

KHUZDUL OUTPOST

Location: Somewhere on Hârn
Holder: Abandoned
Size: N/A

INTRODUCTION

This outpost could be located anywhere at the discretion of the GM. The best place would be just off a major trade route (modern trade routes follow ancient Khuzdul highways) or in a river valley (where the game would have been plentiful). Due to the age of the outpost, it could easily be located in the heart of a modern kingdom or deep in the wilderness. The only location requirements are an outcrop of limestone and a forty-foot cliff face.

HISTORY

Abandoned for over 1000 years, the fact that this outpost is still intact is a testament to the skill of its builders. A hunting lodge and way station, this small underground site was tunnelled out of the face of a hard blue limestone cliff during the Codominium era. It once housed 8-10 Khuzdul hunter-gatherers who used it as a base from which to collect and preserve food to supply to the large cities of Azadmere and Kiraz. After the Battle of Sorrows, it was decided that the outpost was too isolated and vulnerable, so everything of value was removed and the site was sealed for possible future use. The location of the site and floor plans are kept in the Royal Archive in Azadmere. No one has looked at them in several hundred years.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

The outpost was always well concealed. Carefully crafted and balanced stone doors conceal the main entrance and the backdoor. The four crossbow loops overlooking the area in front of the main door were designed to look like simple cracks in the cliff face. When not in use, each loop has a stone shutter, which matches the surrounding cliff face and makes it very difficult to spot. Before departing, the Khuzdul dismantled the two chimneys, which once stood on the top of the cliff, and covered the holes with large heavy boulders.

The maps on page 4 show the furnishings as they appeared in Codominium times. When the Khuzdul left, they removed all portable furniture and whatever wood remained has long since crumbled to dust. Although the Khuzdul produce the best steel on Hârn, even their work cannot withstand millennia without maintenance. All hinges, bolts and strapping are covered with a thick layer of rust and are badly weakened. The doors are made with bronze covered oak. The bronze has turned a deep green and the oak has slowly rotted away in the damp. A solid shove with cause them to collapse. The chimneys are only one foot in diameter and were drilled from the top down. Six inches below the surface, a grill of one-inch thick enamelled steel alloy bars secures the chimneys. Whether by enchantment or virtue of their special coating, these grills are rust free.

The facility was well located and constructed with great care and skill. There has been very little shifting over the centuries, so the walls and ceilings are still in

CREDITS

WRITER

Kerry Mould

MAPS

Thomas Shook



KHUZDUL OUTPOST 2

good condition. Several narrow shafts in the ceiling lead out to the downwind side of the cliff where the low pressure naturally draws the air out. When there is a strong breeze the shafts create a whistling or moaning sound, which can be quite eerie. Despite being closed for a thousand years, the air in the outpost is relatively fresh. Located above the waterline, the entire outpost has a slight slope from the furthest point (the staircase) down to the main entrance. Any water that does penetrate the rock naturally flows down to small drains and out of the rooms. These drains and airshafts have allowed insects and small mammals access to the outpost over the years. A millennia of nests, droppings and food debris litter the floors.

LOWER LEVEL

1. **Courtyard** – The entrance to the outpost is located at the base of a 40-foot tall cliff face. The natural alcove in the cliff, which was easy to fence, served as a pen for the Khuzdul's string of pack mules. Since the site was abandoned, this area has been overgrown with trees, burned down by forest fires and grown over again. Eleven hundred years of winter, wind, water and weather have completed the masterful concealment job started by the Khuzdul. Sheltered from the wind and rain, the courtyard makes an excellent campsite.

2. **Stone Door** – Cut from the face of the cliff, this door perfectly matches its surroundings. Closed and barred from the inside by the departing dwarves, the hinges and bolt are badly rusted. Due to the sheer weight of the door, it would take the combined strength of ten men to force it open from the inside. Once open, the hinges will need to be replaced before it can be fully closed again. Although cut from natural limestone, the stone appears to have been changed to pseudo-stone, possibly by the Earthmaster device from Kiraz. It would take considerable force (at least a battering ram) to break down the door, assuming the correct place on the cliff wall could be determined. During Codominium times, this door was often left open during the day.

3. **Portcullis** – The outer door leads into a short entry shaft blocked by a portcullis. The solid steel alloy grill is coated with some sort of enamelling (like the grills protecting the chimneys). It is tarnished but not rusted and the core of the metal is still solid. Although not locked in place, it weighs over a ton and will be extremely difficult and awkward to lift. The portcullis is overlooked by crossbow loops on both sides and a murder hole above.

4. **Storeroom** – When the outpost was used as a base for hunting and gathering, this room was used to store the preserved game and foodstuffs until a mule train could take them to Kiraz or Azadmere. The room was completely emptied by the departing Khuzdul. There are a

few small animal nests in the corners and droppings on the floor around the drain.

5. **Mule Stable** – The Khuzdul used horses and donkeys, but preferred mules for their pack trains. Most of the mules were kept outside in the courtyard, but this room served as a small stable for injured or young animals. The remnants of the wooden dividers, which once separated the stalls, litter the floor.

6. **Main Hall** – Protected by a second murder hole, a heavy door opens into the main hall. Now little more than a bronze shell over the remnants of an oak core, the door will collapse with the slightest push. The hall was once the heart of the outpost, a bright and cheerful place. With the door open, it is light and airy. The large, well-designed fireplace draws smoke well and throws lots of heat, however the boulder blocking the chimney needs to be removed before it can be used. The room served as a combined lounge, dining hall and work area. Doors lead off all sides of this central room. The departing Khuzdul took the tables and benches, so all that remains are the fireplace and torch brackets.

7. **Dormitory** – This small room originally housed eight dwarves on four bunks. It is now empty.

8. **Private quarters** – The home of the master of the outpost, this room appears to be empty, however, in the far corner of the room is a loose paving stone. Underneath is a small hole containing a rotten bag with three Khuzan Gold Crowns (value 320d each) and a black mass (once 200 silver pieces). The silver would have to be melted down before it would be useful for trade.

9. **Staircase** – A steep spiral staircase, in typical Khuzdul fashion, leads to the upper level.

10. **Well** – A shaft cut into the living rock drops forty feet to water level. The original chain rusted through and fell into the well long ago. The winch is rusted solid and useless. The water from this well is clear, cold and sweet. Fed by an underground aquifer, it has never run dry.

11. **Kitchen** – A large fireplace with a bake oven on one side suggests that this room was once the kitchen. It was much larger than required for 10 dwarves because it was also used as a work area to butcher animals and preserve gathered foods. The smoke hood is exceptionally tall, with several hooks inside for hanging meat to smoke; its chimney is also blocked. The only remaining furniture is a marble cutting block, scored with hundreds of knife cuts.

12. **Pantry** – This small room was used to store the day-to-day food for the inhabitants (as opposed to the food packed for shipment). It is empty.

13. **Privy** – This peculiar little room has a low bench with a hole in it. Under the bench, in line with the hole, there is a circular depression in the floor. The Khuzdul used the

room as their toilet. A large chamber pot would be slid under the shelf and rest in the circular depression. When it was full, it would be carried outside and the contents disposed of.

UPPER LEVEL

14. **Escape Ladder** – The once sturdy door guarding the escape hatch has completely rotted through and collapsed into a pile of green bronze sheeting. Inside the shaft, a ladder, consisting of iron rungs sunk into the living stone, leads to the surface. It allowed the occupants to escape if the front entrance was blocked or watched. The rungs are rusted through and will snap if any amount of weight is put on them. At the top of the ladder is a stone hatch made of pseudo-stone (like the main entrance). Tapered, the round hatch wedges tightly in the hole without hinges. There is a one-foot wide ledge around the shaft four feet below the hatch. A user stands astride the shaft on the ledge and lifts the hatch with his back. The top of the hatch blends perfectly into the surrounding rock. When the dwarves sealed the site, they departed via this exit, so they were unable to extend the three bolts that normally secure the hatch in place; instead they rolled a large boulder over top of it. It will take at least four strong men to remove the boulder. Then, they will have to find the edges of the hatch and pry it up. Explorers will need a rope to descend to the floor of the 23-foot deep shaft.

15. **Guard Room** – Located directly above the main entrance, this room has two murder holes, one in front of portcullis and one in front of the door to the hall. They were used for firing crossbows, dropping rocks or pouring boiling water on attackers below. The portcullis was raised through a slot by chains, which passed over pulleys to the winch at the back of the room. The chains have long since turned to dust and the winch and pulleys are rusted solid. If the winch, pulleys and chains were replaced, the portcullis would be usable again. A dozen small boulders, for dropping on attackers, are stacked in the corner. Buried underneath, long forgotten, is the blade of a fine Khuzdul dagger. The hilt has rotted away, but the blade is solid and rust free. It may or may not be enchanted (at the GM's discretion).

16. **Crossbow Gallery** – A corridor wraps around the cliff giving access to four crossbow loops. The two centre loops look directly forward, but can only see people who are at least 10 feet away from the base of the cliff. The side loopholes can see the base of the cliff in front of the door, providing a deadly crossfire to rake attackers. Each loop is covered with a pseudo-stone shutter fixed with hinges and a bolt; the shutters are in perfect condition, but all of the fittings are completely rusted through. They are only held in place by their own weight and inertia.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Agents of the King – After 1000 years, the King of Azadmere has decided he needs to re-establish a presence in this area to monitor human and/or gargun activities. A Khuzdul huscarl is dispatched. Because of the distance and/or location of the outpost, he hires the PCs to help him find the site. He has an ancient map and the final report from the last Khuzdul to inhabit the outpost.

Villain's Lair – The PCs have been pursuing a NPC for many months. At last, they have tracked him to his secret hideout. The villain has had time to conduct some repairs to the lair, but not all. The amount and quality of the repairs and the number of henchmen is up to the GM.

Tomb Raider – Jarin tribesmen discovered the outpost 500 years ago and used it to bury several chiefs. Most items have rotted away, but some gold and/or special items have survived. A serf from a nearby manor discovered it while collecting bird eggs from the cliff. He was arrested trying to sell a gold medallion. The PCs are sent to retrieve the treasure for the crown. One problem, the hunter claims the tomb is haunted, by a ghost!

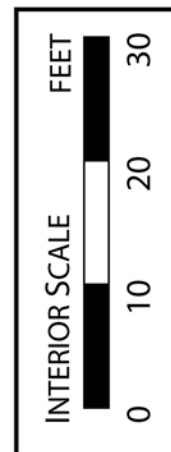
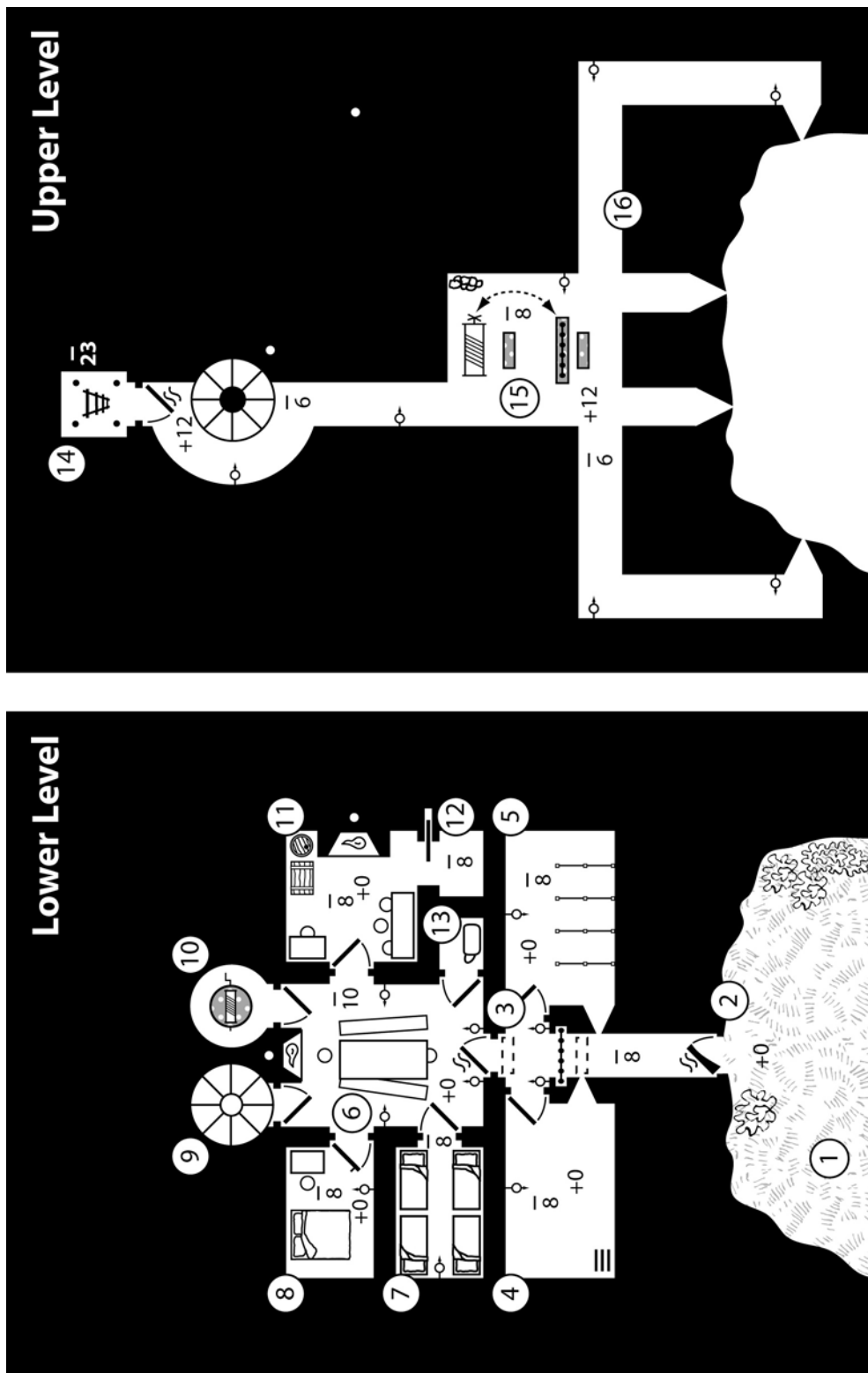
POSTSCRIPT

Naturally, if the PCs discover the outpost, they may want to claim it for their own. Although it is a powerful little fortress, it is in need of repairs to make it fully serviceable again. Unless the PCs are craftsmen, they will have to bring in specialists (blacksmiths, carpenters, masons, etc) to do the repairs. How will they get them there without giving away the location? Replacing the doors, hinges, bolts, winches and furniture will be an expensive proposition, allowing the GM to siphon off excess PC cash and raise awkward questions with the authorities. Transporting a large winch to the outpost could be a challenge.

Unless they plan to leave it unguarded while they are off adventuring, the PCs will need to hire NPC retainers to protect the outpost in their absence. This is another way to drain off excess cash. There is also the potential for treachery, if the NPCs think they can get away with it. The PCs might arrive at their hideout with gargun in hot pursuit only to find the doors barred and demands for an immediate pay raise posted.

If the PCs don't want to repair the outpost or live there full time, there is always the possibility of using it as a treasure cache. The backdoor is functional, so the PCs can use the outpost to stash their excess wealth, equipment and/or belongings. However, the outpost may be in the territory of gargun, barbarians, brigands and/or the feudal authorities. The more times the PCs visit the outpost the greater the chance that they will be seen. They may come back to find their treasure stolen and their hideout occupied by someone else!

KHUZDUL OUTPOST 4



Copyright © 2005, Thomas Shook