

THE SUNLESS CITADEL

*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

THIS ADVENTURE CONCERNS A ONCE-PROUD fortress that fell into the earth in an age long past. Now known as the Sunless Citadel, its echoing, broken halls house 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. He was drawn to the buried citadel twelve years ago, following stories of oddly enchanted fruit to their source. The druid found an old fortress that had been swallowed up by the earth in some sort of magically invoked devastation. With the previous inhabitants long dispersed, vile and opportunistic creatures common to lightless dungeons infested the subterranean ruins. At the core of the old fortress, Belak stumbled upon the Twilight Grove. He discovered at the grove's heart the Gulthias Tree, which sprouted from a wooden stake that was used to slay an ancient vampire.

A perfect, ruby-red apple ripens on the Gulthias Tree at the summer solstice, and the tree produces a single albino apple 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 been widely dispersed through the surrounding lands, promoting good and ill. The seeds of either fruit, if allowed to sprout, grow into small plant monsters known as twig blights.

ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

During their trip through the Sunless Citadel, characters deal with monstrous threats and ancient traps, as well as warring tribes of kobolds and goblins. The adventure is designed for four 1st-level player characters. They should advance through 2nd level to 3rd level before the finale. The adventure has four basic parts:

1. Oakhurst. Although it isn't part of the adventure per se, the village of Oakhurst can provide the characters with valuable information about the citadel. They can also use Oakhurst as a place to recuperate and replenish supplies.

2. Kobold Den. The characters' foray into the citadel begins with an incursion into the most accessible areas of the fortress, where a tribe of kobolds has taken up residence. The characters can avoid strife with the kobolds by agreeing to retrieve a lost pet for the kobold leader, and they might be able to persuade the kobolds to join their side.

3. Goblin Lair. The goblins that live deeper inside the citadel consider themselves the owners of the place. They defend themselves aggressively against intrusion, making it difficult to avoid combat with them.

4. Hidden Grove. Eventually, the characters discover the lower level of the citadel and the Twilight Grove that lies within. There, they learn the truth about the enchanted fruit, and they must confront Belak the Outcast and the Gulthias Tree.

RUNNING THE ADVENTURE

To enhance the experience of the players and help you do your best job as Dungeon Master, take the following pieces of advice and information into consideration.

MAPPING

It can be 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 by sketching on a sheet of paper.

PLACING THE ADVENTURE

The Sunless Citadel is designed to be easily located in whatever setting the DM prefers. Here are some examples.

Dragonlance. On Krynn, the citadel was once part of Xak Tsaroth, and it harbored worshipers of Takhisis. When that city was destroyed during the cataclysm, it fell into a rift that opened in the earth. In this setting, consider replacing the kobolds in the adventure with gully dwarves.

Eberron. Located near the western edge of the Mournland, the citadel was an ancient ruin even during the time of the Last War. Agents of Cyre used it as a way point for conducting espionage against neighboring realms. On the Day of Mourning, the earth opened up and swallowed the place. The Mournland is within sight of the rift.

Forgotten Realms. On Faerûn, the Sunless Citadel was once a secret stronghold of the Cult of the Dragon, located in the foothills northwest of Thundertree. It plunged into the earth when Mount Hotenow erupted and threw Neverwinter into chaos.

Greyhawk. The Sunless Citadel is a ruined Baklunish stronghold that was cast into the bowels of the earth when the Suel Imperium unleashed the Invoked Devastation. It is located in northwestern Bissel, in the foothills west of Thornward.

TIME OF YEAR

If you would like the characters to have the opportunity to find a 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 provides you with additional details to set the scene, which enhances the adventure.

If you choose summer, the hills are lush with growth, though the heat sometimes grows oppressive. If the characters embark in the winter, temperatures hover just above freezing during the day and plunge below it at night.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Adventurers can find the Sunless Citadel within a remote and lonely ravine. The characters can be drawn to the dungeon for any of the following reasons. Relate the information below to the players as necessary to get them interested in journeying to the dungeon site.

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 goblin tribe infesting the nearby ruins, called the Sunless Citadel, though no one knows why) sells 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 townsfolk 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 the 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.

OAKHURST

The community closest to the Sunless Citadel is a village called Oakhurst. Most of its 900 residents (including outlying farms) are human, with a sizable minority of halflings and a scattering of other races.

Significant locations in Oakhurst, and the people to be found within them, include the following:

Village Hall. The center of government in Oakhurst includes the office of Mayor Vurnor Leng, a male human noble.

General Store. The village's main source for supplies and merchandise is the general store, owned and operated by Kerowyn Hucrele, a female human noble.

Shrine. Advice, information, and healing are among the services dispensed at the village's shrine. It is maintained by Dem "Corkie" Nackle, a female gnome priest of Pelor.

Jail. Next to the village hall is a stout building where miscreants serve their sentences. Oakhurst's con-

ABOUT THE ORIGINAL

The Sunless Citadel, by Bruce R. Cordell, was originally published in 2000 as a beginning adventure for the third edition of the D&D game.

The adventure is widely regarded as an excellent way to introduce players to D&D. It's also a great starting experience for a new DM.

