



The Isle of Dread

David Zeb Cook , Tom Moldvay

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A Wilderness Adventure for character Levels 3-7:

The Isle of Dread is the first in a series of adventure modules for use with the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS Expert Rules. As the first D&D wilderness adventure published by TSR Hobbies, the Isle of Dread is designed as an instructional module to help novice Dungeon Masters design their own wilderness adventures.

This module contains maps and background material for the Isle, fifteen new monsters, and suggestions for further adventures. In addition, The Isle of Dread contains a map and background information for a large continent, and eleven smaller maps for encounters on the island itself. In this module, players will push their way through dark jungles and treacherous swamps to discover the lost plateau, and the final secrets of - the Isle of Dread!

The Isle of Dread Details

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From Reader Review The Isle of Dread for online ebook

Jason Koivu says

Like an episode of "Lost," *The Isle of Dread* was confusingly erratic and intriguingly exciting.

This game module for the old-school "expert rules" version of Dungeons & Dragons tapped Arthur Conan Doyle's "The Lost World" for ideas. The concept is that your party of adventurers sail out in search of the rumored wealth hidden upon a remote island. When you arrive you discover the island is populated with a bizarro world of fantastical beasts, murderous natives and magical monsters.

The Isle of Dread came with every purchase of the Expert D&D Box Set, so just about everyone that played D&D owned this, but search me if you can find anyone who actually *played* this module. My cousin and I gave it an abortive attempt once, but mostly all I ever did with it was to glance through, half-heartedly trying to figure out what the overall plot was. I'm not sure there was one though. If anyone can settle that for me, please do.

David Sarkies says

One of the classic Dungeons & Dragons adventures

24 December 2012

This is one of those early modules that is not constructed with a plot, or I don't think it is constructed with a plot. It could be, but it has been quite a while since I have read it, and considering that it is probably sitting at the bottom of a box (carefully stored mind you, since this module is now a collector's item) I don't have ready access to it to see if there is actually a plot. On a side note, I sort of wonder why I collect these things, because it is unlikely that I am going to use it again (if I have ever used it in the first place that is), and I do sort of question whether I can get any value out of it, and even then, sitting in a box (in good condition mind you) does not necessarily mean that it is growing in value. Hey, I could have a first edition copy of *Frankenstein*, but if nobody wants it, or nobody wants to pay the going price of it, then what good is it anyway.

So, this module is set on an island, but I can't quite remember why you go to this island. It could be the reason why most people go to islands, and that is to find buried treasure, but I don't actually remember there being a map with some 'X' marked on it. I do remember playing a *Neverwinter Nights* version of this module, but it was so incredibly hard, particularly when you went toe to toe with a bear (not to mention the dinosaurs that also wonder around the island) that I never got too far in it, and decided to move on to the next constructed game.

Anyway, as with some of these older modules, they were good because they enable you to create the your own plots. This module was the first in the 'X' series, which was a code for the expert system. The basic system only dealt with characters from first to third level, but the expert system I believed went up to level nine (I think, but once again I do not have it readily at hand to check). However the catch is that dinosaurs should be a lot more powerful than players at this level, and in all honesty, even if you are a mage with a fireball, a *Tyrannosaurus Rex* is still going to shrug that off and then proceed to tear you a new one. Mind you (and this is one of the things that I liked about third edition) a tiger and a bear would also likely tear you a new one as well.

I guess the expert system was expanding the world as well, and this particular module provided you with a

larger map of the region, and I even think it have a few little comments about the countries that were about. However, the main focus was on the island, which, mind you, was so far away that you would need a proper sailing ship to get there. This was not the type of voyage that you would use a coaster for (and I sort of wonder how the players at this level, which wasn't that high, could possibly get their hands on a proper sailing ship, and a crew – consider this, a couple of young punks rocking up at the docks and asking 'say, anybody going to the Isle of Dread?').

Jakk Makk says

Five stars for it's ability to inspire. If in doubt, see the Savage Tide Adventure path that begins in Dungeon #139. While peddled as the expert module, it is to my mind the pinnacle of the ODD Lost World culture, though most sources compare it to "King Kong."

The first printing Blue color is the preferable edition, but you can find the orange cover PDF for comparison. Perhaps the sand box strength is lost on modern readers. The maps are so generic they are expressly reused in encounters. Modules at this stage still had a primer feel, like they were showing you how, instead of railroading you through tunnels.

Gygax would later reboot this archetype for a high level module, "Isle of the Ape." The treetop platforms reminded me of Harley Stroh's early DCC modules. Sorry about the crappy phone review. Maybe I'll second draft this later.

It really does lend itself to higher level fleshed out play, otherwise the adventure drags and turns into wandering monster hell. You either need players truly creating a group story, or you need a DM who is comfortable rearranging the monster deck chairs to keep the tension up. There is no reincarnation store unless you work one in. If you play this one as advertised, you'd likely end up with one living marooned pc. Don't let the dinosaurs chew on the loco weed!

Marc says

This was the second module I ever played. After getting stabbed to death in Grade 4 by some jerk in Castle Amber, I caught some disease and shat myself to death on the beaches of the Isle of Dread. Something tells me my older brother and his friends didn't want me hanging out with them while they played D&D.

Michael Prier says

The only redeeming values of this module are dinosaurs and phanatons.

Michael says

This was the first published module for use with the Dungeons & Dragons "Expert Set" – intended as the bridge between Basic D&D and Advanced D&D, although in fact the two systems had enough discrepancies

that it was never quite possible to merge them. Expert D&D allowed characters to progress beyond the third level, which was as far as the Basic rules allowed, so fittingly this is an adventure designed for characters or levels 3 to 7 (those just reaching the “Expert” levels, as it were). Surprisingly, however, its focus is not on a standard “dungeon” scenario like “The Keep on the Borderlands,” but instead on a “lost world” setting in which the party travels to an island inhabited by dinosaurs and other extinct beasts, alongside cannibals and exotic tropical flora and fauna.

The possibility of a “lost world” setting has always been somewhat implicit in D&D rules, which have consistently provided combat statistics for dinosaurs etc., although it has rarely been explored in the published materials provided by TSR and Wizards of the Coast, the inheritors of the line. This one is somewhat incomplete in that sense, because actually the adventure focuses on the exploration of an abandoned (and partially flooded) temple in search of a large pearl, and less time is spent exploring the wilderness of the dinosaur ranges than one might like. Wilderness adventures often present a problem in D&D, because of the challenges and choices they offer to players and the difficulty of remaining focused on a clear objective in that situation. It’s always easier to keep things clear when your only decisions are whether to turn left or right and the difficulty of the monsters encountered corresponds to the depth of the dungeon. So, this adventure does actually fall back on the dungeon to re-focus the finale.

The module also includes an expanded map showing the region surrounding the “Duchy” provided as a suggested campaign area in the Expert rules. It is interesting, but seems to me to try to do too much with too little area. In a space apparently not much larger than Greece, it includes climates that vary from tropical Pacific conditions to sub-arctic Scandinavia, Mongolia, and Southern France. Still, with some adjustments, it does give the opportunity for a very diverse range of adventures within an integrated multicultural setting. I have never actually run this adventure, nor attempted to use the campaign world supplied (indeed, I rarely played anything but the AD&D version of Dungeons and Dragons), but there are some interesting concepts here which could be lifted by any DM looking for new ideas.

Ken says

Based upon Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's novel "The Lost World", this adventure has it all - an ocean voyage, pirates, dragons, dinosaurs, natives, spell-casting giant spiders, buried treasure, shipwrecks, sea monsters, a tremendous volcano with a tropical paradise in its crater, and best of all the Lovecraftian horrors encountered at the end. Even if you never run the adventure as written but just mine it for ideas, it is well worth the read.

Bradley says

First adventure module in the ancient Expert Set. Looking it over now I marvel at the beginnings of the world of Mystara. Definitely a must have for adventure and maps of the world beyond the Duchy of Karamaikos.

Martin St-laurent says

I remember running this adventure a long time and at the time ago, being inexperienced in the art of Gming, I am afraid I fell short of the potential of this adventure. It has been too long for me to remember all the

details, but I used it only as a series of encounters rather than an opportunity for the characters to play a larger role in the campaign. Nevertheless, I remember my players liking the “Lost World” qualities of the adventure.

This sandbox style adventure is designed for characters of at least 3rd level. This is was the first official adventure for the expert level of basic D&D and as such its goal is to help DM and players get familiar with the new rules, mainly the outdoor rules. Therefore, the adventure does not have a clear main goal. That’s not to say there is nothing to accomplish here as we will see later. Let’s begin with the adventure.

It starts with the characters discovering an old nautical journal and an old map to an island that does not seem to registered on any map. Once the characters figure out a way to get a ship, they sail to the island and will most likely try to land at a village called Tanorua. The journal describes it as being inhabited by friendly natives. The village is one of many found on this island. The particularity is that it is built near a great wall that all natives are afraid to cross. The village is described in details and a few customs are covered. Advice is given on how the characters can establish a new trade route and how they could be commissioned to explore the island.

A player’s map with empty hexes is provided and characters can explore the island at their leisure. We have three different random monster tables for different areas of the island. There are many encounters already provided. Among these, the characters may stumble on a pirates camp, a Rakasta camp (powerful humanoid feline warriors), phanatons (small flying squirrel-like humanoids) and many other different encounters. All of them give a sense of a lost world that civilization forgot. If the characters make it to the central plateau, they will have other encounters with dinosaurs and they may also meet another friendly tribe that may ask for their help to deal with renegades living in an ancient taboo ruin. While exploring the ruin, the characters will see several remnants of the ancient civilization and will find even more dangerous creatures. The closes with ideas on how to use the material provided here and with a few sample NPCs for random human encounters and for other villages.

I was careful to avoid the word “ends” because, as a sandbox, it ends pretty much when you or the players want it too. There are many goals to be achieved here and many more that the DM can set as he develops this area of the world. The ideas provided work well with the material provided, but many others can be created. That is what the adventure and content aims to achieve, and in that regards, it succeeds very well.

However, there are a few tidbits of information I would have liked to have. Mainly, who were the Gods referenced in the adventure and where did they go? How do the different villages interact with each other? There is a listing of all the countries of the known world, is one or more likely to wage war over ownership of the island? It would also have been nice to have a bit more details about the inhabitants of the island.

As is, the adventure is solid and can be included in pretty much any campaign where a jungle/lost world type of island can be found. It is a great adventure for players who want to explore and not necessarily deal with a complex plot. As I mentioned, it was intend as a way to learn the expert rules and as such, it works well.
