

City Builder: A Guide to Designing Communities

The Smuggler's Tunnel

By Jim Clunie

Smugglers transport various valuable goods secretly across borders — whether described only by custom, or barred by fortifications, bodies of water, or other geographical barriers — where otherwise the ruling powers forbid them or subject them to heavy taxes. Sometimes they must bypass other physical dangers, as with a city under siege. Hidden underground tunnels and chambers serve the smugglers' purposes either as routes of entry across the border, as temporary storage for consignments of goods until the smugglers can arrange to deliver or sell them to other distributors, or as safe places for the gang to meet, hide, and plan their exploits.

Despite the practical difficulties of excavating and disposing of a significant volume of rock, the level of profits that a smuggling ring can maintain once established — often combined with a sense of injustice against a distant government's taxes and ordinances that sometimes threaten trades that the inhabitants have carried on by right for generations — may spur a remarkable level of effort and ingenuity.

A tunnel network may include natural caves, active or disused mine-shafts, underground routes built for legitimate commerce (e.g., the transport tunnels of Portland, Oregon), and the cellars, basements, or crypts of existing buildings, as well as new tunnels or improvements built for the purpose of smuggling. A lucky band of smugglers might even find and make use of a pre-existing magical effect, created in past ages, which could grant them a considerable advantage as a means of pas-

sage between two points that law-enforcers might never think to cover.

A tunnel's exits may be covered or concealed (perhaps with an elaborate secret mechanism, or under a location that discourages or hinders search, such as a fireplace in current use or a dung-heap), appear as a natural cave or some legitimate underground working, or debouch in an isolated area screened from view. Often, a tunnel connects to a well-known building, such as an inn, a noble's manor, a temple whose priests might either be complicit or ignorant of the trade, a mill, or a ruin that can serve as a landmark.

Inside, smugglers' tunnels must provide a level, well-paved path for porters (known as tub-men), light carts, or beasts of burden to carry heavy loads. The specific location may require props similar to those of a mine to prevent collapse, some means of keeping out water (as the route is naturally likely to run close to the level of any local sea or watercourse on which the smugglers transport their wares) such as drainage trenches — even supplemented by pumps connected to legitimate mills along the route — and lighting, such as brackets for torches or lanterns, beyond the point where it would show to the outside.

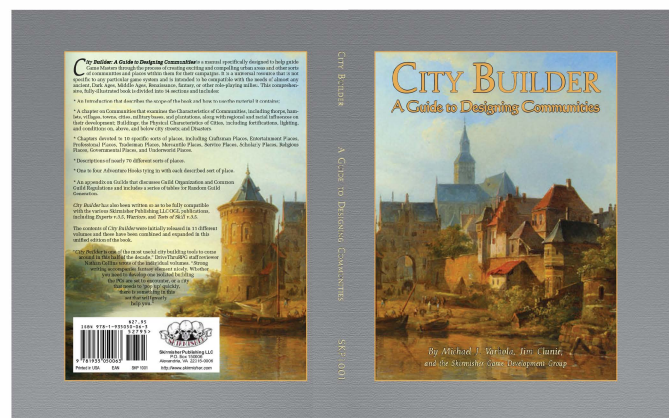
Liquor and other intoxicants are in constant demand and generally taxed as luxuries (if not prohibited as vices), and are thus likely to turn a profit for almost any smuggling trade. A wide variety of other commodities become attractive to smuggle when high duties enable illegal imports to undercut legitimate sales, ranging from

"The Smuggler's Tunnel" is a rules-free description of a specific sort of place that might be found in many different sorts of communities and cultures. It is formatted like the more than 70 places found in the Skirmisher Publishing LLC book City Builder: A Guide to Designing Communities and intended to stand by itself or serve as bonus content to that volume.

Both this article and City Builder overall are intended to be compatible with the needs of almost any ancient, Dark Ages, Middle Ages, Renaissance, fantasy, or other role-playing milieu. It was developed by Jim Clunie, Michael J. Varhola, and the Skirmisher Game Development Group.

City Builder is available both in hardcopy (\$27.95; 174 pages; SKP 1001) and as a PDF download (\$19.99; 174 pages; SKP E 0925) from online sales venues that include DriveThruRPG and the Skirmisher Game Store; hardcopy versions are also available through game stores and Amazon.com.

This comprehensive, fully-illustrated manual is specifically designed to help guide Game Masters through the process of creating exciting and compelling urban areas and other sorts of communities and places within them for their campaigns.



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luxuries such as fine cloth and exotic foods, through staples that the government has targeted for one reason or another, such as salt, soap, spices, or even grain or raw materials such as wool (which the crown of England tried for decades to restrict from export in order to prop up the local weaving industry).

Smugglers may also carry goods that the authorities would prefer to keep out of the common people's hands, such as weapons, political tracts, religious adjuncts, or perhaps even some magic items.

Finally, smugglers can transport people, whether of their own volition, to evade legal restrictions on their movements or threats to their lives, or as indentured servants or slaves.

Once opened, a network of smuggler's tunnels may continue to be used, with ongoing extensions and improvements, for a great many years — or, once all of the smugglers leave the business through retirement or a less peaceful demise, may lie unused and open to the infiltration of unwholesome beings for still longer periods of time. Such lost passageways might contain forgotten caches of contraband or even hoards of coin and other treasures collected as payment.

The locations and organization of smuggling vary greatly with the commodity being transported and characteristics of the area, from many small shipments of necessities to a rural coast, in which nearly every householder of a local village or town might be implicated at least as a customer or small-investor, to highly-organized rings, underwritten by city financiers or noblemen, which bring in large batches of luxury goods within a few days' travel of a major city, thereafter selling them to middlemen at smugglers' markets arranged on near-offshore islands or in out-of-the-way waste areas.

A successful smuggler benefits from physical fitness, boldness and ingenuity, business sense, expertise in his chosen means of transport (such as ship-handling or horsemanship), and a knack for persuading others in the community (whether by trust and goodwill or by threats) to leave well enough alone when they run across his illegal dealings. Often, the leader of a smuggling ring has a public position and occupation that equips him with respect and resources in the community (e.g., an innkeeper). That position, however, often fails to account for his wealth, or the large volume and low price of goods that he seems able to supply.

Builders and operators of a smuggler's tunnel may arise from those skilled in mining and subterranean work (such as Gnomes, Goblins, or Kobolds), from those skilled in transporting goods (such as the inhabitants of fishing villages), or those disadvantaged and not inclined to restrict their profits at the dictates of the local ruler (perhaps among Half-Orcs or humans of a subject population).

Smugglers may follow deities of community and trade, or of the night, the road, or the sea. They are also often infamous, though, for profanely using religious sites, fu-



neral processions, or fear of the undead to deflect interest from their operations, such as concealing goods in crypts or tombs, transporting them in coffins, involving priests in their criminal rings, or masquerading in sinister get-ups to frighten off meddlers.

Smugglers are less likely than other sorts of criminals to build booby-traps around their hideouts, due to their need to negotiate the same places with heavy burdens under conditions of limited visibility, such as at night or during rainstorms. They often warn off uninvolved locals, and even law-enforcers where they outnumber the latter, from their activities, such as by surrounding their landing sites with large forces of guards (bat-men) carrying weapons ranging from clubs to swords, crossbows, and other military arms.

As it involves defiance of any national sovereignty that exists, rather than just local laws, and is a potential avenue to enrich a state's enemies or even to provide passage directly to spies and traitors, royal and national authorities often intervene directly to combat smuggling and punish the perpetrators with great severity when caught. Such measures can greatly increase the violence with which smugglers resist capture or terrorize possible informers, if the severity of smuggling is no less than for assaulting the king's officials or for murder and the penalties are the same.

Adventure Hooks

* A middle-man hires the player characters to transport a group of members of an oppressed race or faith out of the realm, bypassing the border guards and dealing on the way with sickness, frustration, distrust, or betrayal among the refugee band.

* The player characters must intercept ritual items of a malevolent cult, such as a diabolic idol, rare substance, or fitting sacrifice, being smuggled into the kingdom or city to enact a ceremony that if completed will have dire consequences.