

SECRETS OF SUNSTONE OBELISK

AN ADVENTURE FOR 2ND TO 4TH LEVEL CHARACTERS



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SECRETS OF SUNSTONE OBELISK IS A FIFTH Edition adventure for a party of **three to six characters of 2nd to 4th level**, optimized for a party of **four 3rd-level characters**. After a sandstorm uncovers a mysterious black obelisk in the middle of the desert, the party begins their search for answers. Hidden beneath the obelisk is an ancient temple to the goddess of the sun that allows one to gaze back into the past. Can the party listen to the story that the temple wants to tell in order to cleanse it of its tainted past? This adventure is set near the city of Samarahd in the Cartosia campaign setting, but can be placed in any desert environment that might hold ancient magical ruins.

BACKGROUND

Millennia ago, in an age before the city of Samarahd, the ancient kingdom of Mihrwasa was led by a theocracy of priests known as the Dawnbright, who dedicated themselves to Wosyet, god of light and time. At the center of this kingdom was the Sunstone Temple, a bastion of divinity and its most venerated holy site, wherein the Dawnbright were said to be able to look back into the past itself using the temple's magic. Though prosperous for centuries, the kingdom of Mihrwasa eventually fell to its longstanding enemy — the Mugreb orcish horde, which had finally pushed its way through the Kolomon mountains to the north, razing all realms in its path. The entirety of Mihrwasa was destroyed, except for the Sunstone Temple. Through some bittersweet miracle of divine intervention, a group of adventurers intervened during the Mugreb pillaging of the temple, slaughtering the orcs and helping its last surviving priest to protect the temple with powerful magical wards that would conceal it from the orcish horde. Though the rest of Mihrwasa would be lost, the sanctity of the Sunstone Temple was protected. Now, in the present day, long after the Mugreb horde has been lost to history along with the realms it conquered, the wards concealing the temple have faded, revealing its obelisk.

SYNOPSIS

When the party finds their way to the obelisk and into the Sunstone Temple, they'll discover the ghost of a Dawnbright priest who explains that they have arrived just in time: the temple needs their help. Under the priest's guidance, the party will travel back in time using the magic of the temple to slay the Mugreb orcs that attempted to destroy it and help its last surviving priest to conduct a ritual to conceal the structure within the sands of the desert, safeguarding it from further harm. The party will come to learn that the reason the temple still exists for them to discover is because they were its fabled rescuers many millennia ago.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

The party may be drawn to the obelisk for a number of reasons. A few of these reasons are outlined below.

A Chance Encounter. While traveling through the desert on an unrelated journey, the party spots the obelisk in the distance, under the shadow of a jagged mountain range. Intrigued, they decide to investigate.

Rumors of a Mystery. Word has spread throughout Samarahd that a black obelisk has appeared in the desert within a few miles of the city. None have been able to get too close, as reports suggest that the earth itself rises up in defense of the obelisk.

A Request for Aid. An adventurer who set off toward the rumored black obelisk has not returned. A character friendly with the adventurer has become concerned, and offers the party a reward of 50 gp for a confirmation of his whereabouts.

THE OBELISK

The adventure begins when the party comes within sight of the obelisk. Read aloud:

A towering pillar of black stone stands nearly forty feet high against the backdrop of the nearby mesa. The obelisk shimmers with an almost-otherworldly light under the desert sun. Flies buzz around a vulture sitting atop a crumpled form lying near the base of the obelisk.

The obelisk serves as the only entrance to the Sunstone Temple, now and in ages past. Powerful wards that were concealing the obelisk for centuries have finally faded. A casting of detect magic reveals a strong aura of abjuration magic surrounding the obelisk. The following words are inscribed above a weathered, palm-sized indent in the obsidian at a height of five feet:

*A golden treasure that never stays,
The coin whose face gives wealth to all.*

The inscription is a simple riddle to which the answer is "the sun." Speaking the answer to the riddle while placing a hand in the indent on the obelisk causes a circular, shimmering portal to open directly adjacent to the obelisk. Characters who look into the portal can see the hazy image of a temple interior beyond. Stepping through the portal brings the characters to the temple's sundial chamber (area A). The portal remains open within the temple, but disappears in front of the obelisk after 1 minute. Stepping



through the portal from within the temple causes the portal to reappear in front of the obelisk for another 1 minute.

Encounter: Obelisk Guardian. A lurking **earth elemental** bursts upward from the ground and attacks as soon as a party member comes within 60 feet of the obelisk. The elemental fights until it is destroyed, but it stops attacking if the party moves at least 200 feet away from the obelisk.

The Dead Adventurer. Upon closer inspection, the crumpled form near the base of the obelisk is a human male in simple leathers who seems to have been dead for at least a few days. Coming within 20 feet of the body causes the **vulture** sitting atop it to fly away. A dented longsword lies in the sand a few feet away. If the characters came to the obelisk through the "A Request for Aid" hook, the body belongs to the adventurer they seek. They were slain by the earth elemental guardian when they attempted to approach the obelisk.

Treasure: Adventurer's Purse. On the corpse is a coin purse containing 73 gp and two rubies worth 25 gp each.

THE SUNSTONE TEMPLE

The Sunstone Temple was built into a hollowed out portion of the mesa millennia ago. Though in the past the temple was closer to the mesa's surface, an earthquake over the centuries has pulled the temple deeper underground. The obelisk portal serves as the temple's only access point. In its glory days, the sun would shine into the hollowed mesa and through the holes in temple's ceiling, bathing it in light. As a result of the earthquake and the further passing of time, a layer of rock and sand has concealed the surface of the temple within the mesa. Doors within the temple are heavy slabs of stone that open inwards; they are unlocked unless otherwise stated. Ceilings are twenty feet high. Other aspects of temple's appearance, however, depend on the time in which the characters experience it. When they enter, the interior is dark, and a layer of sand and dust covers the walls and floors. Shifting rock has collapsed some walls and overtaken others. When the characters go back in time (see area 6), the temple becomes illustrious; its surfaces shine, vibrant frescos decorate the walls, and light bathes the interior.

Back in Time. The party travels back in time after talking to the ghost of Ayschus in the gyroscope room of the temple (area 6). Encounters within rooms will vary depending on which time period the party occupies. The preceding subheading outlines what the party encounters in a given area of the temple when they are present in the past, during the Mugreb raid. Alternate area descriptions may also be provided, where necessary.

The following areas are keyed to the provided map of the Sunstone Temple.

I. SUNDIAL

A brass sundial rests atop a decorated pedestal in the middle of this chamber. The floor is decorated with a circular tile mosaic. Doors exit to the north, east, and west. Scattered bones, rusted weapons, and tattered scraps of armor litter the floor.

In better days, sunlight flooded through an opening the temple's ceiling to mark the passage of time via the sundial. DC 12 Wisdom (Medicine) check of the bones can confirm them to be orcish, though there are not enough to form a single complete skeleton. The weapons and armor are mundane and too degraded to be of any use.

2. PRAYER ROOM

Two rows of stone benches are arranged in front of a bronze effigy that resembles a large sculpted head wreathed in the rays of the sun. A dais below the effigy is flanked by stone pillars. Atop the dais are several humanoid skeletons arranged in a loose circular formation. More skeletons, weapons, and armor litter the floor in other areas of the room.

A character who inspects the remains on the dais finds them to be human and notices that each skeleton has a hole in the top of its skull, likely delivered by a spear or some similar weapon. A DC 12 Wisdom (Medicine) check of the

SUNSTONE TEMPLE



other bones can confirm them to be orcish, belonging to at least three orcs.

Back in Time: Mugreb Orcs. The bodies of several recently-slain Dawnbright priests are arranged around the bronze effigy atop the dais at the west end of the room. A river of blood runs down the dais and on to the floor. An orc **veteran** wielding a blood-soaked spear and another two **orcs** are present in this room methodically executing priests and turning the room upside down in search of treasure. The orcs attack the party immediately and fight to the death.

Back in Time: Zethus. Huddled up against the wall in the northeast corner of this room is the single surviving member in this area of the temple, Zethus. Zethus immediately recognizes the characters as divine intervention, exclaiming that his prayers have been answered and Wosyet has sent aid. He can explain the following to the party:

- Faith in Wosyet and the strength of the party is the Dawnbright's only hope in preserving the Sunstone Temple from annihilation.
- If the temple has been cleared of Mugreb orcs, Zethus can conduct a prayer ritual with the party's help so that Wosyet may bless the Dawnbright and help them shroud the temple permanently, hiding it from the Mugreb orcs as they rampage across the realm.
- Zethus cannot be sure that the ritual will work, but it is their only hope.

If the party agrees to aid in the ritual, refer to the "Completing the Ritual" section on page 6.

3. PRIEST'S QUARTERS

This section of the temple is composed of a common area that splits off into private quarters. Stone furniture is covered in sand and structural failures have filled rooms with rubble. There is nothing of value here.

Back in Time: Mugreb Orcs. An orc **priest** and another two **orcs** are looting these rooms for valuables. They attack as soon as they notice the party, fleeing towards the prayer room (area 2) when reduced to one-quarter of their hit points or fewer.

4. VESTIBULE

A grand, multi-section circular stone mosaic fitted with gems of various colors is set into the floor of this chamber. Sprouting from the center of the mosaic is an iron capstan. At the far end of the room, hundreds of bones have been strung together with twine and propped up against the wall to recreate anatomically-suspect full skeletons. Hundreds more bones are scattered throughout the room. A brown-skinned goblin whittling a femur looks up in surprise. Doors exit to the east and west.

Chegs the Squatter. The **goblin** in the room is named Chegs. Unless the party threatens him immediately, Chegs greets them eagerly as he is desperate for social contact after being banished from his tribe. Chegs asks the party if they have any good food, for he has been subsisting on desert scorpions for a while. Chegs can explain the following to the party

- He was banished from his tribe for vocally questioning its leadership.
- He stumbled his way through the obelisk portal a few weeks ago and decided the temple would make good shelter.
- He has been gathering the bones scattered throughout to build himself a few "friends" to help him pass the time. He talks to them regularly, but they're usually quiet types.
- He has tried to turn the wheel in the middle of the room, but it seems stuck.

If the party attacks Chegs, he attempts to flee and puts up no fight. If the party was amicable towards him, he may follow the party around while they explore the rest of the temple.

The east and west doors in this chamber are locked and can only be opened by turning the capstan to rotate the mosaic tiles so that the gems are properly aligned by color. Over the years, the capstan has become jammed by debris that has lodged itself between the capstan and its socket. A character who attempts to rotate the capstan without clearing the jam will not be able to rotate it. Characters with a passive Perception of 12 or higher immediately notice the debris and can clear it from the socket with any narrow object and some force. Once cleared, the capstan can be moved freely.

Back in Time: Mugreb Orcs. Four **orcs** are present in this chamber trying unsuccessfully to pry the gems out from the mosaic in the floor. They react with confused surprise at the appearance of the party, but quickly raise their weapons and attack. If three orcs are slain, the final orc attempts to flee to the sundial room (area 1), the doors to which are slightly ajar.

5. SUN FORGE

This room was clearly used as a smithy. An ornate anvil rests in front of a large forge in the east wall. A thick stone table in the middle of the room is scattered with old smithing tools. Tables against the north and south walls of the room hold more tools.

In the temple's glory days, the weapons forged here would be blessed by the Dawnbright before they were carried into battle.

6. GYROSCOPE

A massive bronze gyroscope, fifteen feet in diameter, fills the centre of this chamber. Suspended in the center of the gyroscope is an hourglass filled with black sand. Chains secure the gyroscope in place, connecting it to four equidistant pillars that surround it. In the north, south, east and west quadrants of the room, five-foot-tall stone tablets are mounted on daises. Skeletal remains are slumped against the west wall.

Each of the tablets in this room bears hundreds of lines of inscribed prayers and other holy text held sacred to the Dawnbright.

The Gyroscope. The gyroscope was originally used by the Dawnbright to look backwards in time. Each chain is fitted to the gyroscope with an unlocked removable clasp; when each chain is removed and force is applied to make the gyroscope spin, specific prayers can be spoken to allow one to look back into the past through the hourglass.

The Ghost of Asychus. Shortly after the party enters this chamber, a spectral figure appears, dressed in religious finery and smiling warmly at the characters. "You've arrived just in time," the figure says. "The temple needs your help." The ghost introduces itself as Asychus, a Dawnbright priest. He can explain the following to the characters:

- They find themselves in the Sunstone Temple, an ancient holy site dedicated to Wosyet, god of light and time.
- The temple is under attack from the Mugreb orcish horde and needs help. If unimpeded, the orcs will destroy the temple as they have destroyed all realms before them. Wosyet has blessed the party and the Dawnbright priests to save the temple.
- The Dawnbright and the Mugreb horde are not of the party's time. But Wosyet works in mysterious ways, and the party may intervene to rescue the temple.
- The gyroscope allows the Dawnbright to look back in time, and, in rare circumstances, to travel through it. Now is one of those circumstances.
- By activating the gyroscope, Asychus can transport the party back to the time of the Mugreb so that the orcs can be beaten back. They must find a priest named Zethus in the temple's prayer room.
- When they travel back in time, the party must ask the past version of Asychus to help them return to their present timeline by activating the gyroscope once the orcs have been dealt with.



If the party asks about other courses of action, Asychus can only explain that "Wosyet has willed it this way." Asychus might be able to answer other questions the party has, but if the line of questioning becomes drawn-out (or confusing for the party and the GM), Asychus explains that providing the party with too much information might jeopardize the integrity of the timeline. He passionately urges quick action and asks that the party trust him. A character who makes DC 12 Wisdom (Insight) check can sense that Asychus is telling the truth.

Going Back in Time. If the party agrees to help, Asychus directs the party to unchain and then spin the gyroscope. He closes his eyes and begins to chant a prayer in an ancient language. As the gyroscope begins to move, the room begins to whirl around the characters for a few seconds before the environment steadies itself again — the interior stone of the temple is now polished to a shine, and the sounds of panicked screaming can be heard coming from the doors behind the party, which are now closed. Asychus stands before them in physical form, a surprised look on his face. "Wosyet has answered our prayers!" he exclaims. If the party explains their situation and asks Asychus to return to their timeline by activating the gyroscope once the orcs are dealt with, he nods enthusiastically and explains he will wait for their return. "As Wosyet wills it," he says.

Chegs the Squatter. If Chegs has followed the party into the room, he does not travel back in time with the characters. The party is whisked away without him.

COMPLETING THE RITUAL

When the temple has been cleared of orcs, the ritual can begin. Zethus asks the party to join hands with him in a circle in the middle of the prayer room and tells them to speak the words of the ritual alongside him, which are "As Wosyet wills it, the Sunstone will be hidden." Zethus further explains that the will and concentration of every participant are vital to the success of the ritual. The party must make a DC 12 Concentration group check (each party member rolls one, if the average is equal to 12 or higher, the check is a success). If the group check is a success, the ritual is completed quickly. If the group check is a failure, the ritual takes much longer to complete, and four **orcs** from the Mugreb tribe arrive through the portal connecting to the sundial room (area 1) and attack, requiring Zethus to finish the ritual himself while the party fends off the orcs. Once the ritual completes, a blinding flash of light emerges from the Wosyet effigy atop the dais and a booming voice echoes throughout the temple: "it is willed." Zethus falls to his knees in exhaustion and thanks the party for their aid. The portal connecting the obelisk to the temple within the mesa closes upon completion of the ritual, resulting in no remaining entry or exit to the temple.

RETURNING TO THE PRESENT

Once the ritual has been completed, the party can return to Asychus to once again activate the gyroscope and return to the present day. Both Zethus and Asychus understand that they will die within the temple, as the portal has been closed. They also cannot travel into the party's time, as they understand that Wosyet has not willed that. After the party returns to the present day with the gyroscope, the spirit of Asychus is finally laid to rest, his duty having been completed. Chegs, however, remains. He asks the party where they went and is eager to hear about the details. What Chegs does following this adventure is left to GM discretion.

AFTERMATH

Once the party has returned to their native timeline after helping to protect the temple, they may naturally seek to question the seemingly paradoxical nature of their intervention. They are unlikely to find any answers — the party is a key actor in a "casual loop," wherein through the power of time travel, a sequence of events is among the causes of another event, which is in turn among the causes of the first-mentioned sequence (see also "bootstrap paradox"). Whether or not the party wants to tell others about the temple's magic is up to them, though should anyone else investigate or the party return to the temple, the temple's gyroscope seemingly cannot be moved and can no longer be used to manipulate time. do.



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