

ZHAKOM

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ZHAKOM

Location:	[L3]
Status:	Gargun colony
Government:	King Anrik
Population:	760

In the year 150 BT the mine Zhakom was installed by Clan Ein. The mine contained some large amounts of iron, which did not meet the highest standard but was reasonable enough for mundane items. The ore was readily accessible and accordingly the mine was exploited rather fast and its output started to decline soon after 50 BT. After another 100 years the mine was exhausted and other sources for iron ore were sought. For a very short time humans were granted access but shortly after that the operation was ended and the entries to the old mine sealed.

The mine remained dormant for a long time. In the course of time, wild animals found their way into the caves, when one of the entry seals broke after a particularly violent storm. For a very short duration the mine was used as a home base for some brigands, but the band dissolved due to internal problems and lack of funds. Only long after the battle of Sirion in the year 120 TR did gargun appear in this area.

In their beginning the gargun made little use of the mined cave, it was situated in the high mountains and attacks on Azadmere did not yield much success. The Khuzdul had firm control of the gargun along their northern border. A few maroding bands of gargun were not sufficient to defend the cave against a determined strike from Azadmere. But the dwarfs made the mistake of not properly sealing off the cave, so the gargun still were able to use it as a short-term base.

Late in the year 420 TR a larger group of Gargun-Hyeka was successful in taken the cave. This group was also successful in keeping the mine against an attacking Khuzdul company. When the dwarfs realized that they had let the gargun grow in peace and started the attack, it was too late. At that point about 1000 gargun lived in the complex. Until 600 TR Azadmere could live with these unruly neighbours as the usual mechanisms made sure that the population would not grow unchecked.

After the turn of the century there was a population explosion, not only in Zhakom but also for groups in the vicinity. Thus the coming years

were marked by increased bloodshed. Only after several years did the Khuzdul regain control of the situation, although they had to take severe casualties. The infected mountains now only contained Zhakom and Vernuz and a few roving bands that were chased from one end to the other. The next years took their tolls on these bands. By 640 all of them were subdued.

During the year 656 TR the dwarfs started an expedition against Vernuz, where a dangerous Khanu clan resided. Shortly before the attack began, the Khanu had swarmed, so that the Khuzdul easily overpowered the remaining foulspawn. The swarm, however, overpowered the Hyeka in Zhakom. The Hyeka were henceforth slaves of the Khanu. The new masters heard of the fate of their former brethren in Vernuz and increased the defensive measures of Zhakom. Another, unsuccessful attack by the dwarfs was started in 701, when the Hyeka started to revolt after a bloodbath among the Khanu. Scarcely did the gargun of Zhakom manage to maintain their hold and survive. Since then the Khuzdul have stayed clear of Zhakom.

But the foulspawn did not stay clear of Azadmere. In time, the population of the cave increased to a sizable measure once more, which the Khanu kings wisely controlled by regular raids on Azadmere. Having no other enemies in the vicinity the gargun could concentrate fully on the dwarfs. Attacks were seen daily at the northern border of the dwarfin kingdom, even though the losses were 10:1 in favor of the dwarfs. Lesser counter-attacks, of which the one in 714 was the most notable, ended similarly. Zhakom itself was avoided by the dwarfs, however, the defenses seemed to strong to overcome easily. As late as the year 719 did Zhakom see a major, brutal civil war that left 600 gargun barely alive. In the meantime the population has increased again, but a determined attack by the dwarfs would probably be successful. Farseeing observers among the dwarfs in Azadmere are suggesting such measures against Zhakom.

LOCAL MAP NOTES

Zhakom lies at the center of the map, all quarters around the site have similar features. The region is obviously mountainous and contains needle-leaf forest. The trees are of medium growth at this elevation and not to dense. While

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traveling through this area, there is a 5% chance each watch that an (old) trap of the Gargun will be sprung, which attacks at ML50 with a 4btp. These traps can be found and the precautions of experienced wilderness groups should suffice.

In general the travel rate is 1-2 kilometres per hour independent of the amount of trees. The line of sight is hampered by the tree growth, while sight is basically unlimited, when there are no trees. When traveling observe the way the elevation slopes, which has a more profound effect on speed than tree growth and also effects sight. Obviously, the weather has an effect as well. The towers (see below 2) can be seen from 10 kilometers as feature. The Gargun fort itself (see below 1) can be seen from a farther distance, but the forest and slope decrease this possible sighting.

1. The camp. The vicinity is closely monitored by the Gargun. Everybody in sight must role against "Hiding" every watch to not be discovered. The cave itself holds room for more than 2000 gargun, but this space is not used. While the core of the site has been adapted to gargun needs, additional remnants of old are still present and can lead to sorties and the like. Above ground a wooden palisade is being constructed but large parts are missing. A storm has hit the area lately and the wooden constructions were hastingly fixed. Parties of garguns will be searching for wood that can be used to fortify the camp. A few small buildings inside the fenced area house guard troops. A circle of radius 200 yards has been cleared around the camp, but brush is gaining on the outskirts. The towers are not visible anymore - they could be, if 50 more yards would be cleared. The towers are within hearing distance, a horn would certainly suffice.
2. The wooden tower is 36 feet high and a standing platform at 30 feet is surrounded by a thorny brush that has been fastened there. The tower is not manned, but a single person could probably hold it for a considerable time. The thorny ring gives hampers climbers and is dense enough to even protect against missiles. An unhindered climber would take 5 minutes to climb the platform without being wounded. A climber

is helpless against attacks from the platform. A long ladder (or a similar construction) would be of use.

3. This hill covers 250 dead gargun. They represent a large portion of the losses during the last civil war and have been buried since four months now. The covering isn't very good and a strong odour can be observed several hundred yards away - depending on the prevalent winds.
4. This is a rune circle. The whole vicinity within a 200 yards is avoided by the gargun. There is no reason left for this behaviour. Some 40 years ago a mage installed a rune here that gave the illusion of a helpless dwarf but burnt each gargun that came into the circle. By now the magic has faded while the conditioning of the gargun to shun this place has only grown stronger.
5. A ravine that is perfect for setting an ambush. The sides fall steep and the remaining stony debris not only serves for hiding but also as material to drop on targets. It is only 10 yards apart at its narrowest point and 50 feet high. It is about 1/4 of a league long. The garguns know about this and will lure intelligent creatures, such as men and dwarfs, here. The ravine can also serve to hide troops and passing through it significantly reduces the time someone will travel to (or from) Zhakom, since a lot of climbs and descends in rough terrain is bypassed.

LOOKING FOR TROUBLE

The Khuzdul king could use some scouts, who should find out the correct number or at least a better estimate of the number of gargun in Zhakom. The king's marshal will send out up to four groups into the wilderness, each surveying a particular sector. Healing is provided for those returning as far as this concerns mundane means, i. e. a good physician.

In particular the following means and tasks are named:

- Each groups shall surveil a certain sector: Northeast, Southeast, Southwest, or Northwest. This is to avoid double counts of Gargun.

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- Information is sought on number, movements, weaponry, and building structures of the Foulspawn, as well as their races and all other unusual activities found around the camp.
- The surveillance shall last about one month, during which all hired groups receive a normal pay as mercenaries and kill bonuses for Gargun are doubled (i. e. 6d).
- If necessary some equipment can be borrowed. A simple leather armouring and a (normal) weapon of choice. A physician is available in Azadmere on demand.
- Any found treasures may be kept and the crown renounces ownership to this booty. An exception are dwarfin artefacts should they be found. The crown will pay compensation for such findings.
- Each week a report is to be made. This is were the group gets payed.

The marshal provides the groups with a map of the vicinity of Zhakom. The marshal will only hire trustworthy people for this job. How this trust of the marshal was obtained is left to GM discretion. It is not mandatory that dwarfs are among the scouts. On the contrary, the strategy is not to attract attention to Azadmere and the scout groups are going to surely attract attention from the Foulspawn.

HINTS AND RUMOURS

There are numerous rumours about the foulspawn colony. Veterans remember fights with the gargun that were more fierce than those that take place nowadays. Estimates as to the number of gargun thought to be living in Zhakom range from 1.000 to 3.000. However, official and better informed circles will estimate from 400 to 1.500. Conjectures are that the makeup of the colony has not changed; Hyeka and Khanu will still inhabit the mines.

There are less reports of attacks on Azadmere since about a year ago. Hypothesis for this phenomenon range from a swarm or a civil war, which has caused a reduction in population, to neighbouring colonies that wage a war, even to fantastic Orbaalese or Ivinian landings to this coastline of Hârn, which made first contact to

Zhakom. The reasons are not known to official circles, but the last conjecture is seen as extremely unlikely.

In the course of this intelligence operation there are several observations to be made. They occur in each of the quarters assigned to a different group. (Each quarter can be considered to have a radius of about 6 km.)

- In this vicinity 3 groups at 8 gargun move about. 2 of them are Khanu and 6 are Hyeka.
- The groups are hunting bands, but sufficiently equipped for a fight. The good equipment may be noticed by a keen eye.
- The camp contains many more gargun. A hunting band more or less probably does not make a noticeable difference.
- If two groups in a sector are missing, a more dangerous group issues from the camp. It contains 12 of the foulspawn, who are heavily armed, and will look for the hunters.
- There is an old scout-tower here, which isn't manned. Looking from this tower gives a good overview of the surrounding of the camp. A larger group could not go unnoticed, if someone were to man this outpost.
- A mound of gargun bones is haphazardly covered with earth. It contains the remains of the last civil war. Since there was an abundance of meat, not all dead gargun could be eaten and some needed to be covered like this. The pestilence coming from this hill drives off most animals - the animals that are make up the present diet of the gargun from Zhakom. But having the smell in Zhakom itself was also out of the question.
- With some luck a single gargun can be made out that leaves the area as if he were a Sombambulist. He will walk day and night until he passes out from exertion. This makes it difficult to keep up with him. If stopped, he doesn't know of anything. He appears thoroughly confused. This only happens in the Northeast quarter.

In particular the last observation should be withheld from the PCs, if they tend to follow every red herring. The explanation of this observance is up to the GM. It could be a Nolah calling

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	Str End	Dex,Agl, Spd,Int	Senses	Will	Dge ML	Ini	Combat ML	Weaponry	Armor
Hunting band									
2 Khanu	13	11	13	13	55	60	60	Mankar/Spear	Hide
6 Hyeka	11	11	13	11	55	52	40	Mankar/Spear	Hide
War band									
4 Khanu	13	11	13	13	55	60	60	Mang/Spear/Shield	70%Ring/30%Hide
8 Hyeka	11	11	13	11	55	52	40	Mang/Spear/Shield	60%Ring/40%Hide

or just a hereditary gargun disease - reminiscent of the lemmings.

THE TRUTH

There are actually 260 Khanu and 500 Hyeka still living in Zhakom. In each quarter 2 groups at 8 gargun will hunt in 24 hours. Everything that's available is taken, and the area is giving a decreasing amount of game. Humans and dwarfs are hunted with extreme pleasure, but the traps are set for smaller animals. Nevertheless some may cause serious injury to humans. If a gargun-troop finds out about the presence of the humanoid scouts, they will become the primary targets. Traps will be set accordingly.

In case one of the hunting groups becomes missing and this is noticed, a stronger group is sent out. This will probably notice the human tracks and follow them. They will not pursue the scouts into civilisation, but should the PCs take cover in Azadmere this will be noted. Otherwise, nothing much can be done about the situation.

The groups are all well equipped, due to the fact that the civil war left a lot of surplus weaponry and other useful items.

Weapon	Impact	WQ	Weight
Mankar	3b5t	10	3
Mang	2b5t	11	2
Spear	4b7p	9	5
Roundshield	6b	11	2

The solemn orc that wanders off could be going involuntarily toward a rendezvous with a mage. (This could be the lead-in for another adventure and just gives one explanation.) However, the GM should discourage leaving the area without having accomplished the task.

The reigning king Anrik (obviously a Khanu) is aware of the fact that his colony will have little chance with a concentrated attack from the dwarfs. On the one hand he will reinforce and rebuild the enforcement of his camp and on the

other he will let the gargun make maneuvers that will let them appear more than they actually are. This is one of the reasons, a lot of gargun will be seen outside the walls that busy themselves with a lot of activity. An inexperienced eye will therefore judge the camp to contain just over 1,200 orcs if observing only for a few days. Experienced and knowledgeable observers or those observing for more than a week will give a better estimate of 600 – 900.

Other than that, Anrik will try to capture all enemy spies. Since the observation just started, he does not know about the dwarfin activity concerning his stronghold. If he learns about these activities, he will double the work on reinforcements (and will strain his virility some more). To discourage any remaining observers, any caught spy will be brutally tortured, whether dead or alive. After that he will be publicly eaten.

Anrik has little worry about male contenders for kingship, since the clan is fighting for survival, even though a few rumour that he isn't man enough to ensure this. This means that the king will only be attacked if he shows an obvious weakness. The external enemy - the dwarfs - are considered too bad to waste more blood now.

But should the players conceive a way to exhibit such a weakness, then the king will have a lot of internal trouble on his hands. This would be an invaluable aid, should a Khuzdul attack start soon. Such an advantage would surely be rewarded. Another possibility would be a marked shout from an ambush during a public ceremony such as the killing of a hostage.