

A Visitor's Guide to Gunnar's Rest

By

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Preface | a word from the author

Hail, dear reader. Before you lies a small but helpful guide to Gunnar's Rest. Whether you're a wandering trader, aspiring prospector or just a feller with an impressive beard and a passion for shiny things, this guide will tell you everything you need to know.

My name is Holgath of Wren: poet, traveler, realty agent and yes, amateur historian; and it is my great pleasure to share with you what knowledge I have gathered over my time in Gunnar's Rest. More crucially, I shall divulge to you, dear reader, what little I am permitted by my very good friends in the High Council to share of the Undercity, its inhabitants, and its history.

I am truly honoured to be your guide as I take you on a literary tour of this fair city. Thus: hold on to thine breeches and pray for deliverance as I lay upon you the many peculiarities that make Gunnar's Rest worth visiting.

A market fortress | access and services

Our journey begins in Gunnar's Rest, which, whilst generously accommodating to traders once inside its gates, only opens them during two short intervals daily. During these intervals, the keep's gates are under rigorous surveillance and newcomers to the city are searched and thoroughly vetted without exception. Visitors may stay inside the city, in inns or taverns, or sojourn in layover camps outside the city proper should they arrive at an inconvenient time. It is considered good practice to bring one's own tent and bedroll when visiting Gunnar's Rest.

Visitors with a little surplus gold in their pockets may want to visit the Dangling Anvil on the corner of Market and Gold Street. Known and named after the black iron anvil hanging precariously over the building's sole entrance, the Dangling Anvil is as reputable an establishment as any in fair Azure. Nevertheless, many a young Laird has lost more than a bit of coin in the Anvil's backrooms, for the tavern's bodacious serving girls possess skills far beyond the mere serving of drinks.

With plenty of shops and warehouses, the streets of Gunnar's Rest are busy throughout the day. From fellow travelers playing dice and drinking ale to peddlers selling poorly made copies of dwarven weaponry, everyone is there for one simple reason: the exchange of money, goods and services. Proportionally there are, in fact, few residential buildings on the surface; the majority of Dwarves preferring the gentle glow of luminescent fungi to the pale sun and steel-blue firmament of the Oghrenn Range.

The Undercity is forbidden to outsiders, lest they carry a Token of Admittance: an embossed and engraved brass tube containing their papers and a letter of recommendation from a Council member. A pro forma letter and appropriate papers may be acquired via audience with the Gate Magistrate of Gunnar's Rest, Garm Firebeard. His excellence may be found in his offices at the Exchange; the domed building on Origen Street.

The Exchange serves as a trade hub where visitors can sell their goods and procure valuable merchandise from the Avernus. The most delicate of trades are administered by the Pentarch of Origen himself. The rest falls to the Exchange Secretaries. Approved goods and visitors are transported to the Undercity a few times per week by means of a great stone platform that lowers them safely down into the Avernus.

The Undercity consists of a naturally occurring stalagnate column that encases the surface access lift, surrounded by an inner ring wall along with manors, shops and public buildings. An extended mantle incorporated into the Undercity's vast outer wall contains government and judicial buildings, temples and ample residency for the middle and lower classes of dwarven society. It also contains a vast array of industrial forges and furnaces, as well as specialist workshops and educational facilities for the many dwarven smiths, artificers and engineers that operate them.

Stairways and overpasses facilitate an easy transition between the Undercity's inner and outer circles. Several gates connect the city to the outer world while vast dwarven ballistas line the Undercity's monolithic walls. Natural chasms and underground creeks flowing around the city's outskirts render it virtually impenetrable to any would-be attacker. Many, in fact, have tried and failed miserably.

The High Council implores me to impress upon any would-be intruder reading this with malicious intent, the impossibility of overcoming the impervious defenses and stalwart defenders of the Undercity, and the absolute certainty of both swift and excruciatingly painful death brought on by an airborne four-foot ballista bolt forcefully and rapidly lodging itself in one's abdomen.

The Dwarven Union | a brief history

To truly understand a place, one must know its history. In that respect the story of Gunnar's Rest and the Undercity is no different. Situated like a pearl nestled in the dark oyster of the Isles, Gunnar's Rest is said to have been founded by the renowned folk hero Gunnar Forkbeard somewhere in the early Years of the Sun. Scholars agree Gunnar is more of a mythological figure than a historical one, and the exact year has been lost to the ages. His son Gundrick, who we know built the city wall, otherwise fares little better when it comes to narrative reliability; but his son Gundred in turn, in 232 Y.S. ordered records be kept of the well and woe of clan Forkbeard and its mountain fiefdom.

This was, it is said, in part due to a struggle within clan Forkbeard itself; for when Gundrick's wife Ulrike begat him a second son, instead of the split-ended black beard so typical of Forkbeard clansmen, the uncanny child bore a full, bushy beard as red as molten copper. Though unable to prove Ulrike's adultery, to Gundrick the child was undoubtedly a bastard, and he treated him as such. And yet, he was raised alongside Gundred, more out of shame than any kind of courtesy. Ingmar Firebeard, they called him, and by 232 he had become a thorn in his half-brother's side.

As a second son, young Ingmar held no claim to his reluctant father's lands, but instead intimidated, bribed, or murdered many of the savage human clans that lived in the mountains around Gunnar's Rest, subjugating them and bringing their lands under his control. In doing so he vastly expanded the surface territory held by the dwarves, and facilitated the growing of surface crops. This in turn provided Gunnar's Rest with the very grain it used to brew the famed and coveted dwarven ales – Firebeard Ale first among them.

This led to such a shift in perception from the general dwarven populace that it left Gundred no choice but to, in 259 Y.S., acknowledge his bastard brother's nobility and grant him the title of Senechal. The two shared an uneasy co-rulership of Gunnar's rest until 381, when Ingmar died in a controversial hunting accident. His heir Ingyard Firebeard, who would have held no claim to title nor land, was however graciously allowed to bear the henceforth hereditary title of Marechal of the Oghrenn Range, and to patrol and levy taxes from those lands, whereas the Forkbeards would keep the of Senechal of Gunnar's Rest exclusively for their own.

From the four hundreds onwards, as the developing surface nations began exploiting their own mines and driving out the clans, an influx of noble dwarven and duergar families began greatly bolstering the military and intellectual strength of Gunnar's rest. This caused a fair amount of societal upheaval, as noble clans as old as the Forkbeards joined the ranks of the city's nobility. After Gundred son of Gundrick died in an honourable duel against Halfdan Rocksplitter, the duergar known as "Humandan" for his exceedingly tall stature, the Forkbeards knew themselves outmatched. Gundryn son of Gundred would never take the throne, and abdicated.

And so the High Council was established. The Forkbeards, as prestigious members of the council retained a great deal of influence in the city's affairs, and other clans were allowed to flourish alongside them. As dwarven influence declined in the isles at large, Gunnar's rest evolved from a mid-sized town to a bustling underground city-state. This centralization of dwarven power allowed Gunnar's Rest to become one of the major players in the Evershroud Isles, and despite its limited presence on the surface, exist just below as a force to be reckoned with.

This newfound unity proved instrumental during the Caldwell Uprising, when Thaddeus Caldwell, after his failed coup of the Caldwell Dominion in 621, led his mountaineers across mt. Udnar and took Gunnar's Rest by surprise. Thaddeus and his men held the upper city for five years as his older brother Ozymandias laid siege to it, and tried to take bloody vengeance on him and his conspirators. Only by the end of the fifth year did the Undercity begin to run out of supplies (or ale, as some would have you believe), and the dwarves out of patience. The Forgemaster's Gate was opened, and well-nourished, heavily armored dwarven warriors washed over the famished Caldwell rebels like a brass tidal wave.

Beneath the ramparts of Gunnar's Rest, the right honourable baron Ozymandias Caldwell and High Council representative Laird Aädred Fyndhammar signed the so-called Sharetankard Concordat: the non-aggression pact that nullified any hostility Thaddeus' rebellion had incited between the Dwarven Union and the old Caldwell Dominion. The

Oghrenn Range, east of Gunnar's Rest, would by that same Concordat remain part of the Dwarven Union, but its largely human-populated surface would be exploited for grain farming and cattle rearing to benefit both the Dominion and Gunnar's Rest. The Dominion in turn would provide the better part of the Range's defence, with a small but heavily armored force of Firebeard riders astride great mountain goats to stiffen their ranks.

Gunnar's Rest | modern times

Over the last century or so the Caldwell Dominion has gone through a steady societal decline, and in modern times support from Caldwell has waned, and the Oghrenn Range is largely dominated by Silt's mounted divisions. The Council has stood its ground, however, regarding Gunnar's Rest's function as a centre of trade between surface and Avernum, and has refused Silt's repeated mandates that a group of Sisters Militant, armed representatives of the Cult of Rael, be stationed there. The Firebeards still control the highlands, and their crossbow bolts are plentiful.

Meanwhile in the Undercity, a remarkable number of migrating deep gnomes have cobbled together slums of improvised dwellings from the city's abundant refuse piles. Deep gnomes have long played a part in dealing with the more delicate feats of engineering required by the Dwarven Union, but never in such numbers. Many of them were, at one point or another, slaves of the drow that haunt the deep Avernum, and harbor a mix of fear and hatred for their former masters.

By and large the dwarves consider the conniving gnomes an unpleasant lot, but effective at what they do, and they pay them fairly for their efforts. It is a rare sight, however, for a dwarf to speak publicly with a deep gnome, for to speak with a gnome is to invite dishonour upon one's Clan. Such beliefs stem from an innate mistrust between these races, which harkens back to a darker time when deep gnomes and duergar would fight over scraps to survive.

Now, effectively at the Dwarven Union's mercy, the gnomes are a source of cheap labour for the Undercity. And while officially under the protection of the city watch, the gnomes' slums form an effective buffer zone in the event of a drow attack.

The gnomes are nothing if not inventive, however, and their affinity for artificing has caused many an ill-willed visitor to melt, disintegrate, combust, inflate, explode, dehydrate, freeze or exsanguinate rather unexpectedly as onlookers snickered in their sleeves.

The combination of dwarven craftsmanship and gnome ingenuity is beginning to show exceptional promise where it concerns the creation of automatons: vast, arcane powered constructs that can be ordered to serve their owners in numerous ways. Quite the terrifying prospect if you ask me, but fascinating nonetheless. Union experts warn that speculation regarding the development of arcane intelligence might lead to unforeseen results and any practical experiment should not be attempted without proper containment procedures in place.

On Dwarven Ale | A few notes for the uninitiated

For those not in the habit of imbibing anything stronger than, say, a Zhilan dinner wine, the headiness of Dwarven Ale may come as a surprise. The sweetness of spices and honey with a bright hoppy bitterness, and the chill that lingers in the caskets from their time in the Avernum, makes Dwarven Ale go down with regrettable ease.

The finest grain from the Oghren Range is fermented along with hops and dried Avernum fungi at an elevated temperature, allowing it to reach maximum flavor and potency.

Dark, steam-brewed and spiced, this viscous liquid is then thinned by fortifying it with pure barley spirits to around the twentieth percentile, killing off the yeast and stabilising the mixture. The ale is then triple-filtered to ensure a smooth mouth feel, and is ready to ripen in casks of oak for as long as 30 years.

After 30 years, it may end up in unsuspecting humans such as you and I, and you may find yourself waking up in unexpected places, having made unexpected friends (or enemies), and with the remains of the night's dinner and what's left of one's dignity clinging to their tunic.

It is, however, worth a second encounter. And a third.

The Exchange | Trade and Investment

Much like how in coastal cities like Azure goods are stored in warehouses in the port district, and may change hands many times even before a ship takes them to distant lands, the Exchange is the inland equivalent as goods flow into the Undercity at a steady, but limited rate. Large warehouses full of grain, meat and fresh produce ready to descend, while bronze ingots, weapons, armor and raw copper and tin are stored in others, waiting for whoever can afford them.

Bulk goods can be bought through Exchange Secretaries: respected clerics of Origen who specialize in unerringly identifying and grading all manner of produce, from common fruits to magical items, to establish fair market prices. They are something of an exception among Origen's servants in that they do not in fact produce anything; instead they are a tool used to measure the quality of the work of others. Traveling Secretaries settle local differences, and in doing so create a coherent and transparent market for bulk goods in the Isles.

Daring investors learn to move, hold and sell bulk goods via warehouses of their own. The stock business is risky, and prices may plummet as readily as they may rise. A cunning investor, therefore will first study the natural flow of the market to truly understand its workings and harvest its rich bounty. For more investment advice, consider buying Holgath's Guide to Financial Independence; a helpful little booklet on how Exchange investment changed my life – and how it could change yours!