

THE SUNLESS CITADEL

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INTRODUCTION

"All things roll here: horrors of midnights,
Campaigns of a lost year,
Dungeons disturbed, and groves of lights;
Echoing on these shores, still clear,
Dead ecstasies of questing knights—
Yet how the wind revives us here!"

—Arthur Rimbaud

The Sunless Citadel is a DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® adventure suitable for four 1st-level player characters. Player characters (PCs) who survive the entire adventure should advance through 2nd level to 3rd level before the finale.

Encounter Levels: *The Sunless Citadel* also accommodates parties of more than four 1st-level players, and it can handle parties of 2nd and possibly even 3rd level who do not mind an initial bit of easy going. That means a group of PCs of more than four players or those who begin the adventure at 2nd or even 3rd level require less time to recover between encounters. It also means that the Dungeon Master (DM) must either divide the total available experience point (XP) awards among more people or award higher-level characters less XP per encounter than what a 1st-level party would gain in the same encounter. When the PCs achieve sufficient XP to advance to their next level, allow them to advance during the course of the adventure. In fact, PCs should advance to 2nd and possibly to 3rd level while adventuring in order to adequately face the final challenges of the module.

PREPARATION

You, the DM, should have a copy of the *Player's Handbook* and the *DUNGEON MASTER'S Guide*. A copy of the *Monster Manual* is also useful.

Text that appears in shaded boxes is player information, which you can read aloud or paraphrase to players when appropriate. Sidebars contain important information for the DM. More often than not, DMs can find abbreviated monster statistics with each encounter. Full monster statistics appear in alphabetical order in the appendix. One of the responsibilities of the DM is to review these statistics before the game starts so as to refresh his or her memory of the more distinctive characteristics of the creatures.

Individual encounters possess an overall rating called the encounter level (EL), if appropriate. The encounter level is not necessarily a tool to calculate total experience points for each encounter. The concept of encounter level is important only as a point of information, allowing you to gauge the strength of a specific encounter at a glance. To calculate experience for a given encounter, refer to the challenge rating provided for each monster in the appendix. Cross-reference the challenge rating of a given monster with the party's average

character level on the Single Monster Challenge Rating table (*DUNGEON MASTER'S Guide*, Ch. 7), then multiply that number by the number of monsters dealt with by the PCs for the total experience award. The total experience award is then divided by the number of PCs (and possibly NPC party members) who were present at the beginning of the encounter.

Before the game begins, DMs may wish to review the rules on light sources in Chapter 9 of the *Player's Handbook*, reread the section on setting up the game in the *DUNGEON MASTER'S Guide*, and review the combat rules.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The PCs are not initially privy to the background information, but they may learn it during the adventure.

This adventure involves a once-proud fortress that fell into the earth in an age long past. Rechristened the Sunless Citadel, its echoing, broken halls now house nefarious races and malign creatures. Evil has taken root at the citadel's core, which is deep within a subterranean garden of blighted foliage. Here a terrible tree and its dark shepherd plot in darkness.

The tree, called the Gulthias Tree, is shepherded by a twisted druid, Belak the Outcast. Belak was drawn to the buried citadel twelve years ago, following stories of oddly enchanted fruit to their source. The druid found an age-old fortress pulled below the earth by some past magically invoked devastation. With the ancient inhabitants long dispersed, vile and opportunistic creatures common to lightless dungeons infested the subterranean ruins. But at the old fortress's core, Belak the Outcast stumbled upon the Twilight Grove. He discovered at the grove's heart the Gulthias Tree, which sprouted from a wooden stake used to slay an ancient vampire.

Upon the Gulthias Tree, magical fruit extrudes forth: A single perfect ruby-red apple ripens at the summer solstice, and a single albino apple ripens at the winter solstice. The midsummer fruit grants vigor, health, and life, while the midwinter fruit steals the same. In the years since Belak's arrival, the enchanted fruit has enjoyed wider dispersal in the surrounding lands, promoting good and ill. But the seed of either fruit, if allowed to sprout, brings forth only ill: Vaguely humanoid and evilly animated stick bundles known as twig blights eventually spring forth.

ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

The Sunless Citadel is a site-based adventure. Player characters discover that rumors of a sunken fortress are true. Heroes deal with monstrous threats and ancient traps, dire vermin and mysterious twig blights, as well as warring kobold and goblin tribes.

Oakhurst: The PCs may occasionally retreat to a nearby small town to recuperate and replenish supplies.

Kobolds: It's possible that diplomatic heroes can avoid strife with the kobolds and strike a bargain with them, but only if the heroes agree to retrieve a lost "pet" for the kobold leader.

Goblins: The adventurers have less luck dealing peacefully with the goblins, who feel confident of their strength and prove unwilling to negotiate.

The Hidden Grove and Environs: Eventually, the daring heroes discover the lower levels of the Citadel, and the Twilight Grove. There, PCs learn the truth of the enchanted fruit. They also must confront and defeat Belak the Outcast and the Gulthias Tree if they hope to win free and feel the light of day again.

CHARACTER HOOKS

Player characters can find the Sunless Citadel within a remote and lonely ravine in any number of campaign settings. Refer to the Overland Map on the inside front cover. The PCs can be drawn to the dungeon via the following methods (which are mutually compatible). Relate the information immediately below to the players as necessary to get them interested in journeying to the dungeon site. Or, you can photocopy the hooks described below, cut them out, and hand one to each of your players (give the same hook to two or more characters if necessary).

Simple Adventuring: You are eager to make a name for yourself. The legend of the Sunless Citadel is well known locally, and stories indicate it is a perfect site for heroes intent on discovery, glory, and treasure!

Contracted: Another party of adventurers, locally based, delved into the Sunless Citadel a month past. They were never seen again. Two human members of that ill-fated adventuring party were brother and sister, Talgen Hucrele (a fighter) and Sharwyn Hucrele (a wizard). They were part of an important merchant family based in the town of Oakhurst. Kerowyn Hucrele, the matriarch of the family, offers salvage rights to you and your team if you can find and return with the two lost members of her family—or at least return the gold signet rings worn by the missing brother and sister. She also offers a reward of 125 gp per signet ring, per PC. If the PCs bring back the Hucreles in good shape (of good mind and body), she offers to double the reward.

Solving a Mystery: The goblin tribe infesting the nearby ruins (called the Sunless Citadel, though no one knows why) ransoms a single piece of magical fruit to the highest bidder in Oakhurst once every midsummer. They've been doing this for the last twelve years. Usually, the fruit sells for around 50 gp, which is all the townspeople can bring themselves to pay a goblin. The fruit, apparently an apple of perfect hue, heals those who suffer from any disease or other ailment. They sometimes plant the seeds at the center of each fruit, hoping to engender an enchanted apple tree. When the seeds germinate in their proper season, they produce a twiggy

mass of twisted sapling stems. Not too long after the saplings reach 2 feet in height, they are stolen—every time. The townsfolk assume that the jealous goblins send out thieves to ensure their monopoly of enchanted fruit. You are interested in piercing the mystery associated with how wretched goblins could ever possess such a wonder, and how they steal every sprouting sapling grown from the enchanted fruit's seed. Moreover, you wish to find this rumored tree of healing, hoping to heal an ailing friend or relative.

RUMORS HEARD IN OAKHURST

Player characters can discover the following additional pieces of information either through Gather Information check, where they spend some time in the local tavern (DC 10), or via roleplaying:

- The Old Road ran right past the nearby ruins of the Sunless Citadel, but fell into disuse because of goblin banditry. No one knows for sure what the Sunless Citadel once was, but old legends hint that it served as the retreat of an ancient dragon cult.
- The Old Road also skirts the Ashen Plain, a lifeless land. Player characters who succeed at a Knowledge check (history, geography, or local, DC 12), or ask someone in Oakhurst know that the desolation is attributed to the ancient rampage of a dragon named Ashardalon.
- Cattleherders don't graze their stock too far afield these days. They're frightened by stories of new monsters that maraud by night. No one has seen these creatures, nor do they leave a discernible trail; however, cattle and people who have been caught out alone have been found dead the next day, pierced by dozens of needlelike claws.
- The missing adventurers include a fighter (Talgen), a wizard (Sharwyn), a paladin of Pelor (Sir Braford), and a ranger (Karakas). Sir Braford was not a local, and he had a magic sword called *Shatterspike*.
- Sometimes the goblins offer another apple at midwinter. This apple is corpse-white and utterly poisonous, even to the mere touch of the skin. No samples of either type of apple remain anywhere near Oakhurst.

The Small Town of Oakhurst

The community closest to the dungeon is a small town called Oakhurst (or a name more appropriate to the DM's campaign); see the Oakhurst Map for the town center. The small town follows the rules noted for a town of its size in the *DUNGEON MASTER'S Guide* in Chapter 4.

👑Oakhurst (small town):

Conventional; AL NG; 1,000 gp limit; Assets 45,000 gp; Population 901; Mixed (human 79, halfling 9, elf 5, dwarf 3, gnome 2, half-elf 1, half-orc 1).

Authority Figures: Mayor Vurnor Leng, male human Ari7.

Important Characters:

Kerowyn Hucrele, female human Com6 (merchant); Dem "Corkie" Nackle, female gnome Clr4 (Pelor/healer); Felosial, female half-elf War3 (constable); Ben, Lu, Jym, and Roda, male and female humans War4 (deputies); Rurik Lutgehr, male dwarf Exp3 (blacksmith); Garon, male human Exp3 ("Ol' Boar Inn" barkeep).

Others: Town guards, War2 (12); Exp3 (8); Rog3 (2); Rgr2 (1); Com1 (782).

Notes: The saplings growing at the edge of town go missing, possibly during the PCs very next visit to Oakhurst. Unbeknownst to the villagers, the saplings animate as twig blights in the dark of night, and they scuttle off on their own, continuing their slow colonization of the surface. See the description for twig blights in the appendix.

- Garon, the barkeep of the Ol' Boar Inn, remembers the last time anyone, aside from Talgen and Sharwyn, asked questions about the Sunless Citadel. About thirteen years ago, a grim man named Belak stopped by, and he had a very large pet tree frog.

TIME OF YEAR

If you would like the PCs to have the opportunity to find either a midsummer or midwinter fruit, begin the adventure a few weeks before either the summer or winter solstice. Apart from making a piece of fruit available on the Gulthias Tree, choosing a season also provides you with additional details to relate to the PCs, which enhances the adventure. If you choose summer, the hills are lush with growth, though the heat sometimes grows oppressive. If the PCs embark during the winter, temperatures hover just above freezing by day and plunge below it at night. The PCs will need heavy winter clothes. Snow and wind conspire to create massive drifts across the Old Road.

DARKNESS

Remember that many of the areas in the dungeon are completely dark until the PCs bring a torch or other light source to bear. Creatures with darkvision, such as dwarves, can see without a light source to a distance of 60 feet in all directions. But, many PCs do not have darkvision, and must resort to artificial light. Creatures with low light vision can see twice as far as noted below.

Light Source	Light	Duration
Candle	5-ft. radius	1 hour
Common lamp	15-ft radius	6 hours/oil pint
Bullseye lantern	60-ft cone	6 hours/oil pint
Torch	20-ft. radius	6 hours/oil pint
Sunrod	30-ft. radius	6 hours
Light	20-ft. radius	10 minutes
Continual flame	20 ft. radius	Permanent

MAPPING

It is difficult to keep track of all the corridors, turns, areas, and other features of a dungeon setting, and the player characters could soon get turned around without a map. Ask for a volunteer to be the party mapper. It's the mapper's job to listen carefully to your description of each area, noting its size and exits, and to record that information on a scratch sheet or graph paper.

MARCHING ORDER

Ask the players to tell you in what order their characters generally walk down corridors. This information lets you know generally where each character is with respect to each other, which is important if the PCs are suddenly attacked or if you need to determine who walks into a trap first.

THE CITADEL AND ENVIRONS

"See the old Dragon from his throne
Sink with enormous ruin down!"

—Hymn

Once the player characters are ready to leave Oakhurst, the adventure truly begins.

The overgrown Old Road winds through rocky downs, near stands of old-growth oak, and past 1d4 abandoned farm shacks. The lonely road is empty of all travelers except for the PCs. The distance between Oakhurst and the Sunless Citadel, via the Old Road, is seven miles. This distance requires half a day of walking for creatures with a speed of 20 (or a quarter of a day for those with a speed of 30). Mounted PCs can cover the distance in a few hours. Player characters who strike off overland, eschewing the road, discover that the rough downs slow travel sufficiently that the trip takes twice as long.

Creatures (EL 2/3): Should the PCs travel or camp by night anywhere between Oakhurst and the Sunless Citadel, they stand a 60% chance per night of falling under attack by a pair of twig blights! If defeated, the blights appear to be loose bundles of snapped and broken twigs.

☛ **Twig Blights (2):** hp 5 each.

Tactics: The twig blights attack under cover of night and from surrounding foliage (if any). They sound like wind blowing through dry leaves as they shuffle forward. Player characters without a light source or the ability to see in the darkness have a -3 penalty to all attack rolls (the moon and stars shed some light). See the appendix for more information on this new monster.

SUNLESS CITADEL KEYED ENTRIES

The following numbered entries refer to the locations noted on the maps.

O. Dark Ravine

Player characters who arrive during daylight hours have a good view of the site, which is depicted on the Sunless Citadel Cutaway Map. If they arrive in the darkness of night, the player characters see only what their light sources (and vision capabilities) allow.

The Old Road passes to the east of a narrow ravine. At the road's closest approach to the cleft, several broken pillars jut from the earth where the ravine widens and opens into something more akin to a deep, but narrow, canyon. Two of the pillars stand

straight, but most of them lean against the sloped earth. Others are broken, and several have apparently fallen into the darkness-shrouded depths. A few similar pillars are visible on the opposite side of the ravine.

The ravine runs for several miles in either direction, with an average depth and width of 30 feet. At the point where it most closely intersects the Old Road, it widens to 40 feet. It also plunges much deeper into the earth near the pillars described above. See the Sunless Citadel Cutaway Map.

If the PCs investigate the area, they discover that the pillars are generally worn and broken, and graffiti in the Dwarven alphabet covers most of them. Characters who know Goblin (after translating the letters from Dwarven) recognize the inscriptions as warnings and threats against potential trespassers. A successful Search check (DC 13) reveals that the area in and around the pillars has hosted countless small campfires—some of them recent (about a month ago). However, someone went to some effort to hide the evidence of the camps from casual scrutiny.

Anyone standing next to the ravine immediately notes a sturdy knotted rope tied to one of the leaning pillars. The rope hangs down into the darkness below. Judging by its good condition, the rope couldn't have been tied there any longer than two or three weeks ago. Player characters can also see older and weathered hand- and footholds carved into the cliff face. These are goblin-carved.

Descending: Player characters can easily climb down the knotted rope (Climb check DC 0), using the wall to brace themselves. They descend 50 feet to the citadel foyer (area 2). Attempts to climb down the naked rock using the carved hand- and footholds are more difficult (Climb check DC 10). A failed Climb check indicates that a clumsy climber falls from a height of 25 feet. The fall inflicts 2d6 points of damage.

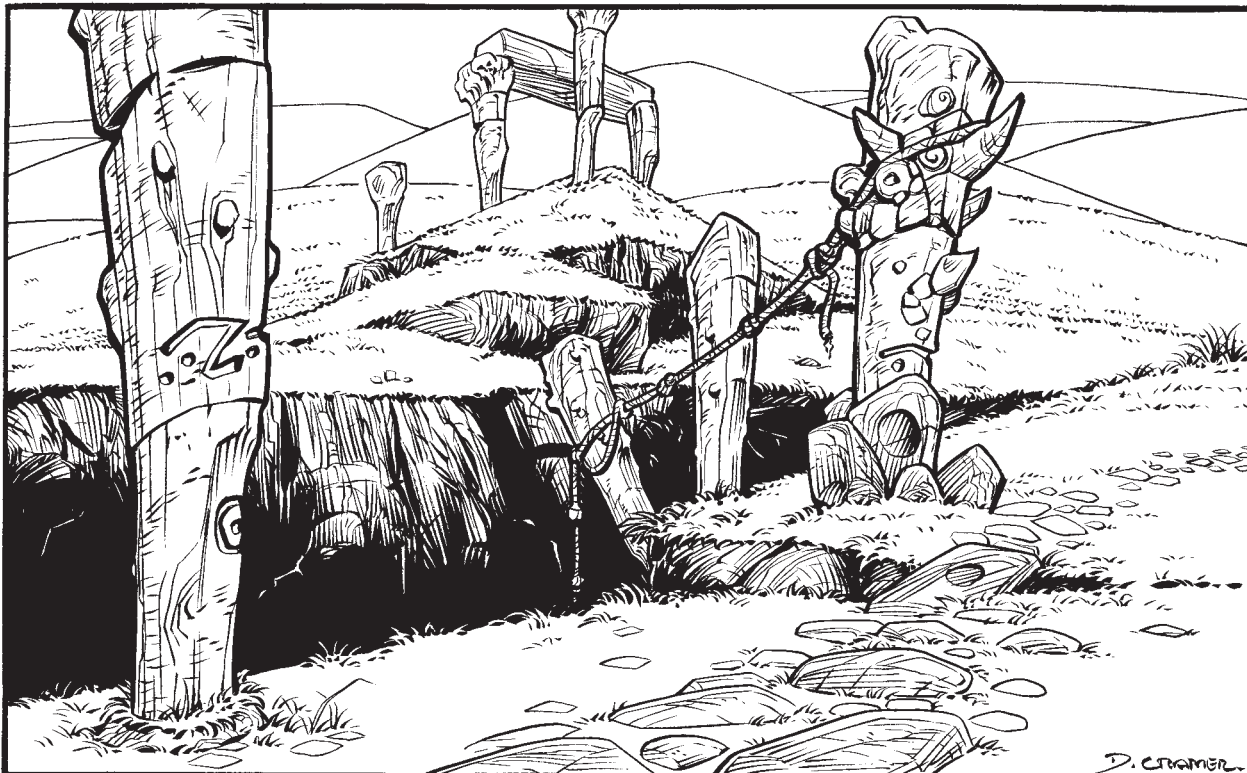
In addition, you should note whether the player characters take extra care to move quietly. Allow those who want to move quietly to make a Move Silently check (opposed by the rats). Make a note of which character first hits the ledge (area 1) by falling or without being quiet about it.

1. Ledge

The ledge is shown on the Sunless Citadel Cutaway Map.

A sandy ledge overlooks a subterranean gulf of darkness to the west. The ledge is wide but rough. Sand, rocky debris, and the bones of small animals cover it. A roughly hewn stairwell zigs and zags down the side of the ledge, descending into darkness.

Even PCs with darkvision cannot see the far wall of the chasm, which is 250 feet to the west, nor the bottom of the subterranean vault, which is 80 feet below. After PCs deal with the monsters, they can search the ledge at their leisure. A successful Search check (DC 13) reveals foot-



Sunless Citadel Overview for the DM

A dragon cult that valued privacy and defense built the Sunless Citadel on the surface long ago. All record of the cult's name has vanished, though various sources believe that it was associated with the dragon Ashardalon. The cataclysm that killed the cult members sunk the fortress at the same time. Because of residual enchantments, much of the structure survived its descent into the earth. With the cultists dead, goblins and other creatures moved in, and they have survived here for hundreds of years.

The goblins once patrolled the area around the ravine (area 0) to rob those who passed by. However, with the Old Road falling out of use over forty years ago, the goblins rarely pay much attention to this entrance. Also, a tribe of kobolds has recently challenged the goblins' ownership of the fortress level. Both groups constantly skirmish one another as they vie for control. Thus, the cleft offers the PCs a good opportunity to gain entry to the dungeon without attracting too much attention. (The missing party that came here before them did much the same; the rope left tied to the pillar was theirs.)

Though both the goblins and the kobolds claim the Sunless Citadel as their property, they've never visited several of its chambers. Likewise, the goblins and kobolds avoid entering the grove level. In the past, they feared that the grove was haunted. With the arrival of the Outcast twelve years ago, their belief is vindicated. Belak the Outcast orders the goblins to distribute the mid-summer fruit each year, and the goblins obey him out of fear.

prints not made by the PCs (they belong to the previous party). The footprints head down the stairs. Extraordinarily large rat prints are likewise abundant. The search also reveals an old ring of stones that contains (and is covered by) the accumulated ash of hundreds of fires, though no fire has been lit here for a few years. The ashes hide rough-hewn spear tips of goblin manufacture and small animal bones from past meals.

Creatures (EL 1): Drawn by the occasional surface animal that accidentally falls into the ravine, three dire rats are sniffing around the rubble. They hide amid the debris at the first scent of PCs above. A dire rat looks like a more feral, 3-foot-long version of a normal rat.

Tactics: Dire rats attack the first PC down the rope who fell or didn't move silently. The dire rats may gain a surprise partial action due to their initially hidden position, and they use these partial actions to close the distance between themselves and their target. The rats attempt to flank the PC, which means that while one rat moves to attack, a fellow rat moves directly opposite the first rat. Both gain a +2 bonus to their attack rolls against the enemy when flanking creatures who fall off the ledge take a total 8d6 points of damage.

➔ **Dire Rats (3):** hp 6, 4, 3.

2. Switchback Stairs

The 5-foot-wide stairs, shown on the Sunless Citadel Cutaway Map and on the Fortress Level Map, are not particularly well made. However, they are not dangerous to any except those who move at a run, which requires a Balance check (DC 13) to avoid falling off at each switchback. Likewise, a melee combat on the stairs could potentially pitch off the stairs any creature who takes a hit for 5 or more points of damage and fails a Balance check (DC 10). Three switchbacks are on the stairs, each of which opens onto a small landing. A fall from the first, second, or third switchback plummets victims to area 3 for 6d6, 4d6, or 2d6 points of damage, respectively. The second and third landing allows those with darkvision a view of the area below.

cracked crenellations, and leaning towers are any indication. All is quiet, though a cold breeze blows up from below, bringing with it the scent of dust and a faint trace of rot.

The stairs on this switchback lead up to area 1, and down to area 3, as shown on the Fortress Level Map.

3. Crumbled Courtyard

The narrow stairs empty into a small courtyard, apparently the top of what was once a crenellated battlement. The buried citadel has sunk so far into the earth that the battlement is now level with the surrounding cavern floor. The floor stretches away to the north and south, and it is apparently composed of a layer of treacherous, crumbled masonry, which reaches to an unknown depth. To the west looms the surviving structure of what must be the Sunless Citadel. A tower stands on the west side of the courtyard.

The stone courtyard, surrounded by crumbled masonry, contains a trap and a wooden door.

Surrounding Masonry Debris: The expanse of crumbled masonry surrounds the entire citadel, as shown on the Fortress Level Map. Player characters attempting to cross it immediately note its unsteadiness. Small characters may plunge down into its unsteady core. Rats and similar creatures can make their way through the rubble unimpeded, but at only 25% of their normal speed. Player characters who press forward despite the dictates of common sense must make a Balance check (DC 15) for each 10 feet of rubble traversed. A failed check indicates a slab of masonry below the PC shifts, dumping that PC into a debris-lined cavity. Climbing back out requires a successful Climb check (DC 15)—a failure dumps the PC back into the cavity. Every time a PC falls into a cavity, the noise is 10% likely to draw one dire rat from the dozens that infest the rubble field. Attracted dire rats, who have no problem squirming through the rubble, attack any PCs still standing on the stable courtyard 3 rounds later, possibly gaining surprise. You can allow PCs to make Listen or Spot checks to see if they notice the rats coming through the rubble.

Trap (EL 1/2): A trapdoor in front of the door leading to area 4 hides a pit trap. A 1-foot-wide catwalk allows safe access to the door, for those who know of the trap. Dwarves and rogues have a chance to find the trap before setting it off.

➔ **Trapdoor Pit:** CR 1/2; 10 ft. deep (1d6); Reflex save negates (DC 16); Search (DC 21); Disable Device (DC 20).

A spring on the trap resets it 3d6 rounds after it is sprung. It contains two long-dead and skeletal goblins, one goblin dead for about a day, and one live dire rat. The rat slipped into the pit to feed on the fresh goblin, but it was caught when the trap reset. If searched, the "freshest"