales about it being trapped like a Kasmiran vault and so it must be as well filled with treasure too. The only reliable tale that came from the Gao mentions that it leads back up to a rock in the strait between Gao-Din and the mainland, from where the passage of ships through that straight can easily be controlled. The secret of this rock is that it holds a magic that can summon sea dragons. Whether the outpost at that tiny island means that the prisoners never made it as far as the mainland or that they had plans to use the magic of the rock is pure speculation.

## THE UNDERGROUND HIGHWAY - SOUTH BRANCH

The Underground Highway from Vahana to Targ is but a crude tunnel compared to the Seventh Road. Roughly hewn deep in the granite bedrock, with air holes letting in the muffy smells and vermin and intrusive plants of the Tazian jungles, it sees very little traffic. Every year, a Thrall expedition clears this stretch of the Underground Highway of unwanted flora and fauna. The rest of the time, travellers have to take care of these nuisances themselves. The stairway leading up to the surface at the Thrall town of Targ is guarded at all times. Allegedly, the exit itself opens up next to a vicious mangonel lizard's pen to demoralise any intruders.

From Targ, the Underground Highway enters the Cinnabar Mountains and follows the mountain range to the Tazian capital at Tor.

## Encounters within the Root Canals

Use this table for encounter ideas or roll 3d20 for western encounters (Jhangara, Mog, Taz) or 3d20 + 40 for eastern encounters (Dark Coast).

<u>Roll</u>	<u>Encounter</u>
3	the Horag
4	nest of water raknids
5	harnessed durge and mudsledge
6-7	Jhangaran mudminers
8	wandering river kra
9	mung-berry tree
10-11	Jhangaran marsh-hunters
12	crystal moth
13	black ikshada
14-15	Mogroth
16	quaal
17	cave bats
18	scavenger slime
19	Thrall patrol
20	polyp-plant
21	winged viper
22	sulphur tree
23-24	swarm of Tazian flies
25	cache of recently mined amber
26	stalking swamp mantis
27-28	lost or discarded object
29	ambushing exomorph
30	amber wasps
31	lone Jhangaran outcast
32-33	ravenger
34-36	dead end
37	party of Gao treasure hunters
38	wounded marsh strider
39-40	makeshift grave
41	inquisitive sapient
42	slime demon guarding a site
43-44	alatus
45	sneaky machakka
46-47	piece of rotting cast-off clothing
48	aquatic vasp
49-50	aramatus

(continued)

Most of this tunnel runs fairly high through the body of the mountains, and are therefore free from most jungle-loving pests. There exists, however, a species of exomorph that has adapted to a life in the mountains and that is known to sometimes wander into the tunnels that run through the Cinnabar Mountains. With its grey-brown coat, it blends in with the rock perfectly, using the same ambush strategy for hunting as its jungleborn cousins do. At Tor, the tunnels lead to a well-defended exit in the city, although the Thrall strategists consider the risks of an invasion from that side as negligible.

From the western Cinnabar Mountains a branch of the Underground Highway extends west to the Axis river. Bordering the swamps of Mog, this tunnel runs through soft soil, saturated with muddy water. Every once in a while, a section of wall or ceiling gives away under the pressure of the water and floods the tunnel. Depending on the season, the water may or may not drain out to the Axis river quickly, and over time it leaves a thick layer of sticky mud that may rise up to waist height. The Thralls have an agreement with the Jhangaran mudminers to dredge all the mud from this tunnel every seven years in exchange for tools and weapons.

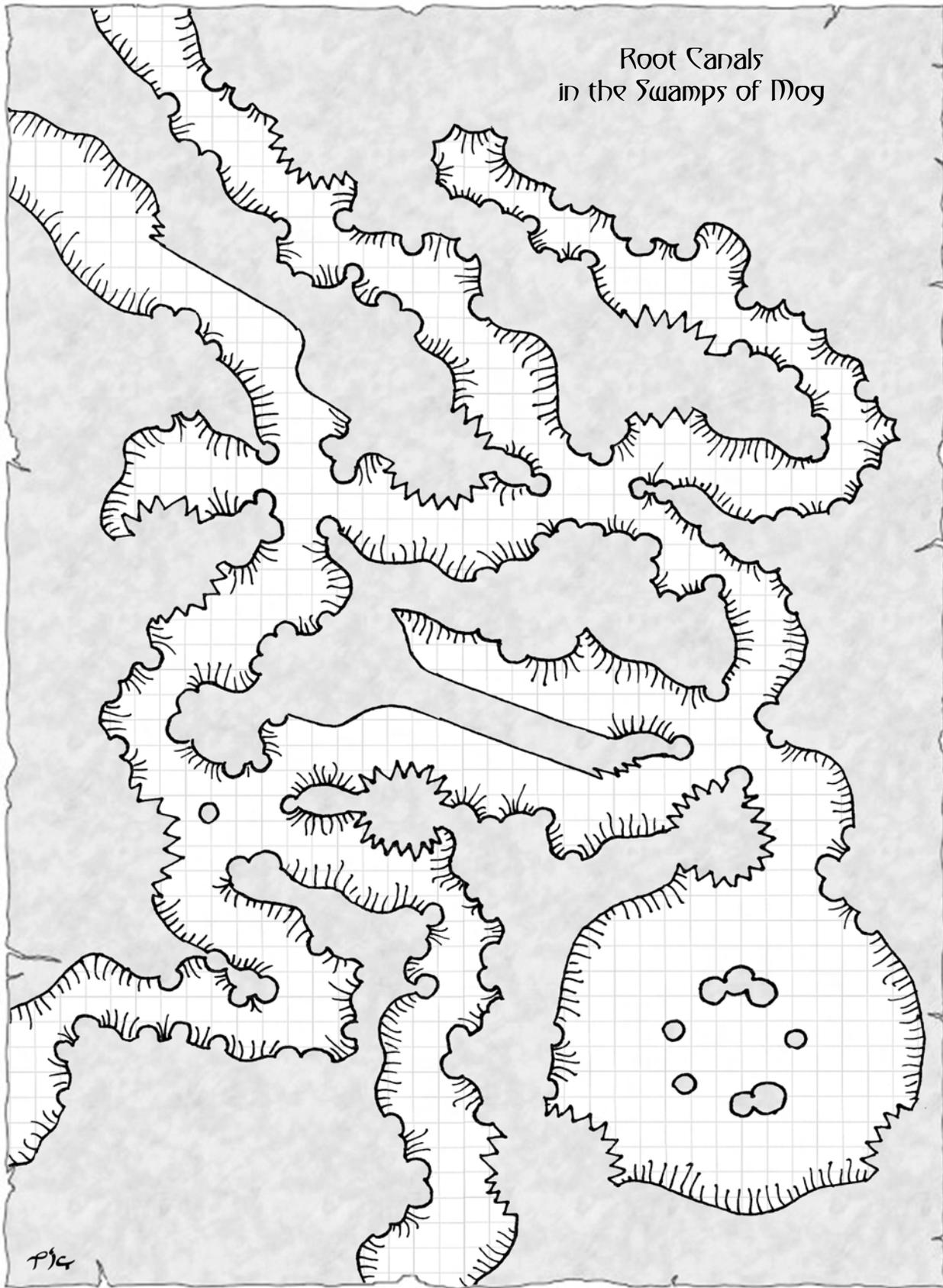
## ROOT CANALS

From the Amber river to the Yellow Marshes the swamps of Mog are surprisingly rich with trees, in particular the gnarled bombo trees. The wild and often dangerous plant life makes travelling this country all but impossible. The murky bogs and quagmires are too thickly packed with root stalks, patches of bonereed, deadwood and other obstacles to wade through, let alone row a canarge or other small vessel. That's all good and well for the tree dwelling Mogroth, but it would seriously impede travel for any visiting parties if not for Thystram's casual remarks on the floatfooted centipede. This small creature's many feet end in tiny air sacks that allow them to move on the water's surface. The famous naturalist noted that the swamp's dense obstacle course

## Encounters within the Root Canals (continued)

- 51-52 tunnel clogged with tangle of
  - 1-5 normal vines
  - 6-10 stranglevine
  - 11-15 serpentvine
  - 16-20 morphius plants
- 53-55 pool of stagnant water
- 56-57 line of mudwalkers
- 58 hungry urthrax
- 59-60 floatfooted centipede colony
- 61 lurking spider moss plant
- 62 wandering neurovore
- 63 running stream of clean water
- 64 concealed swamp lurker
- 65-66 violet creeper
- 67 observant tardisite
- 68 caravan bugs
- 69 cluster of resonating crystals
- 70 volt
- 71-72 disused lair
- 73 Imrian slavers
- 74 single black lotus plant
- 75 chasm viper
- 76 sudden tunnel collapse
- 77 k'tallah grove
- 78 sudden deluge of water
- 79 angry bog devil
- 80-81 hunting band of Moorg-wan
- 82-83 tunnel half-full of sticky mud
- 84 pseudomorph
- 85 carven Baratus symbology
- 86-87 colony of Green Men
- 88 unoccupied D'Oko dwellings
- 89 mated pair of Scythes
- 90 ancient stone statue
- 91 malathrope
- 92 mantrap plant
- 93 omnivrax
- 94-95 Ahazu berserkers
- 96 newly summoned plant demon
- 97 badly decayed windship wreck
- 98 bat manta
- 99 hidden/trapped treasure cache
- 100 iron dragonfly

Root Canals  
in the Swamps of Mog



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seriously hindered these insects, yet they are able to travel great distances quickly by seeking the shelter of the tangled roots of certain bombo trees. Little did he suspect the secret of the root canals.

The giant bombo trees have aerial roots that stand in big curves away from the trunk. These roots easily span a distance of five to ten feet before they dip into the water. Where the bombo trees grow in high densities, this results in spectacularly tangled knots of trees that can entertain a Mogroth for hours, simply hanging from a tree looking at the strange patterns. In less densely overgrown areas that don't enthrall the Mogroth enough to go there much, roots capture a large space and keep it free from other botanic intruders. Covered by moss, algae, broken reeds, and dead bombo leaves, these roots form the frame over a strange series of interconnected canals. These tunnels are large enough to accommodate small rowing boats and its occupants don't even have to duck with every other root to avoid bumping their head. The overgrown roof of dead or rotting organic material hides any travellers from plain view. While it also keeps out some of the many nasty bugs that inhabit the region, it unfortunately keeps in the sleep-inducing scents of the Morphius plant, the hallucinogenic pollen of the black lotus, and other botanic dangers. It's an interesting question for naturalists why these airborne toxins don't affect the floatfooted centipedes, yet have caused the early death of many a visiting adventurer.

## THE MUDMINES OF KARANSK

Mining mud is a filthy job, but someone's got to do it. Most Talislantans are glad it's the Jhangarans and not them. The products of that filthy job though—sapphires, amber and gold—are much in demand and once out of Jhangara their muddy past is quickly forgotten. Karansk, like any Jhangaran settlement is a cesspool. It is populated by grey-clad mudminers frequently drunk on cheap alcohol and unpredictable. When sober, some individuals can be relied on to take an adventurer on a return trip through the

marshes to the mudmines. The majority of mudmines are open pit mines. The mud is dug away in a funnel-shaped pattern and sieved for bits of amber, valuable stones or gold nuggets. This goes on until the outer edge becomes too weak and the whole mine floods with mud and debris. This often happens when a Jhangaran is too drunk to care where he digs and quite a few mudminers' gold mines suddenly became their graves.

Among the Jhangarans there are a few very experienced mudminers who know where it is possible to dig shafts into the marsh's ground instead of open pits. This secret is much sought after and strongly defended among the Jhangarans themselves. All of these mines can be found along the south bank of the Axis river from Karansk back to the bifurcation of the river, and from there further upriver along the east bank until the border with Taz. Occasionally, this last stretch has been the conflict between some more entrepreneurial Mogroth and Jhangaran mudminers. The fact that this nominally is Mog territory doesn't seem to bother the Jhangarans. The dredging of the swamps by the Mogroth puts the relative safety of the mudmines at risk of flooding, which in turn doesn't appear to cause much arousal among the Mogroth. Arguments have been settled by force as well as by sharing a cask of grog, which only serves to illustrate the incomprehensible minds of both races.

The secret to the underground mudmines seems to lie in a mysterious cavern that exists below the humid soil of the swamps just beyond the fork in the Axis river. This cavern is full of resonating crystals, with a remarkably large portion of them being sapphires. Apart from their usual unsettling projection of sounds from other resonating crystals all over Talislanta, these crystals also project a stabilizing force along the east bank of the river upstream and the south bank downstream in south-eastern direction. No other places along the banks of the Axis are stable enough to allow underground mining. Jhangaran mudminers who know about shaft

mining learned about this cavern the hard way. When they first found it, it seemed too good a treasure mine not to pillage. As they did so, the majority of mine shafts along both arms of the river collapsed that same day. These days, the Jhangarans avoid that cave as if it were the Horag's lair.

## SHIFTING SANDS AND ANCIENT TALES

From the Seven Kingdoms there are several well-known, though risky, connections into the Wilderlands. Emmo Ebono travelled most of them in the company of the Danelek guide Vi-Po-Lek. History has many legends of the ancient cities and the curses that befell them. These legends and some evidence existing today allow one to speculate over the existence of tunnels in the northern Wilderlands. Desert sand is no good for digging tunnels. That is, unless you employ powerful thaumaturges. There must be plenty of secrets buried beneath the Red Desert. For the Rajans, whose much more rocky desert lacks all that, it's just another excuse to wage war against the Dracartans.

### SUBTERRANEAN SALT TUNNELS

The widespread craggy hills of the Barrens are riddled with underground passageways and caverns of various origin. The alkaline rock formations don't rise high but go very deep instead. This region of the Underground Highway is the home of the unlikely company of earth demons, Enim and Danelek. The Enim and Danelek use the caves

and tunnels near the surface. Deep down dwell the earth demons. Caves within hills are usually interconnected, and deep below ground many hills have tunnels running between them. Caves in the Barrens hills are huge but with relatively small, inconspicuous entrances. Even in the dim light, the alkaline rock glitters in a mixture of white, yellow and blue light from the crystalline sediments of salt, sulphur and copper. Even a tiny light source is reflected all through the cave or tunnel. This makes travelling through these caves and tunnels easy, if not safe, as less than friendly creatures get an early warning. In the tops of some hills are huge caverns that are the

#### With a Grain of Salt

There is a Danelek tale about a young explorer from the western lands who ventured into the caves of the Barren Hills. He was searching for salt crystals, hoping to find some outside the Danelek territories. When he found nothing in the outer caves, he went deeper into the hills. After a while he heard the most awful singing in the world, which suddenly stopped. He dimmed his lantern and went on carefully until he stood in a cave where a magnificent feast was laid out. A large table was filled with several pieces of steaming, juicy meat on the bone, small bowls with boiled eggs, cold liver sausage and some spicy pies. The smells made his mouth water as he looked over the scene, when suddenly he was lifted up into the air by the collar of his coat. The Enim who caught him considered it his lucky day to catch the ingredients for another such meal, for that was what the dinner was made of. Not in a hurry, the Enim invited his victim to join him and the explorer was only too glad not to be killed right away. They passed the time with drinking and gambling, until the explorer had lost all his money.

(continued)

preferred lairs of Enim.

Despite their richness in alchemical salts, few mines have been opened in these hills because of the Enim threat. A quick expedition led by an experienced Danelek guide can recover a wealth of ores by traversing the heart of the hills from cave to cave. The Danelek have a good knowledge of this part of the Underground Highway and know how to interpret signs of danger. Shortage of food is not a problem, as these caves are the mating grounds of rock urchins. Water, however, is extremely hard to find. Whatever water is available is bound in crystalline sediments and must be extracted by alchemical or magical means.

Near the heart of the Barrens, the caves become fewer, smaller, darker and further apart, with less crystalline sediment to reflect light. Earth demons tunnel deep beneath the surface of the Barrens. They can tunnel at will and move through the earth wherever they please and for whatever purpose motivates them. This random digging is another risk factor to careless travellers. These tunnels were not built for long-term service and can be quite unstable. Nevertheless adventurers are attracted to the gemstones left behind by the earth demons after digestion of the rocks and minerals. The strong presence of earth demons and Enim suggests the existence of at least one portal to the nether planes of the Omniverse deep below the Barrens. Several tunnels connect to the Dead River between the Obsidian Mountains and Kasmir. Some very deep tunnels are rumoured to pass below the Dead River straight into the Darklands.

## THE URKRA MYSTERY

The Maruk mountain range contains a remarkable geographical feature. Between its peaks runs an enormous canyon called Serpent Pass. It is said that in ancient times, a gargantuan creature fell down from the skies onto the tops of the Maruk Mountains. This was the legendary Urkra, from which all kra descended. Serpent Pass is the timeworn trail of the Urkra, by which it made its way down

## With a Grain of Salt

(continued)

The Enim got angry that his game was over so quickly. Hoping to postpone his death, the explorer offered to bet the secret location of the best wine in all Talislanta against his life. Unable to resist the lure of such an enjoyable secret, the Enim agreed. As a wager, they both wrote down their best estimate of the number of crystals on the walls of the cave on a pebble and put them in a sealed jar. Then the Enim, who didn't need sleep, started counting. After two days, the Enim came to counting the back wall, and the explorer took his chance and made his escape. In his fury, the Enim conjured a massive blaze of fire around him and threw it after his victim. In the scorched cave with its now entirely black walls, the sealed jar cracked open by the heat, revealing the explorer's stone with a zero on it. The Enim had to let the explorer go now, and he made his way out safely to tell this tale to a Danelek guide. Unfortunately, the Danelek who heard the tale had no love for wine and the secret location of the best wine in all Talislanta got lost in the telling.

from the mountains. When it reached ground level, it continued to dig and disappeared forever. Near the western end of the pass there's a hole in the ground over a hundred feet in diameter, its edges smoothed by erosion. After rainfall, this hole becomes a churning whirlpool as all the precipitation from the mountains gathers in Serpent Pass, becoming a torrent down towards it. These are arid lands, but when it rains, the effects are devastating. In dry times, the ground around the hole shows the spiral marks of the vortex, and the hole is an easy entrance to the Underground Highway. After a vertical drop of about a hundred feet, the hole splits into four large tunnels that go deeper into the

ground in opposite directions. Each of these tunnels quickly becomes a labyrinth of large drains to get rid of the water. Deeper down some tunnels show the markings of being of land kra origin, but it is difficult to distinguish them from natural water drains. It is easy to get lost in these tunnels. The many side tunnels connecting each other, the many curves and slopes of various steepness are very disorienting. Despite its vastness, this labyrinth seems to be home to only few land kra, but those are inevitably far above average size and usually approach from the depths. No records exist about how deep these tunnels go, nor whether a creature like the Urkra might still exist.

### Numenia Lost

The Marukans claim that they descended from the ancient Numenians. Numenia, the “city of faith”, was built in the southernmost peak of the Maruk Mountains in the era of the Archaen empire. It is said that it was a city of beautiful ornate religious buildings, dedicated to the god Ikon. The Numenians worshipped enchanted objects as holy items invested with divine power. The most holy among those was an idol shaped in the image of the god. Eventually the city was destroyed by earthquakes and buried when the mountains surrounding it came crashing down during the Great Disaster. Now and then temple artefacts turn up, like prayer wheels, icons, and magical objects with religious inscriptions. Several expeditions have tried to find the ancient city, but none led to its discovery. Ever since the ancient war with the Torquarans, the grounds around the city carried deadly poison. The land kra avoid these rock masses and the Urkra labyrinth does not extend anywhere near Numenia’s grave. Any artefacts found in the area should be treated with extreme care because of the poisonous taint of the area.

### THE BROKEN CHASMS

The Kharakhan Wastes and the Plaguelands are broken by ragged chasms. Some are ancient canyons where once rivers flowed. Others were created when the Great

Disaster tore apart the earth. Newly formed underground crevices brought together water from the Golarin Plains and an unstable lava stream from the Volcanic Hills, and the wild magic did the rest. The resulting chemistry ate through rock and created a series of tunnels leading from the chasm floors to connect both realms from which the streams originated. Travelling these tunnels seems deceptively easy. They are large enough for a normal man to walk through, and they don’t wind so much as to lose orientation. The floors are rough, but not so much as to require climbing over boulders and ridges. Most tunnels don’t exceed ten miles in length before they end up in another chasm. Each entrance reveals the wicked red and blue flamed rock created in the burning creation of the tunnels. The risks lie in the unstable alchemical composition of the floors and walls with a touch of residual wild magic left. A step on such a site is like walking on thin ice; it can break any moment and engulf the unlucky victim in an undesirable substance. Disturbing the precarious balance can result in anything from an explosion of red and blue shards of flint stone to a boot being stuck in instantly hardened concrete or a piece of the wall turning into a mirror-smooth patch of amber. This feature has made these tunnels a place of pilgrimage for alchemists. For other adventurers, these are risks to overcome in search of the catacombs of the ancient fortress-city of Kharakhan.

### The Purple Sea

South of the Kharakhan Wastes, the magical cocktail was stronger and ate its way deeper into the ground of the Plaguelands. There, it melted a layer of rock over an area of many, many miles, which filled with a toxic fluid as the magic subsided. Eventually a purple subterranean sea was created, with several tunnels leading away from its northern rocky shore. In the south, many creeks lead up to fens on the Sursian plains. At least one black tunnel approaches the ruins of Torquaran, but comes to a sudden end several miles short of the former city. Nothing stirs in the Purple Sea, which is as smooth as a mirror.

It can be crossed like any other sea, but ships don't leave a wake and oars don't cause ripples. Like the Plaguelands above, it is believed that any living thing that crosses the Purple Sea will be changed or transformed in some unpredictable manner. The sea itself is toxic, although its effects are inconsistent. Taking the water of the Purple Sea out of its underground dome causes it to transform into a harmless but fragrant purple liquid that makes a desired ingredient in expensive perfumes and magical potions.

## THE KHARAKHAN CATACOMBS

Situated in the north of the Kharakhan Wastes lie the ruins of the vast fortress-city of the Drakken, a giant reptilian race of the early Archaen age. Although little is left of the buildings above, the underground catacombs below the central dome are mostly intact, despite the ravages of time and the coming of other civilizations. Built to supply an army camp, these catacombs were built as a honeycomb grid. High, square corridors, roughly hewn out in the bedrock, connect huge, undecorated halls that served as storage space, armoury, training halls and defensive structures to the Drakken. These halls have suffered their share of pillaging over the centuries, but these expansive structures are likely to still contain many ancient treasures. These catacombs are level and stable; few have collapsed. This made them easily accessible for wild animals and other creatures to make them their home, despite the persistent rumours of the catacombs being haunted by the spirits of long-dead Drakken. Most fearsome among these spirits would be a giant reptile with glowing nails on its claws that slowly cause anyone wounded by them to slowly change into a reptilian form. Whether the story is true that unscrupulous historians had someone suffer this fate in order to see if the unfortunate one could translate the Drakken glyphs remains unverified. The Kharakan catacombs are the most northern terminal of the Underground Highway in the Wilderlands.

## THE ARCHAEN MARCHWAY

Many scholars studied the legends of the Dragon Wars in the early Archaen age, yet many issues remain unresolved or unverified. Among them is a record on a fragile scroll that tells about the strategies used in the preparation for the second Dragon War. It is the only reference to an underground tunnel used to march a large army close to Golarin unseen. According to the scroll, disabling the Watchstone brought in the element of surprise, but only if the troops were so close that the Drakken wouldn't have time to organise their defence. No Drakken scouts could see the troops before it was too late. To this end, the wizards and engineers of Phandril created a subterranean marchway, a tunnel running from Phandril, what is now the Hadjin ruins, straight north to Golarin, allegedly located beneath the ruins of Four Nations. The marchway would be an arched tunnel with a paved floor, wide enough to accommodate three platoons marching alongside in regular formation. It would have to be dug deep enough to muffle the sounds and vibrations of so many marching boots, yet not so deep that it would require an exhausting climb back to the surface shortly before the attack. It has been speculated that the Archaen marchway would probably have had its exit in the northern slopes of the Maruk mountains. If so, it probably disappeared when the Great Disaster levelled many of the peaks in this mountain range. Although strategists agree that it would have greatly improved their chances of success, to build a structure of that magnitude in such a short period of time without leaving a trace is beyond anyone's skill today and maybe ever. Whether or not it contributed to the victory over the Drakken, no trace of the marchway has ever been found.

## THE CARANTHEAD VAULTS

All engineers, including the Yassan, will say that the Red Desert is not a good place for tunnels. The scarlet sand is too loose to support tunnels, the porous rock underneath too weak, and while it might be possible to dig in the bedrock below that, creating a stable

entrance through the upper layers just isn't worth the effort with the frequent sand storms. Opposing the engineer's view in this matter, at least in theory, are the thaumaturges of Dracarta. The secrets of their art allow them to stabilize desert sand, to reinforce rock and to gassify stone and blow it out to create tunnels. No doubt such efforts have been made for the defence of the city, but the quantities of quintessence needed to create a substantial network of tunnels is beyond the capacity of today's thaumaturges. The powerful mages of bygone eras wielded enough power to accomplish such enterprises with success and they did. In the city of Drakarta several vaults have been found that were created by thaumaturgy, and each of these held valuable treasures. One of the tomes discovered in these vaults mentions that not all wizards in the Archaen era trusted that their treasures would be safe in the sky cities, with so many skilled mages not being beyond a little spying and pilfering to learn their neighbour's secrets, even with the harsh punishments should they be caught. This led to the creation of secret vaults in the ground, in violation of the agreement with the sub-men. A thaumaturge these days would be skilled enough to lead an expedition to the vaults, should any be discovered.

## THE ANCIENT RUINS

Ruins of forgotten eras are scattered across the wilderlands of Talislanta. Two separate corridors of the Underground Highway connect these ancient cities. One goes from the Ruins of Osmar through the Plains of Golarin to the ruins of the Four Nations. From there a branch leads through the Maruk Mountains, and presumably lead to buried Numenia. The Underground Highway continues to the Orogovian and Torquaran ruins until it reaches the Purple Sea beyond which the Kharakhan wastes and ruins lie. The other corridor runs from the ruins of Kasraan to the Hadjin ruins and continues through the Topaz Mountains to the Old City of Ashann. Although called corridors, these Archaen tunnels are barely worth the name. Given the pride of the cities of that time, they probably

## A Thaumaturge's Vault

The Archaen tome discovered below Dracarta relates the story of the mage Famorin, a thaumaturge of some skill, but unable to master the art of warding. Having been the victim of a burglar, who could not be found even with thaumaturgical forensics, he descended from his home in the sky city of Pompados to the Red Desert and started his work. To shield his work from prying eyes, he erected a wall of shimmering air, giving any activity the illusion of being a mirage. After clearing a patch of rock from its sandy cover, he started evaporating a small tunnel into the rock. From here, the text has become largely illegible due to decay, but there is mention of an invisible bridge of solid air, doors concealed by a curtain of gaseous earth, a stairway of gold of which one step is liquified and drops the intruder into the abyss below, a room lit by candles of solid flame that cast confusing shadows, a pool covered with icy flame but with a three-dimensional maze through the water below, and of a crystal ferry to cross a waterfall, but also of magic gone wrong. There's a river to cross with water so hot you can forge iron in it, a chamber filled with solid air that turns into a thunderstorm if transformed back to gas, and one of the many statues would be the wizard himself after a solidification backfired. According to the tome, this vault is located near the oasis south of Nadan, should any daring explorers be interested.

were little inclined to build strong underground connections that would contribute little to the splendour of the cities or the egos of their inhabitants. Except for the tunnels near Kasraan, the corridors are narrow

and low, and dug with little attention to making travel comfortable. In many places, the soil was not stable enough to construct a natural tunnel and had to be reinforced by magic. Over time, many such spells lost their power, creating major obstacles along the road. From other parts of the Wilderlands, creatures have found or forced access into these corridors and taken residence there for shorter or longer periods of time. Consequently, it is hard to predict what dangers may be encountered there besides the obvious presence of Satada, malathropes, urthrax, chasm vipers, and crag spiders, nor what treasures may be found except the remains of unlucky adventurers that went there before.

### The Ruins of Osmar

From the Dead River, several tunnels approach the ancient ruins of Osmar. Those who dare to face the curse of Osmar, that allegedly is bad enough to drive away all would-be residents, and the substantial beastmen menace, face a city that still contains a myriad of treasures. The most prominent among those treasures are the blue iron weapons and suits of armour. These days, blue iron is only available in the Eastern Lands, by Vajra who know how to extract it from the feathers of the ironshrike and the shrieker. The city had a reputation as the main centre for artificers and enchanters, who no doubt took good care to store their valuables in safe places that would stand the test of time. Blue iron was such a common sight in Osmar that it is impossible that a bird's feathers provided enough of that precious metal to satisfy the need of the Osmarans. Indeed, besides the corridor to the cities in the east, tunnels have been dug in magically aligned patterns below the city that may well have been mining shafts. These mining shafts go straight down to unfathomable depths and some even claim they are bottomless. If any blue iron ore is to be found deep down below the city, it inevitably requires a good deal of magic to bring it up into the city. Like the Black Pit of Narandu, who knows what horrors may lurk so deep in the earth.

### Ruins of the Four Nations

The Four Nations were built over the ruins of the Drakken capital of Golarin. Their rulers constructed fortified palaces from the materials they found in the ruins, boasting to have underground vaults protected against thieves by magic and supernatural guardians. Given the military importance of Golarin, it is likely to have had the same underground honeycomb construction of tunnels and halls as the Drakken base at Kharakhan. The underground vaults would have had to be constructed within the ancient sublevels of that vast city. The War of the Four Nations and the subsequent pillaging by the necromancer king and Phaedran explorers destroyed everything. Today, no records exist that make mention of an entrance to the vaults. Their existence is openly doubted by some scholars, but odds are that extremely rare and valuable treasure still lie buried somewhere within those catacombs, waiting for someone smart or lucky enough to discover a way into the vaults. Even if the true treasure is not found, many common and uncommon tools are to be found among the remains of the ancient settlements. For those with an eye on the markets in major Talislantan cities, it might be worth the risk of bumping in a beastmen enclave in search of lost plaques or scrolls on which Phaedran notes about powerful magic spells are written.

### Orgovian Ruins

The once rich city-state of the Orgovians never was a big settlement, and the Orgovians never dug deeper down than was needed for their cellars and the royal dungeon. It is in the latter that the Orgovians discovered the corridor of the Underground Highway. The royal dungeon is nothing remarkable in itself, but before the Great Disaster levelled the city the Orgovians explored the length and breath of this corridor, and many paintings of their travels decorate the walls of the corridor. As works of art they are worthless, but as a source of information about the Underground Highway it might be priceless for all the long-forgotten secrets the paintings may reveal if one knows what to look for. The Orgovians

broke completely with their past, and it is unlikely that they went back to draw up a catalogue of these paintings for sale, despite the worth of such a tome to underground explorers and treasure hunters, not to mention the scholars at the Geological Repository in Durne.

### Ruins of Torquaran

The corridor to Torquaran ends abruptly several miles south of the city's ruins. A short ramp leads up to the surface, where the remains of a Torquaran guard post indicate that they must have seen significant use in the past. Little of this cursed city still stands and maybe that's just as well. Historians have collected much information about its dark history. Although most of it had better been forgotten, their documents still point to a great many isolated subterranean tombs, prisons, ritual chambers and vaults beneath the ruins. There does not seem to exist a proper subterranean structure beneath the city. Perhaps this is in line with the apparent purpose of their other defensive structures, to keep inhabitants in rather than to keep enemies out. For lovers of subterranean exploration, the ruins of Torquaran have little to offer.

### The Ruins of Kasraan

Like Osmar, the ruins of Kasraan can be reached through several tunnels from the Dead River. A city of merchants, its soil is home to an enormous collection of catacombs, vaults and tombs. Like tales of the city above speak, though maybe in exaggeration, of "streets paved with gold" and "towers of jade that reached the sky," the catacomb roads below the city allegedly consisted of rows of "silver domes resting on ruby pillars" and family vaults were separated from the underground alleys by "sculpted blue adamant gates laid in with perfect moonstones." Much of the underground city is still intact. In the palatial quarters of the city, the underground roads consist of canals lined with narrow pavements. Now dried up, these canals are littered with the accumulated junk of ages. Creatures like the urthrax thrive here like the vermin they feed on. Plunderers have removed most of the

valuables from the catacombs with complete disrespect of the finer laws of engineering, and several sections have become very unstable as a result. Many of the vaults that can be reached still haven't been breached and as far as it is possible to tell with the limited knowledge of the current era, the complicated mechanisms that require both luck, skill and the right combination of magical "key" items should still be functioning. It is equally likely that the ancient curses are still holding strong that would allow the mummified rulers in their rich tombs to rise and destroy anyone invading their peace in search of treasure.

During the uprising of the submen tribes, the Kasirans built their iron dragons, large armoured vehicles that were powered by magic, to maintain their trade operations with other cities. In addition to these costly automatons, they worked intensively on making the Underground Highway a suitable alternative to overland travel. Unfortunately for them, the residents of both Phandril and Ashann had their minds on the stars instead of the sand and refused to support this effort. A magnificent tunnel extends east from Kasraan for twenty miles, where it falters and returns to the same narrow, uneven corridor as is found elsewhere in the Archaen sections of the Underground Highway.

### The Hadjin Ruins

The Archaen city of Phandril looked at the skies. Builders of sky-scraping residential and official pillars, airdocks and colossal mausoleum towers, the first Archaens could hardly be bothered with the ground, other than to make sure it was strong enough to support their amazing structures. To prevent the risk of weakening the fundament of their buildings, no underground spaces were created at all in Phandril. In that same line of reasoning, the corridor does not reach the city proper, but enters the Topaz Mountain at the first peak it encounters west of the Hadjin ruins. From there, the voyage to the ruins must be continued on the surface.

## The Old City of Ashann

Like Phandril, the inhabitants of the Old City of Ashann looked at the skies, or rather the stars. A city of astromancers and diviners, they were interested in the ground only as a solid base on which to build their one hundred feet thick concentric walls. Also like Phandril, the corridor of the Underground Highway passes south of the city with exits leading to where supposedly once a road led to the Old City. According to legend, the ring-shape of the city was designed to reflect certain astral significances and accommodate divining rituals. There have been scholars in the field of geomancy who claim the existence of certain patterns of power lines in the Talislantan soil. If this is true, then the Old City of Ashann might have been built on a conjunction of such power lines. This school of geomancers unfortunately lacks any interest at all in what such power lines would imply for the presence of any treasures or ores that might be in the ground as a result of this magic. Anyone willing to overcome the dangerous creatures and the mysterious wanderers in the Old City to dig in the extremely hard soil might find out.

## THE EMERALD EYE

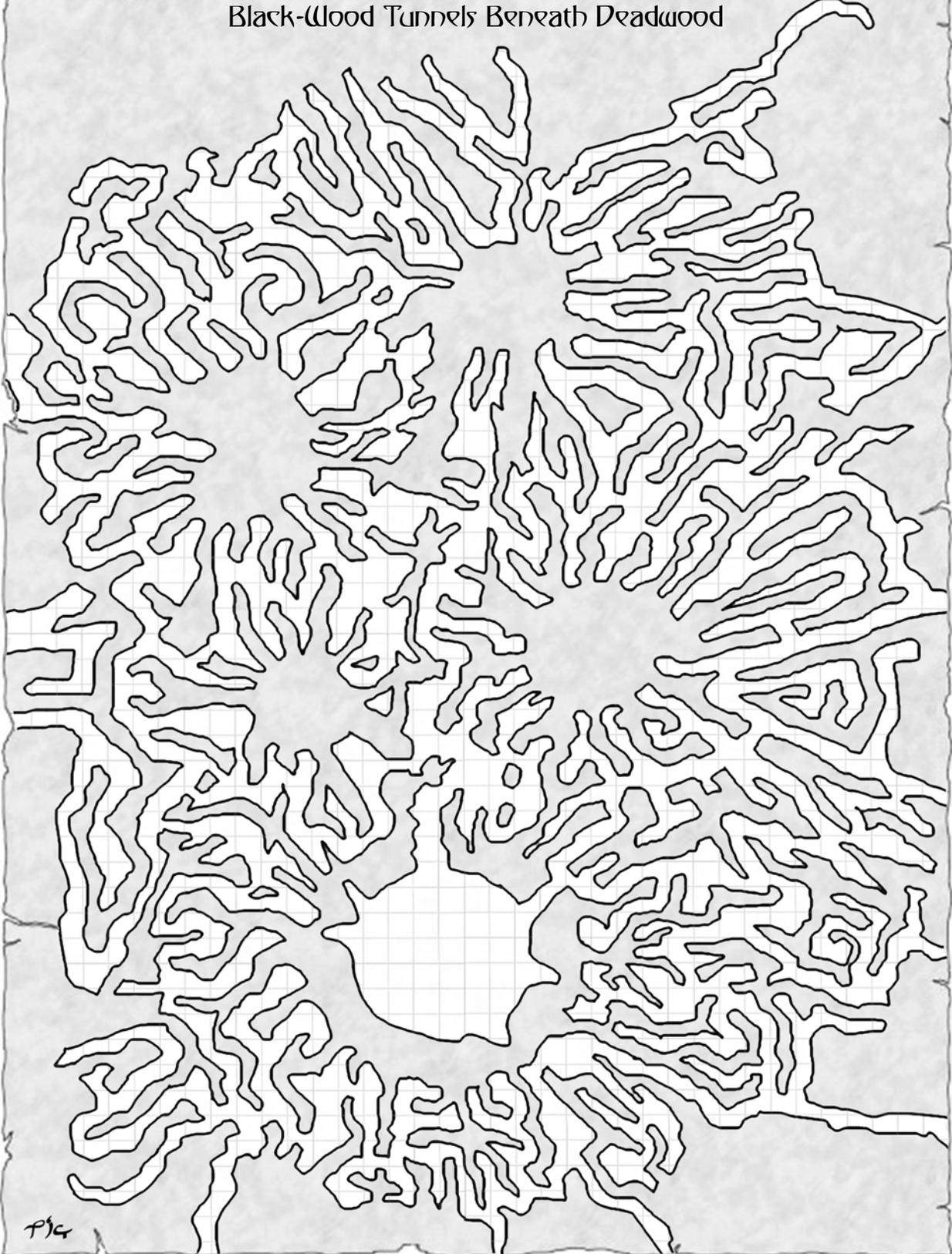
The Sea of Glass is one of the strangest phenomena in Talislantan geology. The existence of such a body of fused green glass is a miracle to behold, even without knowing that there are things going on underneath it. That knowledge was obtained by a cabal of Gnomekin crystallomancers after studying several clusters of naturally resonant crystals for three decades. Careful triangulation of known signals and analysis of unknown sounds led them to believe that there must be a huge hollow bubble at the bottom of the Sea of Glass. They dubbed it the Emerald Eye. This bubble contains a large outgrowth of resonant crystals, and based on the sounds is supposedly the realm of an as yet unfamiliar civilization or is populated with a species of animals with vocalisations that resemble humanoid voices. Unfortunately, the sounds were never clear enough to distinguish the

words, if they were that. It must be a strange world down there, a huge cave isolated from the rest of Talislanta, with two suns and seven moons that all emit a dim green light filtered down from above. It is uncertain whether the Sea of Glass is clear enough to make it possible to see any movement on its surface. Anyone or anything living here has been able to do so without interference from outside ever since the Forgotten Age. It is hard to imagine what the original inhabitants of Talislanta would be like. Discovering such living history is the ultimate dream of any historian. However, if an entrance exists in the surrounding mountains, it has not yet been found or else has been lost again. On the whole of the Underground Highway, the Emerald Eye and the hills surrounding the Sea of Glass make a perfect centre between the Old City of Ashann and the Rajan tunnels into the Jade Mountains. However, these hills are surprisingly void of any tunnels.

## DEADWOOD

No tome about the Underground Highway can be complete without mention of the Deadwood. Deadwood is easily recognisable, as the picture of a wood of trees planted upside down in the ground is a unique and disturbing sight. These black roots that reach to the skies like angry claws can be followed into the ground by some light digging until they reveal black-wooden tunnels. These tunnels form a highway of sorts that is not to be travelled lightly. In theory, this maze of tunnels permeates all through the Omniverse and could thus be used to reach other planes. Infested with plant demons, encounters are inevitable when travelling these tunnels. However, it might well be that the plant demons are only the lesser evil on the road. With exits throughout the Omniverse, the occasional resident that got lost in its local deadwood might well be found wandering here. The black-wood tunnels are a twisted maze themselves, as one would expect a root system to be. It is never a certain thing where a tunnel leads, if anywhere, and the risk of being lost forever is a real threat in this place.

Black-Wood Tunnels Beneath Deadwood



## THE SATADA

Satada are a semi-nomadic race of reptilian predators found in hot and arid regions throughout Talislanta. There are large populations in Sindar in the Seven Kingdoms, the Wilderlands of Zaran, the Red Desert and the Kang Empire. They are known to prey on travellers and to raid isolated settlements and are not afraid to attack creatures up to man-size for food. The Satada know their way around the Underground Highway like no other race, and use it to travel all across the continent.

### Ancestry

Their life underground and their aggressive nature make it hard to study the Satada culture, but given their reptilian nature and use of the Sauran tongue, it has been argued they, along with the Saurans and the Sauruds, are descendants of the Drakken. The Satada are not very interested in their racial history.

### Society

Satada are known as nomadic hunters and warriors, although the distinction is hard to make for outsiders. Their clan-based society is built along a strict caste system that depends on age. Up to their transformation, hatchlings have the position of a fiercely protected treasure without responsibilities. During adolescence, Satada belong to the caste of hunters. It is their responsibility to make sure that the hatchlings are fed and taken care of during evacuation. Other than the hatchlings, members of all castes have to provide their own food. Adult Satada make the transition into the warrior caste. Warriors defend the hatchery cave and the elders, and provide the tools, weapons and other items needed by the clan, usually by raiding travelling parties or small settlements. Satada don't distinguish between males and females in the division of tasks. There is no emotional bonding in long-term relationships and couples usually only form for a night. Female warriors lay three to ten eggs at once, which they leave in the care of the hunter class. Satada hatch in snakeform,

pale-white in colour, with a set of tiny but sharp fangs, and infamous for their insatiable appetite. Hatchlings are not allowed to leave the hatchery, which often literally looks like a huge can of worms. Any food captured or killed is tossed into the hatchery, where it is quickly devoured. When reaching adolescence, hatchlings transform, grow limbs and change colour to green, brown or dark red. The Satada tell about a third caste of elders, former warriors who never visit the surface of Archaeus again.

### Customs

Though primitive, Satada know how to forge iron into weapons and work leather into serviceable items like sacks, sheaths and cloaks. The Satada learned to brew a secret drug to sedate crag spiders so they don't attack creatures caught in their webs. The Satada then use their capture-bows to retrieve the captives to be fed to their young.

### Government

Satada who live long enough to become elders develop a keen sense for the presence of land kra, which are the arch enemies of the Satada. Every once in a while, land kra actively seek out and attack a Satada hatchery to supply its diet with essential nutrients that it can't find anywhere else. This poses a major threat to the continued existence of a clan. When the elders detect a land kra on the hunt, they order the hatchery to be evacuated. Hunters collect the hatchlings in large sacks, not without risk of being seen as food themselves, and carry them away. The elders lead them on a long journey far away from the hunting area of the land kra, sometimes halfway across the continent. Satada warriors try to slow down the land kra in case it picks up the clan's trail. Like any situation that involves outsiders, Satada warriors follow the first one to take initiative to solve it.

Within the Satada community, disputes are automatically won by the higher caste. Within a caste, Satada usually solve arguments by trying to impress and threaten each other. If

it comes to actual violence, the fight is to the death and the loser is fed to the hatchlings.

## Magic and Religion

Satada hate magic and have little affinity for it themselves. Satada elders believe they are cursed by a snake goddess, who sends the land kra after their nests and causes them to spawn voracious, snakeform offspring. Nevertheless, the hatchlings have an almost holy status; the clan will do anything to keep them well fed and protected. When they are forced to move, the elders pray to their deity to lift their curse. Satada elders believe in a legend about a lost shrine to this god somewhere in the Sindar-Golarin region. This may explain the large Satada presence there. Younger Satada are not interested in religion. The dead are fed to the hatchlings without further ceremony.

## The Arts

Satada have little appreciation of art. They prefer crude forms and massive structures and care not for fine decorations. Warriors collect small trophies that make them look more impressive, but they are not interested in the artistic value of the objects themselves.

## Language

Satada share the hissing Sauran tongue with the Saurans and the Sauruds, indicating a common Drakken ancestry. The Satada speak a dialect that is characterised by words ending in a clacking sound. It only exists in spoken form, not in writing. Satada names have that same hiss ending in a hard sound, like Sheussekk, Ssizhoushantt, Soshfalhokk, and Sykhtt. There are no separate male and female names. Clans put their symbol on tunnel walls to mark the borders of their territory. It is not unknown for several Satada in a clan to have learned another language if they stayed in one area for a longer period of time.

## Defences

Satada warriors are experienced fighters, having survived the tough training school of

the hunter class. Warriors tend to stick together so they have at least a chance against opponents like the land kra. Hunters are usually encountered in small groups, raiding travellers and isolated settlements for food for the hatchlings. They frequently leave anything else behind, even if it is of value. Warriors collect small trophies to decorate themselves with, as well as useful tools and weapons.

Both hunters and warriors are skilled in the use of the capture-bow, a heavy and unwieldy weapon, resembling an oversized crossbow. The weapon fires a barbed, iron-tipped bolt similar to a harpoon; a rotating spindle wound with a hundred feet of stout whpcord allows the wielder to reel in the unfortunate victim. The Satada prefer to tangle their victims before engaging in hand-to-hand combat. In a melee, their tail is used both for balance and as an often underestimated weapon. Due to their travels, Satada are known to wield weapons from all over the continent. They possess an excellent underground orientation ability and use this to their advantage in combat.

## Commerce

Due to their aggressive nature, Satada don't trade with other races. They maintain a very simplistic view of commerce. What the Satada need, they take; what they don't need is left behind for others to use. Trade between clans is conducted by the elders and consists mostly of information regarding the location of land kra and food sources, or the exchange of clan members.

## World View

Satada have a deep hatred and fear of the land kra, which like Satada for lunch. Once being tracked by kra, Satada travel long distances to get rid of them. The Satada seem to divide the rest of the world into two categories—food and enemies—depending on the caste to which they belong. Effectively, they are the same thing. Due to their frequent migration, the Satada come in contact with many other races, and a clan can possess items from all over the continent. Abandoned

hatcheries are known to turn up unexpected treasures occasionally.

## DEEP WHITE

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*Imagine a tunnel so white that it blinds you like the sun in the sky.*

From *Tunnels in Talislanta*,  
a school book for Gnomekin children

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Rare bits of information from a great many reports pieced together suggest that Narandu is riddled by tunnels of sorts from the Crystal Mountains in the south to the Far Reaches in the north, and from the Black Pit to the edge of the Trackless Wastes. Collectively known as the Deep White, how many of these tunnels are actually connected to form a highway is unknown. The presence of night demons, typically found near the Black Pit, but also as far west as Yrmania and as far south as the plains of Golarin, suggest extensive connections throughout Narandu. In contrast, according to the Mirin, L'Haan is nearly void of underground passages, except for the Mirin mines in the Hoarfrost Mountains.

## BLACK AND WHITE

Far in hostile territory and swarming with dangers, most notably night demons, the Black Pit of Narandu remains a mystery to most Talislantans. Few investigators have brought back reliable reports to the civilised world. It is said the Ariane possess the most knowledge of this phenomenon. It is possible to descend very, very far into the darkness. An ever-present steam rising from the depths suggests a body of water, yet the ever-increasing cold as one goes down makes this highly unlikely. Deep down, the very reality of the Black Pit seems to waver. Razor sharp edges protrude

## Slumbering Ice

The Black Passage grows. When it was still only a rumour, the Snow Queen of L'Haan became worried, and several years in a row she sent out Mirin scouts to investigate this phenomenon. Indeed, the Black Passage grows, much like the blood vessels of a baby growing in its mother's womb. Exactly what is growing in the Narandu plains is unknown, but if its beating heart is the Black Pit of Narandu, it is to be expected that little good can come from it. Stories of half-digested corpses found in storage rooms that were abandoned by the ice giants are further cause for a restless sleep.

In a joint effort, the Ariane and Mirin have set up a permanent expedition near the Black Pit to keep watch over this ill omen. Hidden in a cavern in a snow-covered hill, mystics and priests study the magic surrounding the Black Pit and the activity of night demons. Unable to find any consistent results at first, the Ariane experimented with near-stasis observations. This led to the discovery that events seem to happen in a very slow but rhythmic patterns. Several times now, they have been able to correctly predict surges of night demon activity in the Black Passage, which coincides with the simultaneous appearance of the moons Zar, Leolis and Phandir in their full moon phase.

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from walls that seem to bend in impossible angles. Suggestions that this pit contains a portal to Cthonia or the demon realms, or to Gelidane, which might be the plane of elemental cold, or maybe some other dimension entirely, feel all too real here. The

upper levels of the Black Pit are made of rock-hard jet black ice that refuses to melt in natural flames or heat. This layer is nonetheless full of openings all around that look like they are the result of ice melting. Large cones of black ice hang from the base of each opening. These openings are notoriously slippery.

Known as the Dark Passage, a large tunnel of black ice runs east and west from the Black Pit. On bright days, a few parts of this tunnel can be seen on the surface as a black line deep within the ice fields of Narandu. The darkness of the tunnel hides whatever moves through it from sight. Maybe this is why it seems to be a hot spot for night demons. To the east, the Dark Passage disappears into the Shadow Realm. After fifty miles in a westward direction, the Black Passage branches off in various smaller tunnels running to various parts of the Narandu underground, as if they were dark veins in a dead white body. Although the blackness disappears after several miles, the darkness seems to extend further into the tunnels every year. The Mirin worry about this (see sidebar). Despite the disappearance of the dark colour, the entire tunnel system is still called the Dark Passage for its frequent presence of night demons as much as the dark fate that many adventurers have met in these tunnels. The main passage continues west and takes on the blue and white tones of the ice of the Narandu plains after fifty miles. Eventually, it disappears below the Crystal Mountains near the origin of the Dead River.

## COLD STORAGE

The Ice Giants are known to dig caverns and tunnels in glaciers to store valuables and to mature any food they catch, for ice giants cannot digest anything that is not deep frozen. Such caverns are found throughout Narandu. Most often, they are natural depressions, carved out in icy hills by violent storms. Still, a lot of storage sites are dug out for the occasion. Deeper storage rooms connect to branches of the Dark Passage (although it's no longer dark away from the Black Pit) and provide exits to the world above. Ice giants are

## Slumbering Ice

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If this constellation is any indication, then it will still be centuries before a proper shape will be recognizable in the formation of the Black Passage, but it is likely that disturbing powers will be manifesting long before that. If the Ice King is behind such a force, it will require an alliance of people to defeat this threat. Maybe the recent increase in Mirin trade parties throughout Talislanta is not just the effect of a strong economy in L'Haan that the Mirin claim it to be.

not good at remembering where they made their stores and sometimes corpses are forgotten. Odd treasures can occasionally be found that way. What is worrisome is the fact that corpses are not preserved in the cold, but over a period of decades actually undergo something that is somewhat similar to a process of maturation and digestion. This process happens faster the closer the storage lies to black sections of the Dark Passage, backing up the belief that the icy land is somehow alive. Some tunnels go down beyond the level of the Dark Passage and all the way to the soil of Narandu. Down on the ground, the remains of plants, including edible varieties and beasts, possibly giant ancestors of the woolly ogriphants, kirryan and tundra lopers can be found. Stories that the remains of primitive settlements were found on these former plains have not been verified.

## THE Icy DUNGEON

The Five Peaks, a fearsome steep mountain in the Ice Peaks range in Narandu is also known as the Ice King's Palace. During the night, it appears to hover above the ground as snow billows about its base and to glow with the last rays of the fading sunlight. The few expeditions that went out to examine this phenomenon and survived, returned with stories of apparently endless caverns and

tunnels throughout the gargantuan blocks of ice. The side of the cliff is full of large cracks of light blue shadows growing into a steady deep blue as the cracks go deeper in to the mountain. From the upper reaches of the cliffs ice dragons have been spotted circling the plains in search of prey but strangely omitting to attack their usual prey, the ice giants that inhabit the region.

Many natural crevices run into a dead end after a while. Others, however, lead to the Icy Dungeon inside the Ice King's Palace. Adventurers' stories told after several mugs of beer regularly venture into the direction of the treasures that are hidden there. The threat is more real than the alleged treasures, and the rash drinker who claims that the Ice King's heart, the largest of the blue diamonds, is hidden there, is quickly made to shut up so as not to bring bad luck upon the bar's patrons.

It is possible to reach the Icy Dungeon from side tunnels of the Black Passage and this may actually be slightly less dangerous than facing the dangers of the flat, white plains of Narandu. The ever-present threat of night demons in these tunnels is of course to be reckoned with, and also a rare frost demon or lone ice giant is to be expected, as well as kirryan laying in wait to jump on passing provlo, and perhaps the nesting cave of a pack of rime hounds, not to mention erx feeding on the wild magic that maintains the permafrost in Narandu. . . . Well, maybe it isn't much safer than travelling aboveground after all. But it does have the advantage of being less likely to alert the Ice King's watchtower in the Five Peaks overlooking the plains of Narandu.

Inside the blue tunnels near the Icy Dungeon, frost golems do whatever work has to be done and can easily be followed, provided the many roaming ice giants can be avoided. Whatever his true origin, the Ice King is a powerful warlock and the Icy Dungeon shows it. Portals into the dungeon are enchanted with strong wards. One of the safest routes recorded, albeit one for adventurers with a strong stomach, is to follow

the golems bringing the well-frozen and seasoned carrion into the gruesome food cellars, where it is roughly shattered into meal-sized portions and stored on shelves. Beyond the food cellars lies a maze of twisting stairways and short corridors that go up and down without apparent logic or goal. Many rooms open up from the corridors, showing mesmerizing ice sculptures and tricks of light, illusion-covered pitfalls, supercooled emptiness that freezes any warm-blooded creature that enters instantly, and other traps. No expedition so far has discovered a way up into the palace of the Five Peaks. On the other hand, it appears to be possible to go down endlessly. In several corridors well-crafted illusions were found that cover up the fact they lead back up to the top of another staircase going down, and it is uncertain just how deep these tunnels lead. Terrifying screams are heard from time to time, but although torture chambers were seen, none were found to hold prisoners. The sole survivor of one party claimed to have seen what looked like a tomb with a plain sarcophagus in the centre and row after row of statues of ice giants on both sides of it. According to this fellow, there may have been several thousand statues present there. If this is true, it raises the question whether these were actually statues or ice giants waiting to be animated. In the latter case investigating if their blue diamond heart is already present at this stage might turn out to be a very profitable expedition, if one survives the hazards of the north.

## HIGH AND FAR

Covered by green-white ice rather than blue-white like the rest of Narandu, the Far Reaches mountain region makes a different sight altogether. This mountainous area can be reached through a series of tunnels through the thick ice of Narandu. From the most southern mountains, a long depression in the ground below the ice runs southwest, like an old river bed. At the bottom, a small space is free of ice and can be followed for many miles. The small diameter of this corridor prevents any ice giants from entering it. At the Geological

Repository in Durne this corridor has been marked as the White River. Near the peaks of these mountains, icebound shipwrecks suggest that these peaks may once have been islands and the area would have been underwater. Deep beneath the layers of ice that cover the mountains lie extensive reefs of coral that survived the effects of time and the pressure of the ice. In the dim green light, little evidence remains of their vibrant colours, but the organic structure stands like scaffolding, allowing passage between its frozen beams. Open spaces are few and passageways are narrow, twisting and filled with the sharp edges and spikes of frozen coral, but most of the mountains in the centre of the Far Reaches can be climbed that way. Where no coral grew, the ice lies directly on the mountain, blocking movement. The coral reefs form a network of awkward openings that can be crawled and climbed through with difficulty. Like all sea bottoms, it is scattered with the remains of ancient civilizations, although much remains covered up. Old coins, shards of weapons and tools, bones, and broken beams of ships can be found simply by searching long enough.

Nearer to the top of the mountains, numerous caves can be found. The openings are small and are often hidden by the coral. It is quite possible to discover an entrance simply because the coral covering it can't support the weight of the explorer standing on it. Inside are large caves interconnected by natural looking tunnels. Signs of habitation by two primitive cultures can be found here, presumably extinct submen races. While cold, these caverns lack the typical feel of icy radiation caused by the ice giants. If such cold is felt anyway, beware of the ice dragon that chose the cave as its lair. The upper caves were once occupied by the island dwellers. Where the walls are not covered by a thick layer of lichen, drawings of simple fishing boats can be found. Fishing hooks, fish teeth, shards of pottery are typical findings in the ice floor of these caves and are of some value to collectors simply because of the rarity of expeditions venturing this way. The lower

## Encounters in the Deep White

Use this table for encounter ideas or roll 2d20 to select a random encounter.

<u>Roll</u>	<u>Encounter</u>
2	guardian frost demon
3	half-digested corpse
4	crystal moth
5	yaksha
6	magic-feeding erx
7	shivering army of darklings
8	Nar Khan tribesmen
9	roaming ice giant
10	patch of black ice
11	pack of rime hounds
12	odd magical portal
13	hungry frostwere
14	forgotten cache of food or loot
15	terrifying scream from afar
16	hunting kirryan
17	remnants of ancient civilizations
18	wandering night demon
19	provlo nest
20	outcropping of resonant crystals
21	dormant frost golem
22	dangerous-looking cracks
23	Gnomekin crystallomancers
24	melting icewater
25	domain of an ice dragon
26	Mirin trading party
27	frozen underground lake
28	fiend
29	lone Ariane seeker
30	ice kra
31	bat mantas
32	group of Ariane warders
33	pack of tundra beasts
34	opening into a dractyl lair
35	Mirin adventurers
36	riderless snowmane
37	abandoned blue diamond mine
38	sizeable Mirin expedition
39	shadowight on a mission
40	other

levels must have been below the water level and were inhabited by an aquatic submen race. Shrines and altars can be found where the waterline must once have been. It appears that the surface dwellers were either dominated by the merfolk or looked up to them as higher beings. The underwater caves don't look like permanent homes, but rather like places of shelter. The aquatic race probably ventured out into the Midnight Sea a lot of their time. Most remarkable are the extensive oyster beds that line many walls and suggest agriculture or the cultivation of pearls. Breaking open the oysters can yield a rare green pearl. Almost non-existent in Talislanta, the value of such pearls depends entirely on the credibility of the story of the seller. An echo of the magic that caused the water to vanish remains as a scary vision when either of the suns shines directly into these caves during sunrise or sunset. Then these caves are filled with the green shimmerings of light in the water. The vague and distorted ghosts of what might have been the merfolk of this region can be seen resisting in vain a forceful stream that tows them into the depths of the caves to disappear where the light becomes too dim to see. Memories of a sounds like tortured whale song will send shivers down the spine of even the hardest adventurer.

## CRYSTAL CORRIDORS

The Crystal Mountains have the reputation to be next to impassable. Only few natural passes are known and used by the few traders that cross these mountains to deal with the Mirin. Other adventurers risk the dangers of the rough terrain, tricky glaciers, avalanches and predators like frostweres and ice dragons in search of the precious blue diamonds. Known to few folk, there are other ways to get from one side of these mountains to the other. A major tunnel into the Crystal Mountains opens where the Dead River parts with the mountains to turn south. This tunnel may once have been the path of a tributary to the Dead River. Other openings, large and small, exist on both sides throughout the entire length of the mountain range. In the very west, a

junction exists where the Dark Passage enters the floor of the Lost Sea.

The Crystal Corridors deserve their name. Running high and low through the Crystal Mountains, glittering ore can be seen in many places, although the large majority is made up of cheap quartz. These corridors are also famous with crystalomancers for their many beds of naturally resonant crystals. From east to west, these form a permanent radar of everything that is happening in Talislanta. A cabal of Gnomekin Crystalomancers has a permanent station in these corridors, guarded by an elite platoon of the Protectors Force.

Although easier to travel than crossing the mountains on the surface, travelling the Crystal Corridors is nowhere near a leisure activity. The corridors vary in width and height from a mere two feet to no more than ten feet in some places. The floors and walls are uneven with many large cracks in the floors and walls due to the slowly decreasing temperatures as the ice giants move further south. Slopes can be steep and unforgiving and may continue for miles from the heart of a mountain all the way to its top. Between the bottom and the top of the mountains there are no exits to the tunnel. In the western part of the mountain range, the Nar Khan tribes, a race of submen that has many similarities to the Mondre Khan of the Eastern Lands, inhabit caves and may be found wandering or hunting in the Crystal Corridors. Further east, ice dragons have their lairs in the Crystal Mountains, some of which may be connected to the Crystal Corridors. Frostweres are an ever present threat here too.

## THE RUINS OF FARNIR

The second largest presence of ice giants, next to the Ice Peaks mountains where the Ice King is said to hold court, is around the ruins of Farnir. Exactly what happened is unknown, but along with the other sky cities, Farnir fell from the heavens, and shortly afterward it disappeared in a thick layer of ice. The ice giants created tunnels running from the surface down to the city and still make use of

these tunnels occasionally. No doubt other passages through the ice connect to some of these tunnels. Several theories exist about the reason why the ice giants visit the city and some even claim that Farnir was somehow the birthplace of their race. It would take a long and well-prepared expedition into the ruins to find the truth.

As one descends from the ice tunnels to the city, Farnir appears in all its ancient splendour. Tunnels enter the city just within its adamant walls and show the richness of the decorations all through the city. Stairs down from the walls are beautifully crafted from blue iron filigree, appearing as if they could not possibly hold the weight of a child, let alone a grown man, but as strong as a staircase forged from solid steel. Near one of those stairs is a diamond fountain filled with quicksilver that continues to run, despite the frozen state of the rest of the City of Alchemists. The ice that encases the ruins is pure crystalline white, and as long as there is daylight above it is not hard to see, despite a two hundred feet thick layer of ice rising over the city's towers. Most of the city is filled with ice, and it takes hard work with a pick axe to make any progress towards the centre. The streets are surprisingly clear, and buildings are closed, as if everyone braced themselves for the impact when the city fell. The city is full of marvellous constructions, some of which hardly bear describing. Masters of alchemy gave imaginative twists to the artful buildings made by masters of engineering. Walking a street may be like walking on water; a curtain in a doorway may fill the air with the sweet smell of freshly baked pies; when rang, a bell shaped as a bird sings a melodious tune. Unfortunately, a day's work doesn't make much progress in the rock-hard ice that fills the streets and buildings.

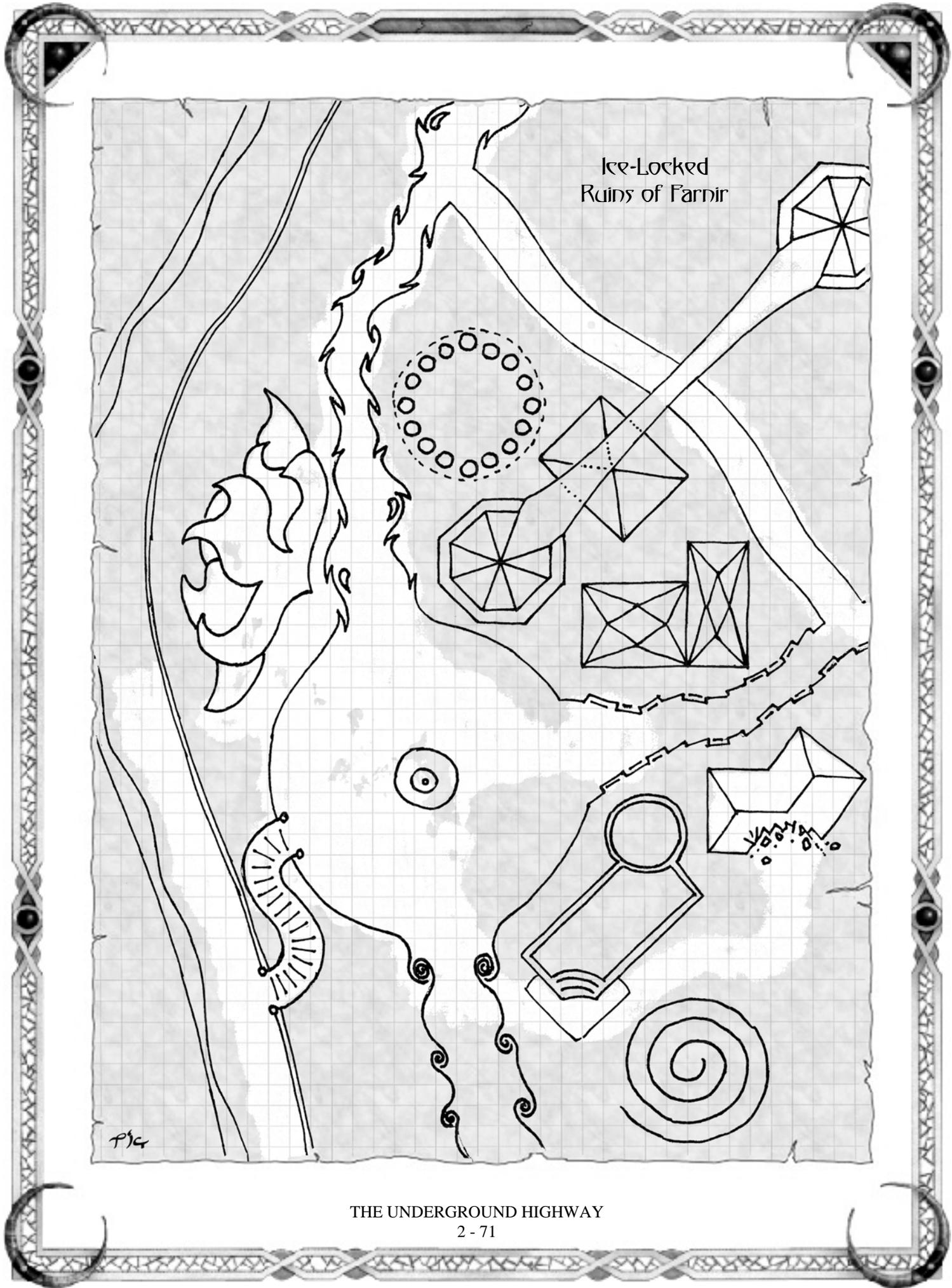
At night, the city becomes filled with various spectral entities that move through the clear ice as if it were air. The nature of these spirits is unknown, but contact with living creatures can cause anything from visions of an ancient market, or turning the area touched

blue and immune to cold, to instant death. Successful expeditions that brought back marvellous trinkets from Farnir didn't dare to stay in the city for more than a few days and only in the presence of daylight.

## THE HOARFROST MINES

To the Mirin, the Hoarfrost mines are the last line of defence against the ice giants of Narandu as well as their most important source of blue diamonds. Riddled with mines, the Hoarfrost Mountains are the only place in L'Haan that has an Underground Highway. The rest of the Mirin lands are utterly void of tunnels, caves or other subterranean structures. The mines run deep into the body of the mountains to a level full of caverns, where a series of frozen lakes connected by rivers form the basis of the Mirin mining operations. From here, tunnels are dug where veins of costly ores are expected. Rubble is removed with ice skiffs to caverns that serve no purpose to the Mirin. Ores and rough gemstones are collected at a few central locations before being brought up to the surface. In addition to the mines, the Mirin operate a tunnel pilot service on the underground ice rivers for traders who wish to avoid the risk of going over the mountains. The Mirin charge a hefty fee for this service, but many see it as a better price to pay for getting to the other side than the chance of having to pay with their life.

Where the Hoarfrost Mountains separate the Sinking Land from the Shadow Realm, the Mirin know there exists a long series of caverns, lakes and canals that hold evidence of some past civilisation. What little knowledge the Mirin have of this place indicates that these caves have been the residence of one or more tribes of submen. As they see it, they were caught between a rock and a hard place, with the Shadow Wizards and the Snipes, and most likely the Great Disaster did the rest. These caves are now home to a small army of fiends, bat mantas and shadowights that escaped the control of the shadow wizards of the Iron Citadel in the Shadow Realm.



Ice-Locked  
Ruins of Farnir

Pic

## HIDING IN THE DARK

The Obsidian Mountains and the Darklands are riddled with more tunnels and caves than there are holes in Cymrillian cheese. The mixed rock of the Darklands suffered a lot from the pollution by the Ur Clans and the forced mining expeditions the Ur demanded from the darklings. As the softer stone was washed or dug away, a framework of near indestructible rock remained. In these tunnels the darkling tribes make their homes for as long as the Ur let them. Many sites are inaccessible due to the toxic chemicals used by the Ur to drive out the darklings. A Darkling legend is still being told about their Lost Home somewhere in the depths beneath either the Obsidian Mountains or the Darklands. Reluctant to endure the abuse by the Ur Clans and equally reluctant to leave their homelands and possibly suffer another defeat by the Gnomekin or other race whose terrain they would have to invade, the darklings are in a constant search for their Lost Home. When approached with care, they have even been known to provide services or goods to adventurers who offer to help them in their search. Of course, it is better to make sure beforehand that the darklings—with their tongues that were made for lying—will keep their part of the bargain. A much-rendered service by the darklings is to put an adventurer back on the right track out of the Darklands, as it is all too easy to lose your way in this rocky sponge. From the Darklands, passages connect to Durne and the Wilderlands. Those approaching these lands usually experience an increased number of encounters with Satada. After coming from the Darklands, some adventurers have described this as a good thing. The upper reaches of the tunnels in the Obsidian Mountains are the domain of the Stryx and a good number of yaksha and provide little or no benefits to the underground traveller.

# CHAPTER THREE

## Going Down

### ADVENTURING UNDERGROUND

Like the surface of Talislanta, the Underground Highway contains many different settings and many ideas to use in adventures. There is something for every style of play within the common theme of the Underground Highway. As the Underground Highway spans all of Talislanta, it can be fitted in with most campaigns, for GMs who like to do something different for a change.

Many different approaches exist for running underground adventures. The classic dungeon crawl is of course among them anywhere treasures are hidden. The Baratus hideouts or the catacombs of ancient Kasraan are ideal locations to do some dungeon bashing. Spy's Fate and the Rajan connection are good places for stealth missions into enemy terrain. The Wilderlands contain many links with historical events in Talislanta and will appeal to spell casters in search of ancient spells or powerful magic items. Fans of water adventures can chose their pick with the secret

tunnels of the Sunra or their new cousins, the Fan-Ra-San. Finally, the 'real' Underground Highway in the Seven Kingdoms offers many possibilities, from caravan guarding to diplomatic missions, Satada hunting, and epic adventures.

Likewise, adventures can focus on many aspects of the Underground Highway. How do the players find out where to go? Can they survive on rations of fungus and moss that the Kalixa showed them? Do they see those giant rough diamonds that will bring a small fortune on the market of Kasmir among the other crystals? Are you certain you brought enough lantern oil? And how, in Terra's name, do you fight a Satada warrior when the walls and the ceiling don't allow you to swing your sword like you're used to? The Underground Highway poses many new practical difficulties for GM and players to explore. Enjoy these challenges.

In this and following chapters you will find ideas for adventures, new character archetypes, skills, magic, equipment and creatures to use in your games. *[Editor's note: Most of the last three chapters are presented here as incomplete outlines.]*

# ADVENTURE SEEDS

Below are several ready-made story lines for adventures. They are not fully detailed but give you a background story and several ways to develop the adventure. These seeds leave room for the GM to run the adventure in a way that fits his or her style and player group.

## DURNE AND THE DARKLANDS

A Gnomekin scout returns with a report that the Ur are pressing the Darklings again to launch a massive evacuation into Durne. With a new surge of subterranooids coming from the depths, the King and Queen of Durne wish to hire the aid of a group of adventurers to confirm these observations and to delay the evacuation as long as possible. Coming from Cymril by the Seventh Road, the adventurers get a chance to get used to the peculiarities of underground travel and combat with Satada hunters in search of fresh meat. Getting an audience will introduce them to the Gnomekin city of Durne. The King and Queen will grant the adventurers the use of the slideway system. Let's hope there are not giants among them.

Near the Darklands, the adventurers will meet the first darklings who have fled their homes but don't know any details. Pressing on, the adventurers will have to enter the darkling realm, where they have to talk their way through the pathologically lying darklings to find out that the Ur Clans have struck a bargain with an unknown entity to move further south in exchange for their toxic wastes. Can the adventurers aid the darklings to fight the Ur, or help them find their Lost Home? Or will they travel the Dead River around Ur to the north to find out more about the deal the Ur struck with the ice giants who want to move their invasion to the south? Can they forge an alliance between the stryx and the darklings and with aid of the Gnomekin

Protectors Force strike back at the Ur Clans, return the situation to the way it was, and let the Ur Clans deal with a disgruntled ice king?

## FAN-RA-SAN TEARS

The adventurers meet with a Fan-Ra-San elder in disguise, who tells about ancient magic at the Crying Eyes. As he begins to give instructions on how to get there, his eyes go wide and he dies. How are they going to explain this and still get help to reach the Crying Eyes?

## FULL DEMONIC CIRCLE

A Rahastran cartomancer predicts the return of an evil power at Zahur's shrine below the Fire-Pits of Malnangar. Worried about this, several cabals of powerful wizards gather to find a solution. The adventurers are approached by an unknown wizard who claims to know the ritual that can destroy the shrine before it's too late, if only they take him there. Can the adventurers find a way to reach the Island of Fate? Is this wizard who he says he is? Or is he secretly planning to conduct a ritual that will return Zahur or Drax to this world? And if so, will the plot be discovered in time? If not, Talislanta may soon be another world altogether.

## MUDDY BUSINESS

The tunnel to Karansk has been flooded with mud again. The Jhangaran mudminers are cleaning it out, but someone is sabotaging their work. Who? Why?

## THAUMATREASUREHUNT

A Dracartan thaumaturge opened a cavern created by ancient thaumaturgical magic and needs a party of adventurers to investigate.

## FACING THE DARK

Demons are entering the Badlands in increasing numbers. The adventurers must find the tunnel that leads from the Black Pit of Narandu to the Sardonyx Mountains and cause it to collapse.

## CHAPTER FOUR

# Rockbottom Lore

## UNDERGROUND PATHS

### MAGIC

*[Editor's note: This heading was a placeholder for subterranean-related magic orders and spells.]*

### EQUIPMENT

#### Canarge

A combination of canoe and barge. This boat has a small section in the back that seats one person, who can propel the vehicle with oars or a pole. The front part is broadened to serve as a cargo area.

#### Speleological Gear

Not unlike mountaineering gear, this includes rope, a small pick axe, watertight bags, survival rations, a warm blanket, rough leather gloves, metal spikes and a hammer.

### PATHS

*[Editor's note: This heading was a placeholder for subterranean-related character paths for 5th Edition Talislanta.]*

## SKILLS

### Speleology

This skill covers all the tricks needed to move through difficult tunnels. It includes knowledge of what items to bring along, basic rules of thumb (e.g. keep a minimum of three steady hand- and footholds at all times, regularly check your rope for cuts and wear that may decrease its strength). It also allows one to construct simple rope bridges and dig out footholds with a pick axe.

Attribute modifier: DEX

### Rafting

The ability to construct simple vessels out of basic things that will remain afloat in water and how to ride it in a wild water river.

Attribute modifier: DEX

### Geology

Knowledge of geological layers, recognition of different types of stone, including ores, and their properties. It also covers knowledge of seismic activity, the way geysers work, and when lava has cooled down to temperatures at which is strong enough to support an adult man walking on it.

Attribute modifier: INT

### Orientation - Subterranean

This ability allows a player to find his way around in the unfamiliar spaces of the Underground Highway. With this skill one is able to determine depth underground by estimating the oxygen level of the air, predict whether a tunnel will go up or down further on, and determine which way the suns set even though he can't see them.

Attribute modifier: PER

## CHAPTER FIVE

# Secrets Buried Deep

## UNDERGROUND LORE

This section contains information about the things that make travelling and adventuring underground different from the same activities on the surface of Talislanta, as well as tips for players to prepare themselves for a journey on the Underground Highway.

### GEOLOGY

While you may not see far ahead, the land you're travelling through can tell you a lot about its history, dangers, and resources. *[Editor's note: This section would have provided details on geology for use by players and gamemasters alike.]*

### ORIENTATION

Know where you're going. Even with a map, it's hard to say which way is north. Just like you can tell directions from which side of a tree is covered with moss if you know the main direction of the wind, so can the subterranean races tell directions from

geological features, location and type of fungal growth, echoes, and of course magic.

### WEIGHT

There are no shops below ground (with the possible exception of certain stretches of the Underground Highway beneath Durne), so everything you want to have you must bring along yourself. Remember that many stretches of the Underground Highway are unfit for beasts of burden. Watch your encumbrance.

### SURVIVING

Know how to find food and water that is safe to consume. Bring warm blankets and pack them in a watertight bag. Moving through water will get you wet, and there's no sun to warm you but plenty of draughts to chill you to the bone. Fires are not an option wherever limited oxygen and smoke inhalation are risks; toxic fumes and oxygen depletion may occur. Know how to cross deep crevices and get to high-up tunnel entrances safely, where the rock is strong enough to attach a hook. Be aware of risks like cave-ins, floods, unstable ground, avalanches, waterfalls, and steep downward slopes coming to a dead end.

## MODES OF TRAVEL

Main roads that run beneath the surface may be traversed by wagon or steed, but most cannot. Some underground lakes and rivers can be travelled by boat, shallow streams by canarge. Sometimes services are provided. Rapids are traversed by raft. Use air bubbles for travel underwater. Aquus can be trained as aquatic mounts.

## PREPARATION

Buy maps, talk to guides, find trustworthy companions, buy equipment, stock food and clean water.

## NATURAL CRYSTAL RESONANCE

Some rare crystals are magically sensitive to vibrations and resonate on an unknown magical frequency. This magical resonance is so powerful that it affects other such crystals throughout the continent. These crystals emit sounds picked up by crystals in remote locations. Crystallomancers have not yet been able to grow crystals with such a powerful ability. Apparently, the crystal's ability to resonate is integrated with the bedrock of Talislanta, because cutting a crystal loose from the surrounding bed destroys its resonance.

## BESTIARY

### AQUS

An aquatic hybrid of the equus and some fish. Able to quickly stretch and retract a strong membrane between its front legs and between its hind legs, its strokes can propel the animal with considerable speed through the water. Aquus are the favoured mounts of the Fan-Ra-San Water Guard.

## Subterranean Fauna and Flora Found in Other Sources

While nearly any creature might be found below ground for one reason or another, below are references to a select few that are native to, lair in, or may frequent underground areas, along with the page number in the source.

Aramatus (Tal4 249, TC 5, TM 10)  
Bane (NG 12, Tal3 259, Tal4 169, TM 17)  
Bat Manta (NG 13, TC 103)  
Black Mushroom (Tal3 281)  
Bog Devil (TC 8, TM 24)  
Cave Bat (NG 16, Tal3 261, Tal4 290, TM 28)  
Chasm Viper (Tal3 289, Tal4 133, TM 29)  
Crag Spider (NG 17, Tal3 261, Tal4 185, TM 31)  
Darkling (NG 18)  
Deadman (NG 110, Tal3 282)  
Deadwood (Tal4 160, TC 11, TM 35)  
Demon, Earth (NG 21, Tal4 359, TC 130, TM 41)  
Demon, Lava (TM 42)  
Demon, Night (NG 23, TC 133)  
Demon, Pyro- (NG 24, Tal4 213, TC 135, TM 46)  
Demon, Rock (TM 46)  
Demon, Sand (NG 25, Tal4 272, TC 137, TM 46)  
Devil, Enim (Tal4 337, TM 55)  
Disembodied Spirit (Tal4 281, TC 106, TM 59)  
Drac (Tal3 290, TM 60)  
Dragon, Crested (NG 32, TM 63)  
Elemental, Minor (Tal3 275, Tal4 311, TC 95, TM 72)  
Enim (NG 37)  
Erx (TC 107)  
Ferran (NG 41, Tal4 355, TM 77)  
Fiend (TC 104)

(continued)

## EARTHWISPS

Subterranean companions of the muses of Brown Astar.

## FLOAT-FOOTED CENTIPEDES

Aquatic cousin of the caravan bug, found in swamps.

## PROVLO

The tunnels through the thick layer of ice covering Narandu between the ruins of Farnir and Traitor's Bay are home to a penguin-like semi-intelligent species, called the Provlo. Their main mode of movement is a short run, followed by a fast slide on their smooth round bellies, similar to a bobsled. Unaware travellers can have nasty accidents when surprised by these living torpedoes. Provlo live in pairs and communicate with other Provlo pairs by building their nests in resonating ice crystals.

## ROCKTAIL

A slothlike creature with a leathery skin that resembles rock. It clings to the ceiling and can extend its hide like a cloak, concealing its body. Its long, muscular tail resembles a stalactite and uses it to knock out unaware passers-by. Then it drops to the ground to eat.

## TEARFISH

Beautiful and innocent looking fish that inhabits the area downstream from the Dead Lagoon in large numbers. For all their serenity when well-fed, these fish become monsters that tear any living being to pieces in minutes with their needle teeth when hungry.

## Subterranean Fauna Found in Other Sources (continued)

Gellid (TM 82)  
Geophage (TC 28, TM 83)  
Ghast (Tal4 159, TC 114, TM 84)  
Gnomekin (NG 43, Tal4 123, TM 85)  
Gnorl (Tal4 166, TM 85)  
Ice Giant (NG 46, Tal3 263, Tal4 297, TM 95)  
Ikshada (NG 47, Tal4 305, TC 33, TM 95)  
Kaliya (NG 33, TM 100)  
Khadun's Sage (TM 103)  
Kra (NG 51, Tal3 263, TC 36, TM 105)  
Kra, Desert (Dj 30)  
Kra, Land (Tal4 129, TC 37, TM 105)  
Land Crab (TM 107)  
Manrak (TC 46, TM 114)  
Necrophage (NG 63, Tal3 273, Tal4 159, TC 116, TM 127)  
Octomorph (TC 53, TM 132)  
Orange Fungus (Tal3 284)  
Pseudomorph (TC 57, TM 143)  
Rajan Scorpion (Tal3 277, Tal4 291, TM 146)  
Raknid (NG 70, Tal3 266, Tal4 214, TC 58, TM 148)  
Ravenger (Tal3 266, Tal4 281, TM 150)  
Rictus (TM 153)  
Rock Urchin (Tal3 293, Tal4 359, TM 154)  
Root Grub (Tal3 278, Tal4 141, TM 154)  
Satada (Tal3 267, Tal4 132, TC 65, TM 157)  
Scarlet Sporozoid (NG 105, Tal3 280, Tal4 125, TM 160)  
Scavenger Slime (Tal3 267, Tal4 304, TC 66, TM 160)  
Shadowcat (TC 117)  
Shadowight (NG 76, Tal3 274, Tal4 301, TM 165)

(continued)

## Subterranean Fauna Found in Other Sources

(continued)

Sivian (TM 170)  
Skalanx (Tal4 181, TC 71, TM 170)  
Skank (Tal3 293, TM 171)  
Slicus (TM 171)  
Snipe (NG 83, Tal4 302, TC 73, TM 173)  
Stenchroot (NG 111, Tal3 286)  
Subterranoïd (Tal4 125, TC 76, TM 177)  
Tszarlak (TM 185)  
Urthrax (Tal4 315, TC 82, TM 188)  
Vajra (Tal4 206, TM 189)  
Weirdling (NG 93, Tal4 168, TC 88, TM 196)  
Werebeast (NG 94, Tal3 270, Tal4 169, TM 197)  
Yaksha (NG 99, Tal4 175, TC 90, TM 200)  
Yitek (Tal4 275, TM 202)

### Key to abbreviations:

Dj - *People and Places: Djaffa* (4th edition)  
NG - *A Naturalist's Guide to Talislanta* (1st edition)  
Tal3 - *Talislanta Guidebook* (3rd edition)  
Tal4 - *Talislanta Fantasy Roleplaying* (4th Edition)  
TC - *Thystram's Collectanea* (3rd edition)  
TM - *Talislanta Menagerie* (4th edition / d20)