

Greyhawk Guide
to the

ISLE
OF
DREAD

by
Pluffet Smedger

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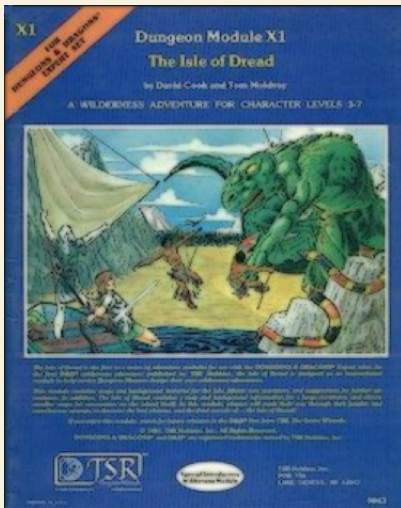
Editorial Assistance: Gary Holian

Cover Typography: Thom Vandevenne (Oronir)

We are, in truth, as far from any human aid as if we were in the moon. If we are to win through, it is only our own qualities which can save us. I have as companions three remarkable men, men of great brain-power and of unshaken courage. There lies our one and only hope.

-Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, The Lost World

Introduction



The Isle of Dread by David Cook and Tom Moldvay was first published in 1981 and it is best known by its infamous product code X1. It was the first D&D module to introduce Dungeon Masters and Player Characters to the concept of an outdoor Wilderness Survival Adventure. The module was originally placed in the so-called Known World setting of the BECMI D&D Ruleset, later called Mystara. Located hundreds of miles south of the main continent, it was also the first module to contemplate sending the players on an oceanic voyage. Countless players were introduced to its tender mercies due to the module's inclusion the Expert Rules Set.

Its status as a classic of the genre was assured. It was voted #16 in the list of greatest D&D modules of all time in *Dungeoneer Magazine* #116, and some voters even had it near the top of their list.

Why did the module capture the imagination so strongly? Well, it was the first module to whisk players away from their lands of comfort and take them to a savage and unrelenting place far from home. It was a classic pulp adventure, indulgent in certain tropes of the genre to be sure, but a wild ride nonetheless with elements recognizable to fans of Burroughs, Howard, and Conan Doyle. The isle was home to flora and fauna unlike any the players would have encountered until that point. Of particular note were the presence of dinosaurs, but there were other unique creatures, including Phanatons, Aranea, Rakastas, and Kopru. The Isle of Dread was the mythical Skull Island of King Kong fame, in all but name, though in many respects more fearsome. It was the Lost World.

The module lay dormant for over two decades, until September 2004, when *Dungeoneer Magazine* issue #114 decided to revisit the setting in the form of Greg A. Vaughan's **Torrents of Dread** adventure. The adventure took the PCs back to the heart of the Isle of Dread for an encounter



The Isle of Dread in relation to the Known World

with its most villainous residents, the amphibious race known as the Koprû.

One thing that the adventure lacked was the needed context. Then Dungeon Editor-in-Chief, Erik Mona, reached out to Living Greyhawk Gazetteer co-author Gary Holian and they decided that the time was ripe to place the Isle of Dread in the World of Greyhawk, at the time the default setting of 3rd Edition Dungeons & Dragons game. Holian reasoned that certain iconic modules such as Keep on the Borderlands, Tomb of Horrors, and the Isle of Dread were archetypes that were bound to exist on all fantasy worlds, including the World of Greyhawk.

Gary Holian set about creating a Backdrop article for Dungeon #114 that re-imagined the classic module for the World of Greyhawk. It was now firmly placed in the setting, but kept true to many of its most iconic features, including the isle's unforgettable shape, scale, flora, fauna, and adventure hooks. Much of what you need to know about the isle's placement in Greyhawk can be found in that article.



South Seas Map (Courtesy: Mike Bridges - www.greyhawkery.com)

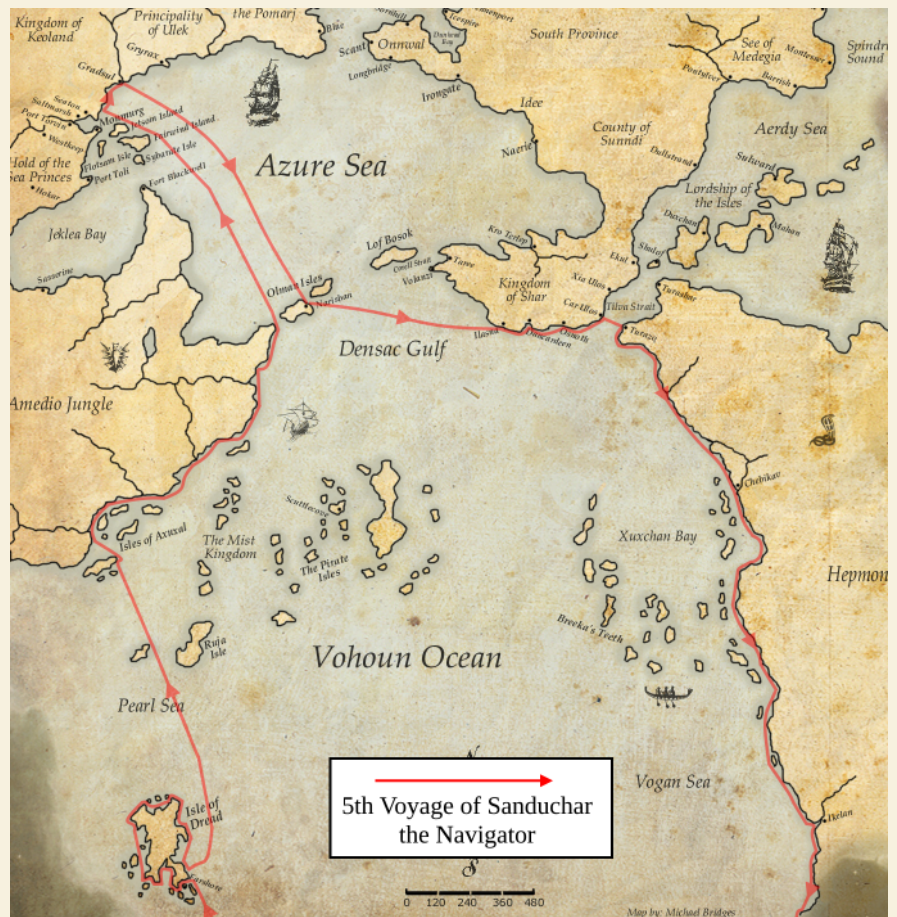
Like the original, the isle was located many hundreds of miles south from the well known lands of the campaign. The Isle of Dread was now found beyond the Densac Gulf in the Pearl Sea region of the Vohoun Ocean. It was just beyond the southern verges of the page 18 map of the 1983 Glossography of Greyhawk, near the equator of Oerth.

Unlike the original, the setting now had a more defined history (see the table: A Brief Timeline of the Isle of Dread, below) and was tied to one of the major cultures of the campaign setting: the Olman. More importantly, it had a backstory to explain its existence. The following sections will detail the Isle of Dread's connection to the World of Greyhawk and offer DMs background material to use for their campaigns.

Flanaess History

The Isle of Dread first entered the consciousness of the people of the Flanaess through the accounts of the voyages of Sanduchar (SAN-doo-KAR). Sanduchar the Navigator was a Suel sailor, explorer, and most importantly, a King of Keoland who lived over a century before the founding of the Great Kingdom of Aerdy. The enterprising monarch was the first to circumnavigate the Azure Sea and create an accurate map of its shores. Later voyages revealed the extent of the Amedio Jungle. Sanduchar's fifth voyage was his most ambitious, in which he traversed the Vohoun Ocean and discovered the Pearl Sea. Sanduchar's fleet passed within yards of the Isle of Dread and sailed around the large island, and some of its smaller satellites, to make a close inspection. Intriguingly, the maps produced by his chief cartographer Lyrianna Sellark, included a large jungle-covered island due east of the Isle of Dread, more than 70 miles long and nearly as wide. The expedition did not set foot on this smaller island, for its fauna were also large, and particularly dangerous. Only one word was written under the map: *Oonga*.

A series of Explorer-Kings returned to the Densac Gulf and Vohoun Ocean over the next century and a half, recording its many wonders and bringing back exotic foods and animals to the markets of Keoland. King Luschan the Just even rescued a pod of Locathah who were about to



be overrun by an army of Ixixachitl. They would become the first settlers of what would become the Briny Quarter of the City of Gradsul. The final voyage to the isle was led by Malv III, an intrepid Keoish King who harbored the ambition of colonizing the Isle of Dread and adding its far-flung shores to his growing realm. Furthermore, he planned to sail upon the nascent City of Sasserine and reclaim its citizens for Keoland. King Malv's plan was to conquer the Isle of Dread and methodically clear its jungles of monsters, but it was foiled when the expedition was attacked by a colossal sea monster that sunk the flagship, *The Gallivant*, sending the monarch along with most of his crew to a watery grave within view of the isle. Thus ended the Age of the Explorer-Kings.

Olman

The human culture that once dominated the Densac Gulf and the southern verges of the Flanaess is known only as the Olman in the Common Tongue. Their endonym is unknown to us. The islands that form the gateway from the Azure Sea to the Densac Gulf bear their name, though those islands only represent a tiny fraction of the land which they once controlled.

Arising in the north of the land we now call Hepmonaland, the first Olman Empire spread to control parts of the (modern) Lordship Isles, Tilvanot Peninsula, even parts of the Azure Sea. These city-states endured for centuries, soon spreading across the waters to parts of the Amedio Jungle and the islands in between. Towards the end of their epoch, they even discovered Thanaclan, the island which would one day become the Isle of Dread. It represented the southernmost extent of their spread. Some scholars even think the Olman Empire once traded with the Suel Imperium and both cultures knew each other's waters.

In the Olman culture lycanthropy is not considered a curse. Instead it was and continues to be seen as a great boon, regarded as a mystical path to a greater connection with the gods. It was also a revelation of the inner self, they thought, a sign of true advancement. Among the most special of the were-folk to the Olman are the were-jaguars. Unfortunately, in the eastern, oldest part of the Olman Empire, they dabbled in transformation and aberration in the form of the Yuan-Ti that grew out of control. The Hepmonaland Empire of the Olman would soon succumb to disaster. Their cities would become Taboo or Forbidden to the rest of the Olman. But even as the most of the cities in the Amedio would later fall to warfare and disease, the City-State of Thanaclan remained a shining beacon of Olman culture.





They had smooth heads, large eyes, and tentacles, sphinctered mouths. The men of the watch appeared entranced by the creatures and leapt into the sea to their deaths untouched. I was horrified. We, the survivors, sailed away immediately as if our lives depended it on it....this "Isle of Dread" had earned its name in my eyes...."

-Rory Barbarosa, Captain of the White Countess out of Rel Astra

Kopru

The main antagonists of the Isle of Dread are the race known as the Kopru. They are one of many aquatic races that call the waters of the Vohoun Ocean their home. Millennia ago they had a kingdom with few rivals in the region, save perhaps the Ixixachitl. Between the two dark realms lay a fault of utter darkness, known as the Trench of Night. Numerous battles were fought in the trench, over



Map of the Vohoun Ocean Depths

slaves, territory, food and the favor of their mutual patron, Demogorgon. Eventually, the Kopru faltered. Their food supply dwindled and a plague severely damaged their society. A slave revolt practically finished them off and the surviving Kopru made for deeper caves and waters. Many of the slaves moved west to found the The Seven Cities under the waves. Later, Aboleth moved into the area evacuated by the Kopru and came into conflict with the Olman of Thanaclan.

Monsters of the Isle

No amount of hunting and clearing can reclaim the island from its monstrous denizens. The island replenishes itself through various fog-filled gates that open new doors to the savage worlds from which these monsters have crossed. The only way to truly save the Isle of Dread is to find the original shadow pearl (or its shards) and remove the connection to the savage realms of Demogorgon, the wellspring of these monsters.

The Kopru are the only race that is fully aware of this problem and will do their utmost to defeat anyone who is interfering with the plans of Demogorgon.



Flora and Fauna of the Isle of Dread

The Red Lysanthus



A flowering plant unique to the Isle of Dread and some of its surrounding islands is the Red Lysanthus. Cultivated by some of the shamans of the local Olman tribes, the Red Lysanthus is highly prized by the natives for what seem like its miraculous medicinal properties. The Scarlet Brotherhood have discovered that the Red Lysanthus can also be magically enhanced to provide remarkable preservative and rejuvenating powers, including acting as the alternative main ingredient for potions of longevity. Even placing a few of the flowers in the stores within the hold of a ship can keep its perishable goods fresh for weeks or even months, allowing for greater range and reduced risk for the ships that can obtain the flower. A tactical advantage that any navies of the north would gladly kill for.

A Brief Timeline of the Isle of Dread

-1310 CY	The Ixixtachtli Empire goes to war with the Kingdom of the Kopru that controls the Isle of Dread (then unnamed by mankind).
-1200 CY	The Olman start to colonize the Amedio Jungle, beginning their great expansion west.
-1100 CY	Amedio states declare their independence from the Hepmonaland Empire.
-1050 CY	The Olman Amedio Empire is formed.
-900 CY	The Kopru Kingdom is racked by famine and finally an uprising of slaves that rips it apart. The Kopru descended into exile below the waves, abandoning the surface of the isle.
-709 CY	The Isle of Dread (then known as the City-State of Thanaclan or “Place of the Pearls”) is settled by Olman explorers, who tame the island and transform it into a tropical paradise that sustains thousands. It becomes one of the wealthiest realms in the far-flung Olman Empire.
-674 CY	The Great Wall of Thanaclan is built, making large scale access to the isle more difficult. It takes 10 years to complete.
-550 CY	The Great Temple of Thanaclan is completed. It takes decades to complete and is built of white opalescent stone. Many treasures are housed within the edifice dedicated to the Olman pantheon.
-410 CY	The Princes of Thanaclan value their isolation from their Olman brethren in the Amedio and Hepmonaland, surviving many of the internecine wars that brought down the rest of the Empire of the Olman. They remain relatively unscathed.
-422 CY	The Twin Cataclysms destroy the Suel Imperium and the people of Thanaclan no longer trade their pearls and wares with the great sailing men of the west.
-379 CY	The Olman princes discover the Great Black Pearl off the shores of Thanaclan, the largest ever found and ensconce it in their temple. Soon the kingdom becomes racked by calamity.
-377 CY	The Olman princes turn to their gods and begin sacrificing numerous of their own citizens in order to regain their favor. Their calls go unheeded as they redouble their efforts. Their society begins to collapse as famine sweeps the isle and numerous Olman escape to surrounding islands.
-375 CY	In a final attempt to destroy the pearl, the princes instead unleash the first Savage Tide and Thanaclan is racked with disasters. The temple and the main city are destroyed. Fog-shrouded gates begin to open randomly on the island, allowing savage beasts never seen before to roam the island. Some of the citizens even
-168 CY	Sanduchar the Navigator is the first person from the Flanaess to visit the Isle of Dread and produce a map of its location. But the dangers proved too great to

	explore the surface, so it's coastline was mapped and it was left behind and the voyage continued. Lyrianna Sellark, chief cartographer on the expedition, and future wife of Sanduchar dubs it the "Isle of Dread", first recorded use of that name.
-150 CY	Conflicts between the Keoish and Toli grow into a full blown war.
-126 CY	Defeat of the Toli in the Battle of Jeklea Bay opens the whole south to exploration for the Kingdom of Keoland. Some of the Toli sail beyond the Olman Isles to the Densac Gulf.
-124 CY	Founding of the City of Sasserine by Keoish dissidents from the City of Gradsul. Freedom to worship the old Suloise gods is one of the main reasons given. Following the Toli Wars, many begin to flock to the south over the next century to seek a new life.
-6 CY	King Malv III journeys into the Densac Gulf like his forefathers.
7 CY	Death of King Malv the Explorer. <i>The Gallivant</i> , flagship of the expedition to the Isle of Dread, is sunk off the coast of the island. The rest of the fleet returns under black flags. This event ends the Age of the Explorer Kings.
8-12 CY	Following the death of Malv the Explorer, the Toli begin to reassert their independence in the south. Monmurg becomes the southernmost city of the Kingdom of Keoland.
197 CY	A series of Touv Explorers from Hepmonaland begin to make the precarious journey west to the Isle of Dread. These explorations falter and the survivors are absorbed into the local Olman populations.
315 CY	Tavish the Great of Keoland sends an expedition to the Isle of Dread, though he does not accompany it. The ships are turned back south of the Olman Isles by fleets of rapacious marauders. These isles are now called the Pirates Isles.
446 CY	The Sea Princes conquer the City of Monmurg and create a new realm south of Keoland. Travel south becomes dangerous and restricted.
548 CY	A new Koprü Queen is crowned. She vows to restore their dominion and begins prodigious sacrifices to the Lord of all that Swims in Darkness. Demogorgon returns his favor.
562 CY	The voyage of Rory Barbarosa of Rel Astra rediscovers the Isle of Dread. His logs of the journey become infamous, rekindling interest in the isle. He comes by way of an easterly route near Hepmonaland, but then is blown off course to the isle.
593 CY	A ship out of the isolated port of Sasserine reaches the Isle of Dread. The expedition is led by the parents of Lavinia and Vanthus Vanderi. The Farshore Colony and trading company is established.
595 CY	Vanthus is captured by pirates on the return to Sasserine. He is held for months, until his family pays a substantial ransom.

Savage Tide Adventure Path: Redux

Debuting in 2006 and running late into 2007, the twelve chapter Savage Tide Adventure Path offered Dungeon Masters and PCs the opportunity to visit the Isle of Dread as part of a grand scenario. However, one of the complaints of the adventure paths is that they unrealistically compress events that are supposed to carry the PCs from 1st to 20th level, sometimes in a matter of weeks or months. That is a convention that doesn't have to bind DMs. In my own campaign, I reimagined the Savage Tide Adventure path for levels 7-14. I also changed the final beats in the story (especially the final third) to keep it more grounded on Oerth and avoid the climax on the Abyss, entirely. Here is a brief thumbnail of the changes.

Chapter 1: "There Is No Honor"

by James Jacobs (Dungeon 139, October 2006)

In the original: The characters are drawn into a murderous family feud. Undead pirates and a powerful thieves' guild feature heavily.

In the redux: The characters are still in Sasserine to begin the adventure. They are drawn into an internecine dispute between family members of the noble Valderi family: Lavinia and Vanthus. They take service under Lavinia and the PCs perform various services for her. Very little is changed. Just a matter of emphasis. APL7.

Chapter 2: "The Bullywug Gambit"

by Nicolas Logue (Dungeon 140, November 2006)

In the original: The PCs are hired to find a missing brother, the characters discover a secret hideout and witness the effects of the Savage Tide.

In the redux: The PCs finally seek the whereabouts of Lavinia's wayward brother, Vanthus. They uncover a plot that resulted in the death of the Vanderi parents. They also follow him to Kraken's Cove, where a small Savage Tide has been unleashed. The PCs don't know what that means or what caused it, but they know it means no good. They must save Lavinia from the Bullywugs. They learn that Vanthus has fled to Pirate Isles. APL7.

Chapter 3: "The Sea Wyvern's Wake"
by Richard Pett (Dungeon 141, December 2006)

In the original: The PCs begin their journey to the Isle of Dread; the lost city of Tamoachan and a monstrous sargasso are featured highlights.

In the redux: Instead of the Isle of Dread, the PCs are on a journey to Scuttlecove, a notorious pirate haven in the Densac Gulf, in search of Vanthus Valderi. They now know that while he was a prisoner of the Crimson Fleet, he was turned by them. He has an alliance with them and is now returning to Scuttlecove to rejoin them. Same encounters, spaced on the way to Scuttlecove. APL 8.

Chapter 4 (previously 8): "Serpents of Scuttlecove"
by Richard Pett (Dungeon 146, May 2007)

In the original: The PCs reboard the Sea Wyvern, this time to sail for Scuttlecove - a hideous city of pirates, slavers, cannibals, and worse - in search of clues to the final Savage Tide and the rescue of their patron.

In the redux: Here is our first major revision to the Savage Tide adventure path. Instead of sending the PCs directly to the Isle of Dread, they first try to find Vanthus Vanderi in the legendary pirate haven known as Scuttlecove. They discover that far from being their prisoner, Vanthus Vanderi has become a member of one of the most depraved pirate organizations of the region, the Crimson Fleet. There the PCs discover that the true purpose of Vanthus is to set off a Savage Tide in many places, rocking the lands of the north, including Sasserine. Somehow this is all connected to the Isle of Dread. The PCs must go to the colony of Farshore and get there before Vanthus. APL9.

Chapter 5 (previously 4): "Here There Be Monsters"
by Jason Bulmahn (Dungeon 142, January 2007)

In the original: The PCs are shipwrecked on the Isle of Dread, the characters travel south along the coast to the colony of Farshore.

In the redux: Racing to get to the colony on Farshore, the PC's ship, the Sea Wyvern, wrecks short of its destination and they are forced into a dangerous trek to get there. Largely unchanged. APL9.

Chapter 6 (previously 5): "Tides of Dread"
by Stephen S. Greer and Gary Holian (Dungeon 143, February 2007)

In the original: The PCs are warned of an imminent attack by a pirate fleet, the characters seek to fortify the colony of Farshore.

In the redux: The PCs are well aware that the colony on Farshore is in danger and prepare for the attack. They must also deal with some strangers who claim to have had an arrangement with the Vanderis. They turn out to be representatives of the Scarlet Brotherhood. They have the appearance of being priests, ministering to the natives of the isles, but are in reality priests of Syrul. APL10.

Chapter 7: "City of Broken Idols"
by Tito Leati (Dungeon 145, April 2007)

In the original: Still seeking clues to the mysterious pearls, the PCs travel to the taboo central plateau of the Isle of Dread to confront the terrible creatures that live there.

In the redux: The PCs defeat the threat to Farshore and have killed most of the Crimson Fleet invaders. Vanthus Valderi has escaped and the PCs learn he has made for the ruins in the center of the island plateau. He still intends to go through with the Savage Tide, with or without his pirate allies. Friar Mattias, the SB representative, insists on accompanying the PCs on the journey, citing the Red Lysanthus "investment" being in jeopardy. APL9.

Chapter 8 (previously 6): "The Lightless Depths"
by F. Wesley Schneider and James Lafond Sutter (Dungeon 144, March 2007)

In the original: On a quest underground to seek the source of mysterious pearls, the characters discover a horrifying city of slumbering aboleths.

In the redux: This chapter largely remains the same. APL11.

Chapter 9: "Into the Maw"
by Robert J. Schwalb (Dungeon 147, June 2007)

In the original: The party sails into the Abyss itself, seeking to infiltrate a demonic prison fortress and turn its fiendish factions against each other.

In the redux: The party escapes from Golismorga into the Trench of Night, where they must face off against a Megalodon Shark and numerous other deep sea nasties, while seeking knowledge of the Fane of Pearls. APL11.

Chapter 10: "Wells of Darkness"
by Eric L. Boyd (Dungeon 148, July 2007)

In the original: To learn the secret of stopping the Savage Tide, the party must free Shami-Amourae, succubus-goddess and former consort of Demogorgon, from the Wells of Darkness, deep in the Abyss.

In the redux: The Wells of Darkness now refer to a feature in the ocean depths. The party learns that the true power of the Kopru lies deep in the Trench of Night in the "Wells of Darkness" where the shadow pearls are cultivated. They make for the Fane of Pearls but are confronted with Kopru and their slaves. They are led by Vanthus Vanderi and a grand battle ensues.

Chapter 11: "Enemies of My Enemy"
by Wolfgang Baur (Dungeon 149, August 2007)

In the original: Our heroes travel to Hades, Arborea, and the depths of the Abyss in order to recruit allies against Demogorgon from the eladrin court, daemons, and even other demon lords.

In the redux: The PCs must seek out the great nemeses of the Kopru, the Ixixachitl, in order to create the distraction they need to enter the Fane of Pearls. While they have no reason to help the PCs, they are easily riled by learning that their great rivals have created the shadow pearls, are currying favor with Demogorgon, and are about to unleash them upon the world. The Ixixachitl launch their attack, as the PCs assault the heart of the Kopru redoubt. APL12.

Chapter 12: "Prince of Demons"
by Greg A. Vaughan (Dungeon 150, September 2007)

In the original: An army of demons and eladrins stands ready to mount an assault on Demogorgon's Abyssal realm of Gaping Maw. The party must take advantage of this distraction and prevent Demogorgon from activating the Savage Tide and driving a world insane.

In the redux: The PCs must face off against the Demogorgon-worshipping Kopru Queen and her retinue, that includes some exotic aquatic fiends. Furthermore, they discover that Vanthus Valderi, whom they thought dead in the Wells of Darkness, has returned as a Death Knight in the service of Demogorgon. The Sibilant Beast sends everything he has against the PCs. The fight is on. APL13/14.