

# MARGOMODS SUNLESS CITADEL COMPANION

**ANDIE MARGOLSKEE**

Expanded story content, HD maps, and a DM's guide to the Sunless Citadel!



# WHAT IS THIS BOOK?

**W**RITING THIS BOOK STARTED WITH THE DESIRE TO deliver a narratively satisfying story to my players that builds on the wonderful dungeon available in the original 5E *Sunless Citadel* adventure module. *MargoMods Sunless Citadel Companion* is a detailed DM tool that fleshes out new and old NPCs and delves deeper into relationships between factions that cross species boundaries.

All 56 rooms of the original dungeon are included in this expansion as fully detailed and intricate HD maps. All of the material in this expansion is backwards compatible with the published 5E adventure and can be used to either replace the original module or supplement it. Your choice!

All of the information included in this adventure is intended to be taken as fact and supercedes whatever information you might find elsewhere, but as always, Rule Zero applies: the DM (you!) is always right.

This book divides the large dungeon crawl into sections with explicit goals and more targeted combat and social encounters. In the face of the inevitable failure that is attempting to control player chaos, hopefully you find the enclosed encounters and ideas to be fun to play with!

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## ON THE COVER

Goblin warchief Durinn engages in his favorite pastime. Chelsea Crane brings to life a climactic confrontation with the fortress level's first boss.



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# INTRODUCTION

WELCOME TO MARGOMODS *SUNLESS Citadel Companion*, an expansion and DM's guide for the popular classic D&D adventure. In this adventure, players delve into the depths of the *Sunless Citadel* — a sunken fortress home to warring factions, political intrigue, and the growing threat of twisted creatures spilling out of the Twilight Grove below.

The encounters in this book assume milestone leveling for a party of four level 1 characters that reach level 3 by the time they encounter the final boss in the Twilight Grove. This adventure connects easily to the rest of the *Tales from the Yawning Portal*, the *Curse of Strahd* campaign, or the original 8-part 3e Ashardalon adventures.

## WHAT YOU NEED TO RUN THIS ADVENTURE

To run this adventure, you need the *Player's Handbook*, the *Monster Manual*, the 5E *Sunless Citadel* and this PDF. This adventure guide is intended to supplement and not entirely replace the original module, although it may be possible to run this content on its own.

## ADVENTURE OVERVIEW

*Sunless Citadel* contains four primary locations:

- 1. Exploring Oakhurst:** players are told of lost adventurers and magical fruit, both of which are resolved in the Twilight Grove (4, below).
- 2. The kobold den:** the players receive a sidequest involving recovering a pet dragon and potential allies.
- 3. The goblin settlement:** the goblins were exclusively a combat hurdle before reaching the grove below.
- 4. The Twilight Grove:** the players finally uncover the fates of the lost adventurers, discover the secret of the fruit, and confront the druid Belak and his twisted plant creatures.

Both original adventure hooks resolve in the Twilight Grove. This isn't a bad thing: we do want the adventurers to want to confront Belak and his plant monsters in the Twilight Grove. However, the original adventure runs the risk of missing out on the great roleplaying and narrative opportunities provided by the kobold and goblin settlements.

This expansion builds on the two groups to make them interesting in their own right while fleshing out the world they live in. With more comprehensive character motivations and distinct factions within each

tribe, player choices ultimately decide the fates of not just individual NPCs, but entire colonies.

## WHAT IS IN THIS EXPANSION?

Does your party like deep dives into political conflict? Do they love that one NPC that *definitely* has a secret? Do they also love expansive dungeons with traps, fights, and hidden rooms? This expansion has it all — it transforms the original *Sunless Citadel* adventure from a loosely connected set of rooms into a dungeon crawl with a cohesive and flexible narrative framework.

At its core, the central conflicts are driven by NPCs who are too proud and too greedy. This expansion comes with fully realized characters presented in an easy-to-digest format, making it simply to step into their shoes and play them how you want to. NPC Spotlights can be used on their own and can also be found in the standalone NPC Spotlight PDF for easy reference.

## DIRECT CHANGES TO THE ORIGINAL

All references to any racial/species tension and/or racial/species biases are considered non-canonical for this expanded adventure material. They have been replaced with comprehensive character desires and personalities to expand cross-faction and cross-species allegiances and conflicts.

For example, the description of the goblin chief Durnn in the original *Sunless Citadel* 5e adventure module suggests that Durnn is more willing to die than to surrender if the opposition includes kobolds. In this adventure, Durnn is unwilling to negotiate with anyone he views as “weaker” than him. Besting him in battle or through a show of strength can bring Durnn to the negotiation table, regardless of his opponents' species and who they choose to work with.

## LAYOUT

This book has four chapters. The first describes the history of the *Sunless Citadel*, which is a summary of information found across multiple official adventure modules. Chapters 2–4 describe the adventure itself, presented in the order that the players are likely to encounter the content if you follow the encounters laid out here.

Within each chapter, you'll find sections that correspond to major territories within the dungeon (for example, the Ordahir territory is A13–A24). Each area subset will have an Area Overview, an Example Area Progression, and a list of NPCs that can be found in this section of the dungeon. The Example Area Progression

isn't intended to be followed strictly, but it should give you an idea of how each section of the dungeon works.

## NOTE ON FORMATTING

When creatures or named NPCs are mentioned for the first time in an encounter, they are in bold type for easy reference. If it's a new creature their entry will be included nearby, otherwise please reference the Monster Manual or 5th Edition SRD. Magic items and spells are italicized and other miscellaneous notes are in green.

## ADVENTURE ROADMAPS

The Adventure Roadmaps provided are intended to be quick references for evaluating how NPCs and the results of NPC-initiated events might change as player chaos leaves its fingerprint on the adventure. Each group playing this adventure will have different goals and make different choices and we want to make sure those choices are meaningful. Many of these events can occur without player input, but the resolution of these events depends entirely on what the players do (or don't do). Please view these roadmaps as rough guidelines and not as firm rules.

### INTERACTING WITH NPCs

The kobolds and goblins in this adventure are intended to be played as NPCs that interact with the player characters in ways expanding well beyond combat.

While picking fights with NPCs is a part of any D&D game, the narrative suggestions and NPC motivations are less fun and less useful if every encounter ends in combat.

## ADVENTURE HOOKS

The Sunless Citadel can be located in any location in a remote and lonely ravine. This book assumes the party is starting the module in or on the way to the *Sunless Citadel* or **Oakhurst** (as in the original).

### NEW ADVENTURE HOOKS:

The following plot hooks are intended to draw the players to explore the dungeon and thrust them into the center of the ongoing conflict between the kobolds and goblins. Relate the information below to the players as necessary to get them interested in journeying to the dungeon site.

The first hook encourages players to take part in the conflict directly. The second hook inspires them to ask questions about the Cult of Ashardalon — inevitably putting them in conflict (or allegiance) with key NPCs like Rahg, Gulthias, and Belak.

**Answering the Call:** The kobolds that recently settled in the Sunless Citadel have encountered violent resistance from goblins and other creatures. Answering

the call of the Citadel's kobold captain of the guard, Rahg, you left your home to assist in defending and expanding the kobold's fledgling settlement. He seemed to hint at a greater purpose, but didn't provide many details.

**Seeking the divine:** The Sunless Citadel is rumored to have been built in ages long past by a cult that worshipped Ashardalon: an ancient red dragon revered by some as a god. You've heard that the Citadel has not been fully explored by its inhabitants and is likely to still contain secrets and treasure relating to the history of Ashardalon. Whether it's gold or information, you know the Citadel's halls contain something worth your time.

### ORIGINAL ADVENTURE HOOKS:

For your convenience, here are the original adventure hooks:

**Going for Glory.** 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 place that holds promise for those intent on discovery, glory, and treasure!

**Rescue Mission.** 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 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 nearby village 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 character. If the characters bring back the Hucreles in good shape (of good mind and body), she offers to double the reward.

**Solving a Mystery.** The goblins living in the nearby ruins, called the Sunless Citadel sell 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. 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 twiggly mass of twisted sapling stems. Not too long after the saplings reach 2 feet in height, they are stolen—every time. The townsfolk assume the goblins send out thieves to ensure their monopoly on enchanted fruit. You are interested in piercing the mystery associated with how the goblins came to 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.

# DM ADVENTURE HOOK CHEATSHEET

## 1. ANSWERING THE CALL

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**Rahg** intends to violently overthrow **Yusdrayl** in an effort to impress **Belak** and gain access to secrets pertaining to Ashardalon.

### CLUES

- Rahg himself tries to recruit the party (e.g. A25) and reveals his plan to join Belak if the party helps him in his coup.
- Letters found in Rahg's desk in the prison (A18) detail his connection to **Durnn** and Belak.
- **Calcryx** freely shares details about Rahg's plans, including his desire to join Belak and Gulthias.

### RESOLUTION

Beyond overthrowing Yusdrayl, to ensure the safety of the kobold settlement, the party must deal with the threat of the Durbuluk as well as Belak and his monsters. Even if the party is working with Rahg, Belak is still a threat. Belak ultimately wants to turn Rahg (and the party) into thralls of the tree.

## 2. SEEKING THE DIVINE

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Rumors of ancient relics associated with Ashardalon are in fact true. There are two draconic relics the party can obtain: **Rahg's** broken sword *Toothpick*, and **Durnn's** warhorn *Blight's Call*, which are one of Ashardalon's fangs and claws respectively. They may also find the desecrated *Reincarnate* spell (A12) and find active dragon shrines in A9, A46, and A51.

### CLUES

- Rahg's notes in his desk in the prison (A18) refer to the two draconic relics and the dragonpriest's experiments (A12).
- A successful DC15 Nature check on Rahg's sword or Durnn's horn reveal them to be a dragon's fang and claw respectively.
- **Belak's** notes and treasure in his study (A53) detail much of what he learned about Ashardalon from Gulthias.

### RESOLUTION

How much the party finds out depends on how far they dig, but they will inevitably encounter **Gulthias** and various relics associated with Ashardalon along with abundant treasure and information throughout.

## 3. GOING FOR GLORY

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There is an abundance of treasure and secrets throughout the fortress, such as *Nightcaller* in A27.

### RESOLUTION.

The resolution of this original hook is similar to *Seeking the Divine*.

## 4. RESCUE MISSION

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The adventuring party consisting of **Sharwyn** and **Talgran Hucrele**, **Sir Braford**, and **Karakas** traveled to the fortress, where they all died at the hands of goblins (Karakas & Talgran) or **Belak/Gulthias** (Sharwyn & Sir Braford).

### CLUES

- Karakas can be found in the northeastern rat's nest (A30), which Grenl and Durnn both know.
- Talgran is dead at the bottom of the 80 foot drop to the Grove (A42) because Durnn murdered him.
- Sharwyn and Sir Braford are thralls of the tree and can be found when the party confronts Gulthias and Belak.

### RESOLUTION

None of the adventurers can be saved. This hook resolves with Sharwyn and Sir Braford likely being the last to die, since they die 24 hours after the Gulthias tree is destroyed.

## 5. SOLVING A MYSTERY

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People throughout local areas have been buying fruit that can heal illnesses, but when they plant the seeds, the saplings disappear. These saplings are becoming **twig blights** and walking away on their own, which threatens the surrounding areas because they can perpetuate the spread of the blight themselves (e.g. refer to Chapter 1 or A49).

### CLUES

- Elements of the life cycles of the blights can be found in **Gork's** journal in the garden galleries (A48) and in the northernmost arboretum (A49).
- Any goblin can confirm that they are not stealing the fruit after two weeks of growth, which requires another mechanism for the saplings disappearing.
- The party encounters blights either during travel, during a long rest, or finally in the grove (A55–56).
- **Belak** freely reveals that the tree grew from a stake used to slay the vampire **Gulthias**.

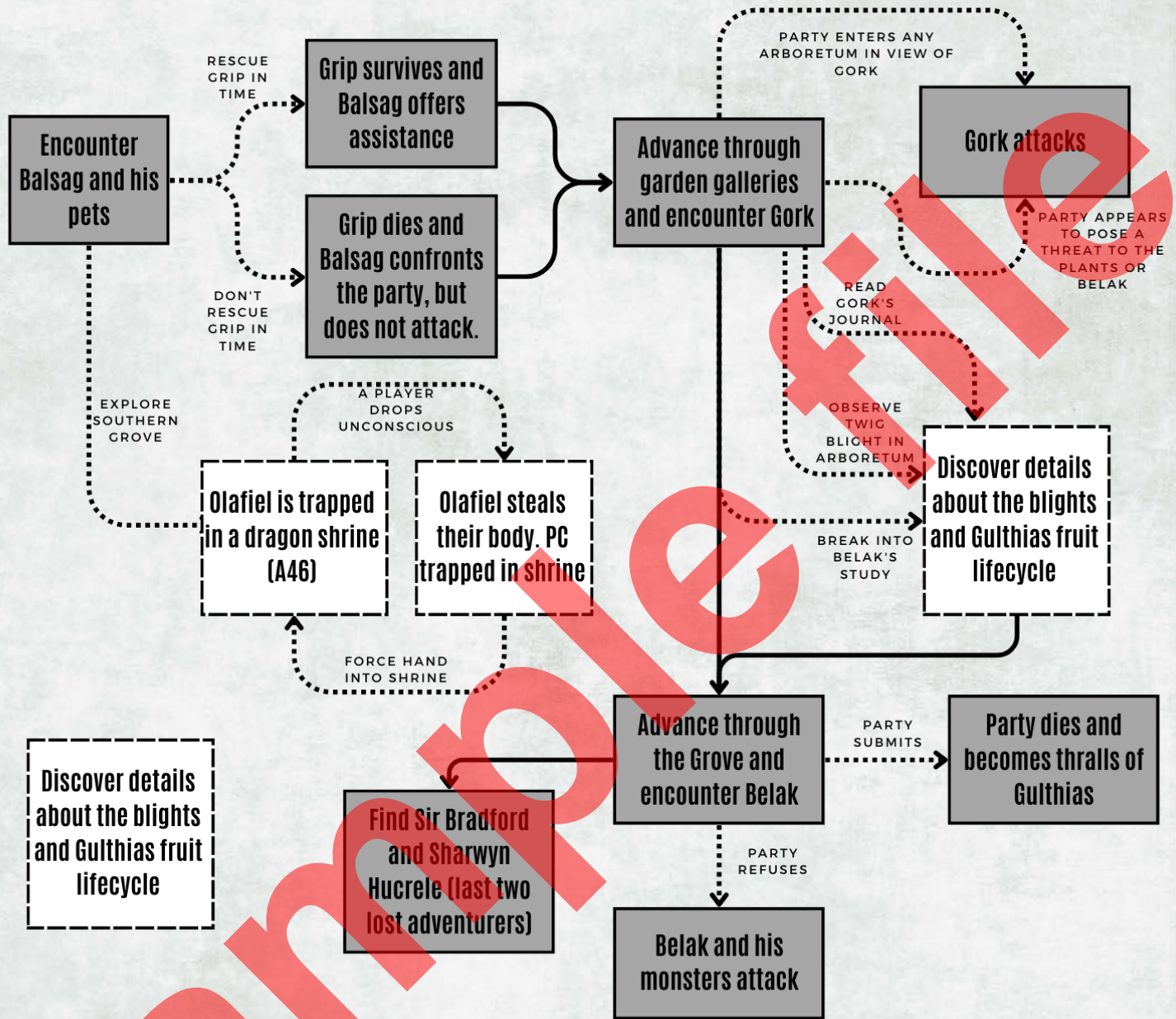
### RESOLUTION

The truth that the Gulthias tree produces the fruit and that the seeds eventually produce the blights they have been fighting ultimately resolves the mystery. The party can also learn that the tree was created from a vampire and the fruit is therefore spreading the influence of an evil undead creature.





# ADVENTURE ROADMAP PART 2



**GRAY BOXES:** Chapter 4

**SOLID ARROWS** indicate mandatory adventure events.

**DOTTED ARROWS** indicate adventure paths determined by player choice.

**DASHED BOXES** indicate optional events.

# CHAPTER 1:

## A Brief History

**T**HE PROMISE OF A MAGICAL HEALING fruit has recently brought more attention to the Sunless Citadel and its surrounding towns. Goblins sell a ruby-red apple near the summer solstice, which heals those who eat it. Unbeknownst to many, the fruit is born

by a cursed tree — the byproduct of an ancient evil trapped in the Twilight Grove below the fortress.

The Citadel was originally built on the surface by a sect of draconic cultists — elves who worshipped the ancient red dragon Ashardalon. The following descriptions include information and citations from various adventure modules along the classic 8-part Ashardalon adventure path, especially the *Heart of Nightfang Spire* (HNS) and the *Bastion of Broken Souls* (BBS).

### GULTHIAS AND THE CULT OF ASHARDALON

Centuries ago, the vampire Gulthias traveled to the Sunless Citadel, where he was staked and trapped. From his body in the Twilight Grove, the **Gulthias Tree** grew. The tree produces cursed fruit that, when planted, creates twisted plant creatures known as blights.

**Gulthias** has a long history of serving the ancient red dragon, Ashardalon (HNS 2). Ashardalon fled this plane for the Bastion of Unborn Souls after a grievous wound (BBS pp. 28), leaving his followers behind in the Material Plane. As the head of a sect of Ashardalon's followers, Gulthias was tasked with preparing for Ashardalon's return. Expecting a long wait and in an effort to resuscitate the heart Ashardalon left behind, Gulthias and his followers took their own lives in a ritualistic sacrifice. As a result, they became undead themselves (HNS, 2).

*“With a magic born of equal parts skill, faith, and desperation, Gulthias rekindled the heart, but not to life. Forsaking life himself, he invested a portion of his newfound undead power into the organ. With this catalyst, the heart was preserved, and it now serves as the center of faith and necromantic power for the cult, reborn in undead darkness”*

*-Heart of Nightfang Spire (p. 28)*

Gulthias returns in a subsequent adventure (the Heart of Nightfang Spire), so he clearly was not killed by the stake. Ultimately, even the destruction of the Gulthias Tree that imprisons him at the end of this adventure doesn't kill him — it frees him.

Gulthias's reason for coming to the Sunless Citadel is not stated anywhere in the 8-part adventure series. A compelling reason could be a necromantic power source or ritual. The failed dragonpriest and his magic (SC Area 11) serve as the perfect explanation for Gulthias's exploration of the Sunless Citadel.

In this expansion, the **dragonpriest** was a victim of his own failed magic. He was working on modifying the *Reincarnate* spell to create a way for Ashardalon to return to the Material Plane. Typically, the only result of a *Reincarnate* spell are humanoids. However, he was attempting to modify the spell to work for a red dragon. His experiments ended in failure and when the dragonpriest tried the spell on himself, he became a troll instead. His fellow cultists entombed him for practicing profane magic. Magic of this kind would be very enticing to Gulthias — with Ashardalon's heart and a modified *Reincarnate* spell, Gulthias might think he could return his lord to the Material Plane.

## THE STATUS QUO IN THE SUNLESS CITADEL

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Many centuries have passed since the cataclysm that sunk the Citadel — the resident goblins and kobolds have had ample time to develop their own small civilizations and culture.

**Durnn** has taken his role as current leader of the goblin settlement by force, and is too proud to back down from the pressures of the encroaching kobolds and their leader **Yusdrayl**. Yusdrayl is too ambitious to give up her quest to control the Gulthias fruit, though she is totally unaware of the fruit's connection to the blights and Gulthias Tree.

Dissatisfaction brews in both groups. The kobolds' captain of the guard, **Rahg**, believes he would be a better leader and has been working in secret with Durnn to negotiate peace. **Grenl**, the only councilmember to survive Durnn's culling of the elder council, believes Durnn's aggressive actions endanger their future, but is powerless to stop him.

Before the adventurers arrive, Durnn and Rahg together organized the capture of the kobold's white dragon wyrmling, **Calcryx**, leaving the kobolds on the precipice of revolution and the goblins with precarious control of a living weapon. Rahg finally has the political advantage to usurp Yusdrayl. Unfortunately for him, the players arriving changes the whole equation.

Here I describe the key factions and NPCs causing the tense situation that the party walks into.

### THE ORDAHIR

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The kobolds are relative newcomers to the citadel and refer to themselves as the Ordahir (“Groundbreakers” in Draconic).

The ongoing conflict with the goblins raises an important question: why are kobolds here? Moreover, why would commoners who are not prepared for combat be here?

### YUSDRAYL'S FOLLOWERS

What Yusdrayl lacks in leadership experience, she makes up for in ambition and a knack for magic.

Those that followed her to the citadel are an eclectic bunch. The allure of mystery and relics enticed scholars and scientists to join her expedition, while others looking to heal loved ones (or themselves) desperately cling to her promise of a miracle cure. They didn't expect and weren't prepared for Durnn's violent resistance.

Yusdrayl promises conditions will improve soon, but her inability to secure peace has sown the seeds of discontent.

### RAHG'S FOLLOWERS

Rahg secretly leads a sect of the Cult of Ashardalon. He and his followers want to reclaim their ancestral home and delve into the depths of the Sunless Citadel to find a method to bring their god back to the Mortal Plane.

Rahg and his followers were surprised and revolted to discover Yusdrayl kept a white dragon wyrmling in a cage. Worse, Yusdrayl was losing the war. In secret, Rahg and Durnn have been working together to release the dragon from captivity, broker peace, and violently remove Yusdrayl from power. Once those goals are achieved, Rahg can finally set his sight on his true goal: his god's resurrection.

### THE DURBULUK

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The Durbuluk (“Dominator” in Goblin) have lived in the Sunless Citadel for centuries, subsisting off of food gathered in the Underdark and goods stolen from passersby. Until recently, the goblins in the fortress never caused enough trouble to draw the eye of outsiders. Durnn's aggressive rule and the dissemination of the Gulthias Fruit have drawn the attention of the kobold newcomers and multiple parties of adventurers.

### THE OLD WAY

Despite their aggressive-sounding name, the Durbuluk have abided by a simple code for centuries: “*Stay Small, Stay Safe.*” This way of life has helped them live in the citadel with little to no trouble from outsiders.

To them, stealing is a part of nature — what is eating fruit from a tree if not stealing? Their culture, predicated on the temporary nature of ownership, teaches its children not to take theft personally — just steal it back! Durnn is much more territorial, possessive, and aggressive than any of the prior goblin chiefs.

### CHIEF DURNN

Now that he has murdered all but one of the elders previously leading the goblins, Durnn and his hobgoblin crew seek to expand their territory. Abandoning the Old Way, Durnn agreed to disseminate the fruit of the Gulthias tree for its druidic tender, Belak the Outcast. Their deal benefits them both, though Durnn only knows the fruit provides a reliable source of income as rumors of the fruit's healing properties lure intrepid adventurers and their goods to the fortress.

### ELDER COUNCIL: GRENL

Grenl is the only living member of the Durbuluk's prior ruling council. She serves as Durnn's advisor and the Durbuluk shaman. Her life was spared simply due to her botanical and shamanic knowledge — Durnn hopes she can foster the growth of their very own Gulthias Tree. She has been unsuccessful thus far.

## BELAK THE OUTCAST

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**Belak's** influence is ever-present in this campaign — in fact, much of the conflict is ultimately his doing. He is responsible for ordering Durnn to stop selling fruit — the main reason the previous adventuring party led by the Hucrules came to the Citadel, where they all eventually died.

### BELAK AND THE GOBLINS

Belak gives the goblins the Gulthias fruit to sell, which has drawn outsider attention to the Durbuluk. He also gave Durnn a magical warhorn that allows him to briefly control the blights spawned by the Gulthias tree while magically fueling Durnn's rage and greed. If not for Belak, Durnn would likely never have murdered the Durbuluk elders, nor would he be so hellbent on accruing more power.

### BELAK AND THE KOBOLDS

Rahg has communicated with Belak through a series of letters that the players can find (e.g. A18 and A53). Rahg's actions are driven in part by his desire to impress Belak, who he hopes can share more information about Ashardalon and connect him with Gulthias, the revered leader of the cult that Rahg belongs to.

### BELAK'S GOALS

Belak's goals align with Gulthias. Gulthias wants to create "a nation-state under his rule" (HNS, 28) that worships Ashardalon, while Belak wants to "expand nature's reach" (S.C. Area 56).

Belak is obsessed with the blights and the Gulthias tree. They are, to his knowledge, entirely new, unique, and fascinating. The fruit of the Gulthias tree functions as both a poison and a cure.

Ultimately, Belak shares the same goals as Gulthias — to spread the seed of the Gulthias tree. As written in the original module, the fruit's seeds don't produce more Gulthias trees - it produces an entirely different creature (twig blights!). As a druid and a botanist interested in the cycle of life, the complete lack of a normal life cycle would be deeply fascinating to Belak. Belak sees himself as Gulthias's servant and has dedicated his life to figuring out how to make the Gulthias tree self-sustaining. Without a mechanism to spread Gulthias's blights more broadly, Belak's and Gulthias's plans for large-scale domination and subjugation would be doomed from the start.

## BELAK'S RESEARCH

Belak's research has uncovered new blights and new plant-animal hybrids beyond the *Monster Manual*.

Fleshing out blight options a bit gives us more wiggle room in narrative structuring and makes it easier to show players what Belak is really after — without explicitly telling them!

**The Gulthias "fruit".** (Excerpted from the original) Two magical fruits (evocation school) ripen on the tree each year. Each fruit resembles an apple, but it slowly extrudes from the tree like a cyst. Up to a week before the summer solstice, a ruby red fruit grows. Someone other than a construct who eats a quarter or more of it regains 70 hit points. In addition, any blindness, deafness, and diseases affecting the eater end. Up to a week before the winter solstice, a sickly white fruit grows. Someone who eats a quarter or more of it takes 70 necrotic damage. Each fruit has 1d4 seeds that, if planted, grow leafless woody shrubs that animate as twig blights after one year.

**Planting Gulthias seeds.** The original module establishes that planting the seeds produces twig blights after one year. Great. What happens when we plant the seeds of the poisonous fruit? Belak has a stockpile of these, since the fruit that is usually sold is the healing fruit. Let's make those produce nastier blights when planted (refer to this expansion's **prickle blights**).

**Eating Gulthias seeds.** Sure, eating the red fruit heals you and the white fruit hurts you, but what happens if you eat the seeds? Animals eating seeds is a crucial mechanism that many fruits use to spread their offspring. Instead of taking root in the soil after passing through an animal's system, let's have them take root in the gut of the animal itself. The **blightsnake** in this book is an example of this process. This also gives us some potential variety in outcomes — what happens if you implant a seed in an undead creature? Is it the same for a bear versus a rat?

**Grafting plants.** Plants can be grafted and grow together, potentially inheriting the traits of both plants. Let's step this up a notch and have twig blights intentionally bind themselves to other plants to create new varieties of blights in whatever form we want. After 24 hours of sustained contact with a tree, a twig blight can become fully incorporated into the plant to create a new hybrid — even one potentially capable of spreading more blights! This helps us explain the existence of other existing blights like **vine blights**, **needle blights**, and **tree blights**, while also giving us a framework for creating new ones.

# CHAPTER 2

## Journey to the Sunless Citadel

**T**HE PLAYERS TRAVEL TO THE SUNLESS Citadel along the Old Road (as in the original adventure module) or through the Underdark tunnels. The following encounter works just as well on a set of roads with the same layout as the tunnels if you want to use the Old Road.

The party must travel for hours through the vast network of tunnels surrounding the Sunless Citadel to reach the fortress. Food is plentiful — edible purple mushrooms line the walls and light the way. Most creatures have been scared away or hunted by the **goblin** and **kobold** inhabitants of the Sunless Citadel.

Traversing the Underdark without a guide is possible, but risky. If the party decides to travel without a guide, consider imposing a level of exhaustion or using skill challenges (e.g. survival checks for navigation and dexterity checks for dodging falling debris).

### DM NOTE: BREAKING THE ICE

To start a new campaign in the middle of the action consider the following:

- (1) Make **Kon**, a young kobold, their guide by default. Kon has offered their services to the party for a small fee (e.g. a day's rations). Kon regularly leads travelers to the Sunless Citadel.
- (2) Establish that the party has already exchanged names and have agreed to travel together, at least to the Sunless Citadel.
- (3) After "What do you do?" on the next page, I have the players roll initiative.
- (4) On each player's turn, have them introduce their characters (what do they look like, what information would they have shared with the strangers they are traveling with, etc.). They can then continue their turn and explore, roleplay, or do whatever else they'd like.

### NPC SPOTLIGHT: KON

Kon (he/they) has the **kobold** statblock from the *Monster Manual*, but they learned *Spare the Dying* from their husband **Erky** (SC Area 34). Kon is a member of the kobold colony living in the citadel, but he spends very little time there — instead, he spends most of his time attempting to hire himself out to travelers.

**APPEARANCE.** A tiny and jittery copper-scaled kobold. Their smiles often seem a bit forced.

**PERSONALITY.** Talks fast and is terrified of everything. He tries not to talk too much to hide his nervousness.

**SECRET.** Goblin raiders have held Kon's partner, Erky, hostage in the Durbuluk prison for about a year. In exchange for Erky's continued safety, Kon is being forced to lead travelers into ambushes.

**LOVES.** Erky. Kon became a cleric because they wanted to be supportive of Erky's religion while they were dating, but they never really had the knack for magic. The one spell they learned, *Spare the Dying*, was the only thing that stuck - and only because they don't know what they'd ever do if Erky died.

**KNOWS.** Basic information about the Durbuluk and its leader, **Durnn**, who Kon believes to be the source of the conflict. He also knows Erky is held in the Durbuluk prison, somewhere in the northern part of the fortress. He hasn't seen Erky in months.

### KON

*Small humanoid cleric (kobold), chaotic neutral*

**Armor Class** 12  
**Hit Points** 5 (2d6 - 2)  
**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
7 (-2)	15 (+2)	9 (-1)	8 (-1)	7 (-2)	8 (-1)

**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 8  
**Languages** Common, Draconic  
**Challenge** 1/8 (25 XP) **Proficiency bonus** +2

**Sunlight Sensitivity.** While in sunlight, Kon has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

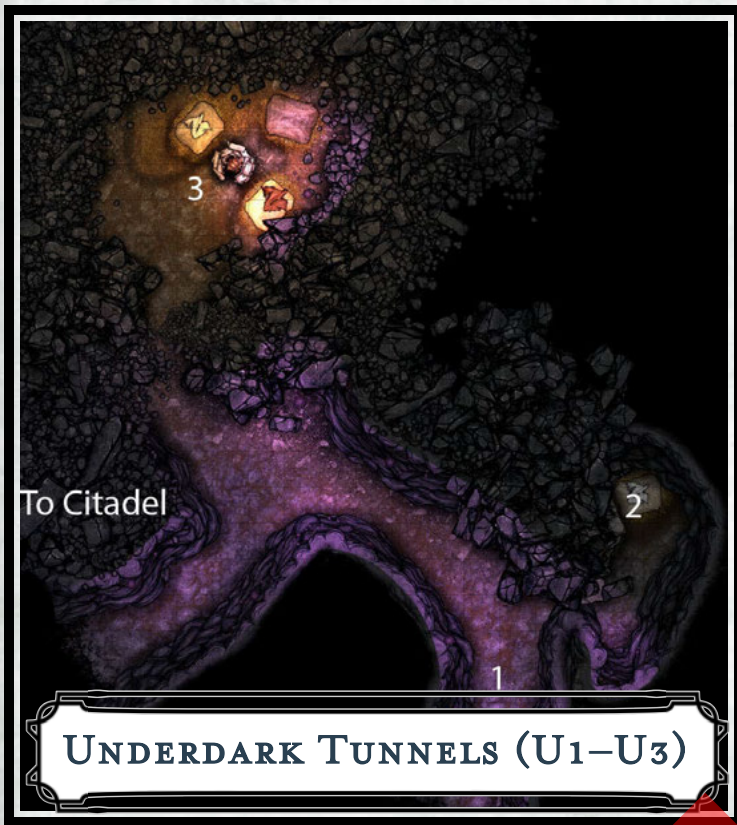
**Pack Tactics.** Kon has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the kobold's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

**Spellcasting.** Kon is a level 1 spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Wisdom. He knows the following cleric spell:

Cantrips (at will): spare the dying.

### ACTIONS

**Dagger.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5ft., one target.  
*Hit* 4 (1d4 + 2)



## AREA OVERVIEW

These rubble-strewn tunnels are frequently used to ambush travelers. Three **goblin** raiders (CR 1/4 **goblins**, AC 15, 7 HP, with 3/4 cover in the rubble) have a small camp behind the rubble (U3) and a fourth hides in U2. The tunnels smell faintly of smoke fumes and signs of combat are only visible after approaching U3.

### EXAMPLE AREA PROGRESSION

1. **Kon** dashes ahead and out of view.
2. **Advancing stealthily**, the party finds signs of combat.
3. **Entering U2**, the scout is alerted and sounds the alarm. **Goblins** prepare (out of view) in U3 atop the rubble. Combat begins.
4. **After combat**, Kon begs the party to save his husband **Erky** from the goblins imprisoning Erky and forcing Kon to lure travelers into ambushes.

## (U1-U3) ENCOUNTER: AMBUSH IN THE UNDERDARK

Durbuluk **goblin** raiders have prepared an ambush.

### ENCOUNTER GOALS

**Establish the Durbuluk threat.** This is the first contact with a recurring enemy (the Durbuluk led by Durnn).

**Raise the stakes.** The threat is made real if any or all of the players are knocked out. Don't worry — they will find safety with the kobolds once they reach the Citadel! Kon can use *Spare the Dying* if anyone is near death.

## TACTICS

**Surprise.** Enemies take a surprise round if/when they attack before being spotted.

**Rescuing forces.** If the players are losing badly, have the guard captain **Rahg** swoop in and save the party with a squad of four **kobolds** (see *Monster Manual*).

### SPICING UP THE ENCOUNTER

Consider environmental hazards usable by both players and enemies or bring in enemy reinforcements from behind.

**Rockslide.** A creature on top of the rubble may use their action to attempt to trigger a rockslide in a 10 ft. cone. Each creature inside of the area of effect must succeed on a DC12 Dexterity saving throw or take 1d4+2 bludgeoning damage and be knocked prone.

**Reinforcements.** Interesting (and difficult) reinforcements could include **prickle blights**, or a **goblin boss** with more **goblins**.

### AREA U1. AMBUSH APPROACH

**Keep momentum high.** We want players to move forward to trigger the ambush. After rolling initiative, they can introduce their character on their turn and jump into combat. Read or paraphrase the following:

PHOSPHORESCENT MUSHROOMS CAST A DIM PURPLE glow on the rough stone walls pressing in around you. The occasional sound of dripping water or small creatures skittering in the dark are enough to startle your kobold guide, Kon, who has promised to bring you to the Sunless Citadel. After countless hours of walking, climbing, and crawling, you round a corner where you see large piles of rubble from an apparent cave-in.

“Almost there - see those fallen rocks? Lots of cave-ins near the fortress. Just through that passage here and we'll arrive.”

The winding passage bends to the left, obscuring your view of what lies ahead. Kon rounds the corner and the party loses sight of him. What do you do?

Kon has ducked off to the left, quickly rounding the bend. The party is far from the first group Kon has led into this trap. The party is likely suspicious, but it is difficult to make out anything unusual from U1.