

Surface Ruins of Shadow Keep

Hidden away in the isolated Shadow Woods jungle, at the southern limit of the great Malhavania Peninsula in northwestern Doriant, an old and almost lost trackway leads west from Elkan Village over the Draspa River to the Ruins of Shadow Keep. Quite what the significance of the Keep once was has been largely forgotten over the century or so of the Keep's ruination and abandonment, beyond a few obscure tales, which as so often with such folklore, play up the possibility of fabulous, lost treasures at the site. Few have ventured this way in a long time, and fewer still are the survivors that have returned, grumbling at finding little more than overgrown rubble, troublesome wildlife, and aching limbs from a wasted journey. Every now and again though, a rare, lucky treasure-seeker returns with a pouch of unusual gemstones, claimed as originating at this place.

The site is inhospitable, located almost exactly on Nibirum's northern tropic at 25°N latitude, as the jungle is full of insects, birds and larger creatures always happy to snack on a group of passing travellers, as a change from one another. Diseases are present as well, and are usually harder still to guard against. Yet the prospect of those gemstones still tempts those with a sufficiently adventurous spirit. The Keep is some twenty miles (30 kilometres) or so west from Elkan Village, although as half this route is within the heavy jungle, where the trail is particularly hard to follow reliably, the journey can take easily three to four times longer than that distance alone might suggest.

Closer to the Ruins, there are a few more open areas in the vegetation, although then the problem becomes the sometimes extensive patches of Slap Grass, a tall, grass-like, mobile plant, that uses its roots to crawl over areas of difficult, rubbly terrain and thinner soils, using its large, wing-like flowering heads to deliberately slap at passing creatures, infecting them with its seeds. On the map, the main Slap Grass areas are marked using a yellow-green vegetation symbol, commonly over the collapsed rubble, although the Grass may be encountered almost anywhere on this map, should the GM require.

Also in the vicinity of the Keep are packs of Flying Foxes. These are unlike Earth's Flying Foxes (a common name for species of tropical fruit bat), as they are quadrupedal, red-furred, fox-like animals that also have bat wings, and can fly using them. Their front paws are prehensile, and they lair in only the largest jungle canopy trees, usually high above the jungle floor, because they prefer to walk on all fours along the thicker branches, or less commonly on the ground. Three such trees are labelled on the map.

Both the Slap Grass and Flying Foxes were developed using random tables in the revised edition of "The Tome of Adventure Design" published by Mythmere Games. For GMs' guidance, both have been given game-relevant stats here using the "Shadowdark RPG" core rulebook, published by The Arcane Library.

Flying Fox. *Terrier-sized, red-furred, flying canines, with prehensile forepaws, bat-like wings and sharp teeth.* **AC** 12, **HP** 10, **ATK** 1 bite +2 (1d6 + disease), **MV** near (climb, fly), **S** +1, **D** +3, **C** +1, **I** -2, **W** +1, **Ch** -1, **AL** N, **LV** 2. **Disease.** DC 12 CON or 1d4 CON damage (can't heal while ill). Repeat check once per day; ends on success. Die at 0 CON.

Slap Grass Patch. *Clumps of Human-tall, slowly mobile grass plants, growing in rubbly soils, with sword-long, flattened-wing-shaped flower heads they use to slap at passing creatures.* **AC** 6, **HP** 13, **ATK** 2 slap +1 (1d4 + seeds), **MV** close (climb), **S** -2, **D** +1, **C** +0, **I** -4, **W** +0, **Ch** +0, **AL** N, **LV** 3. **Seeds.** DC 9 CON or infected with seeds. Targets in armour have ADV on check. Infected target takes 1 CON damage per round, dying at 0 CON. DC 12 DEX on turn to remove seeds and halt CON damage.

Features of the Keep

Much of the central and northwestern parts of the map comprise the collapsed-rubble remains of Shadow Keep's surface walls and floors. The walls have fallen both into and out from the original Keep's location in places, with an especially large amount of rubble having fallen towards the northwest, away from the Keep. That northwestern area, labelled "**Fissures and Slap Grass**" has a number of narrow, deep crevices in the surface, which penetrate down through the ceiling of the Kennels area of the separate Underground Ruins of Shadow Keep map in the Atlas, areas 13 to 25 there. It would be possible for very small characters to use some of these fissures to access that lower level, although larger ones would need to dig through a lot of soil and solid rock to reach it, more than 30 feet below (9 metres). Patches of Slap Grass are particularly prevalent all across this area, which is extremely uneven, very rubbly, and most difficult to safely traverse on foot.

The **Old Road** extends right up to the, now virtually lost, outer gatehouse, although it is little more than a very patchy trackway at best now. Some of the old sandstone floors of the former open-air **Outer Keep** are still partly intact, if overgrown and damaged, and a small, patchy, northern part of the former gatehouse walls still stand up to nine or ten feet above the old floor surface (2.75 to 3 m) north of the northwestern end of the Old Road. Enough of the thick, outer wall lines survive in places to show the size and originally octagonal

form of the Keep, with segments of the northern and southwestern outer walls still reaching an uneven 15 to 20 ft high in parts (4.5 to 6 m). Some of the facing stones remain in place lower on the surviving wall fragments, enough to show they were well-fitted Dwarf work at one time, set up over rubble cores, which rubble is all that remains much above a yard/metre or so from ground level.

The **Inner Keep's** outer walls were of similar overall shape, but a lot thinner, and barely survive to 10 or 12 ft high in a few spots (3 to 3.5 m). What flooring there is here is of a fancier, indoor style of Dwarf-made tiling, although nearly all the floor over the southeastern half of the Inner Keep has collapsed into a rubble-filled hole beneath the ground surface. Parts of an old, broad stone staircase leading down can still be glimpsed among the vegetation and fallen rocks just inside the old line of the south wall of the Inner Keep, but this would need substantial efforts to clear and allow access to the Subterranean Ruins of Shadow Keep (into area 1 of that separate Atlas map). This map has had the true amount of rubble reduced somewhat to allow the stairs to be spotted (just) among the fallen rocks, to assist GMs. Finding the actual stairs adventurers can encounter should present a greater challenge!