

**ADVENTURE:
CASTAWAYS ON THE INNER SEAS
(OR: A THREE HOUR TOUR)**

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This is an oceanic/coastal themed introductory scenario, designed to bring a group of unsuspecting characters into the Hollow Earth. All characters should have some kind of connection to the uppers social classes; they might be the money-men, celebrities, or distinguished doctors and academics who form the upper echelons of society, or they might be criminals (either a con artist masquerading as a socialite or a burglar who infiltrated the crew) or adventurers (perhaps a prodigal child come back from Yale). More experienced players may want to try creating all characters as “Gilligans,” which is to say, characters who are not necessarily prepared for an expedition of any sort and without any significant combat skills. In any case, names like Cavendish and Vanderslice are apropos.

STORY BACKGROUND

A year ago, a group of Terra Arcanum agents discovered a tiki statue in the shape of a squid that evidently has the power to open the Hollow Earth gate through the Bermuda Triangle. However, when passing through the gate they were attacked by a kraken; part of the group escaped on rafts back into the Hollow Earth where they are now stranded, while the bodies of the less fortunate washed ashore, where their possessions—including the Tiki-Squid—was scavenged by a local vendor of tourist merchandise.

The agents who remained stranded in the Hollow Earth managed to get out a message to the Terra Arcanum about what had happened and explained that they have the companion artifact that will open the way out. This last statement ensured that the directors of the Terra Arcanum would mount a rescue operation ASAP, because having regular access to a gate in Bermuda

would allow them access to the Hollow Earth without the expensive voyage through the North Pole. When the Terra Arcanum heard that the Tiki is for sale they send their agent Scullery, who is known to be a wealthy collector of antiquities, to retrieve the Tiki-Squid, test its purported ability to open the gate, and rescue the stranded agents. Captain Scullery, under strict orders to “dispose of his crew and all passengers” once inside the Hollow Earth, has decided to take this opportunity to settle old grudges.

PLAYER'S INTRO

As far as the players know, Captain Scullery is a plump and jovial old fellow—sometimes with a mean streak, but by and large a very nice fellow. Although none of the characters have seen Scullery in years, they have all been invited to be guests aboard his new luxury yacht named The Venture on a scenic tour of several Caribbean islands. Scullery told them that he made this offer in order to “mend fences, repay debts, and make up for old offenses.” Indeed, as they characters introduce themselves they may find that they have all had a falling out with Scullery at some point in the past, or Scullery owes them money, or other little things like that. Only one fellow had never met Scullery before, and that was the person who purchased a strange squid-shaped tiki. Scullery was very interested in that idol and offered large sums of money. But when the fellow wouldn't sell, Scullery smiled and shrugged his shoulders and invited him on this cruise. Isn't Scullery a nice fellow?

ABANDON SHIP!

The Venture sets out heading for—you guessed it—the Bermuda Triangle. A storm besets the ship as soon as they are out in

open water, and all the usual Hollow Earth effects begin to take place on wrist watches and compasses. Suddenly, the ship lurches as if it has struck something, and a moment later the Captain issues an urgent order to get everyone onto lifeboats. The storm rages and the sheets of rain limit vision to about fifteen feet. Huge waves scour the decks of anyone not hanging on tight. There is no time to gather belongings. If anyone goes to get the tiki-squid, they will find that it is missing! Once in the lifeboats, things are grim. They can also see the Venture listing horribly and evidently about to capsize (but then the storm shrouds it and it is lost from sight). All the players are in the same life boat, and the crew gets into the other one. The captain is not seen in any of the boats and has possibly decided to go down with the ship.

In actuality, the Venture is in no danger, but the captain has used the storm to divest himself of his crew and the Tiki-Squid, which he knows will attract the sea monster. He has secreted it in the character's life boat, where they will discover it shortly after the Venture is lost from sight and shortly before one of the crewmen yells "*LAND HO!*"

The occupants of both life boats furiously paddle towards the shore, but the crew's boat gets pulled violently under the waves, and the survivors are attacked by something beneath the surface—there is clearly something hungry in the water! The players can attempt rescues, but the boats are only meant to hold eight people (give or take, depending on how many 'red shirts' the GM wants around). As the survivors get to the shallows, it is their turn to be attacked as a Kraken's tentacles reach up and seek victims. It will strike with two tentacles before the players reach safety, attempting to grapple rather than inflict direct damage. This is the first of several good ways to get rid of rescued NPCs. If a player is seized, the Kraken will flail him around above the surface for a while (it has already had a good meal, so it is now content to play with its food). A tentacle struck for a single point of damage will release its victim; it will seize victims around the waist, leaving their arms conveniently free—the tentacles defense is 4

to a person being held, since it effectively loses its Active Defense. If it really looks like one of the PCs is doomed, an NPC crewmember could show up in the waves, striking with a knife and valiantly sacrificing his own life to save the life of the character. Finally, the life boat is utterly destroyed and the characters must swim the remaining short distance to safety.

STRANGE SHORES:

Almost as quickly as the storm came, so it retreats, revealing the bright, noonday sun over this tropical beach. As the players dry themselves out, this would be a good time to introduce them to the weirdness of the Hollow Earth, including horizon, sun, etc. After a short time scouting their area, they will hear the sound of a horn, the type used on a boat, coming from a harbor some distance away. Players with any type of nautical skill may even recognize it as belonging to the Venture. They can find a trail that leads up along a rising slope towards some cliffs which seem to contain caves. It is about an hour's hike. A GM may wish to place an aquatic obstacle (such as a river or a lagoon) in the players' path, but only if someone in the group has some kind of skill that will help them cross it.

ROADSIDE DETOUR:

Assuming that the players follow, they will eventually spot the carcass of a large animal, and sleeping next to it is what appears to be a giant komodo dragon. It is, in fact, a velociraptor. Players will see it dozing in the sun from a long way off, so a smart party would go around. A more aggressive party can easily find rocks or sticks to turn into spears or clubs. The thing is sleeping so the characters have a chance of sneaking up on it, and it has just fed and so may be sluggish (-2 attack) and will flee if the characters prove to be anything of a threat, possibly after killing any extraneous NPCs (hey, the crew accepted a certain amount of risk when they put on the red shirt). If the players get in to real trouble with this, the fight could be interrupted with

the next event, which would immediately scare the raptor away.

MAMMOTH STAMPEDE:

As the characters follow the trail parallel to the shore and begin to near the cave, they hear a few gunshots behind them on the trail. A moment later, the ground starts to shake, as though with a minor earthquake. Whoever fired those shots stirred up a stampede of woolly mammoths, and the stampede is heading right for the characters! The players better run fast to get to the caves (*shameless plug: this would be a great time to use the Continuous Movement option of Continuous Combat, which will be explained in the GM Screen*). The shots were fired by Terra Arcanum hunters who will return to the cave after another few hours in the field. If they encounter the characters, they will put on a friendly face and invite them inside to the Banquet in the Cave.

BANQUET IN THE CAVE:

The cave is a combination of natural formation and carved den. It has several rooms to the rear, but the main entrance is marked by a large warm fire, a long wooden table piled with fresh food, booze and other good things. And who is awaiting them? It is Captain Scullery! He states that he is quite overjoyed to see that they are still alive, and invites the characters to sit down and share in his repast while he explains about his new friends. Isn't Scullery a nice fellow?

At this point only the most paranoid of characters will be mistrusting of Scullery and of course the food is all drugged. Any who resist may be threatened by the other Terra Arcanum agents—there are about 4 Terra Arcanum agents per 3 players. Resistance may need to be met with force, and the agents are armed with non-lethal weapons such as clubs or shotguns loaded with rock-salt. In the worst case scenario, if the players are avoiding the drugged food and refuse to surrender, they may need to be surrounded and KO'd.

VILLAIN'S REVEAL:

While unconscious or in submission, the players will be bound with leather straps, then tied to a kind of teeter-totter device over a pool of water (more on that later). Captain Scullery will address them, show the Terra Arcanum tattoo on his right breast, and commence his gloating. The seemingly harmless Scullery now reveals his ruthless mean-streak. It turns out that Scullery is somewhat glad that the characters are not dead, because this way he can recover the Tiki-Squid (if they still have it) or rub their noses in the fact that he has its counterpart, which will allow him to get out. The Venture was not destroyed, but in fact awaits their departure. Their plans are to put the idol to use to escape the Hollow Earth within the hour, but before he leaves the characters to their certain deaths he will answer questions about the Hollow Earth, the Terra Arcanum, or the Tiki-Squid (maybe give the players 3 real-world minutes before he grows impatient—don't give the players a chance to run out of questions), then leave them to the death trap.

DEATHTRAP!

Below the players is a pool of ravenous piranhas—if there are any 'red shirts' left, the Captain may push them in to demonstrate the deadliness of the fish (or he might dip in a hunk of meat to make the same point). The players are essentially bound by thin leather straps to the high end of a giant teeter-totter. On the other end is a huge bucket full of sand, funneled at the bottom like the top half of a broken hour glass. Before leaving the room, the villains uncork the bottom of the bucket so that the sand runs out, which means that the bucket, which originally weighed more than the characters, slowly becomes lighter, and thus the character's side begins to sink towards the frothing waters of doom.

Captain Scullery leaves one guard in the room that looks gruff and uncaring about the character's fate. Unfortunately for Scullery, the guard he has selected is of weak moral fiber and can be bribed by a

millionaire or distracted by a gorgeous woman as some one chews his way through the straps. Even if won over, this guard won't help the players until the last minute in an attempt to drive the price of their release higher. If they convince him to completely switch sides, he can become their new 'red shirt'.

Otherwise, players might think of an ingenious way out, but the simplest escape is to gnaw through the leather straps (this may lead to some fun role-playing as the rich socialites must subject themselves to the indignity of chewing their bonds like common household rats). Once freed of their restraints, the characters have little trouble helping each other out of the pit. *(The idea for this deathtrap came from a Fu-Manchu movie)*

EMPTY CAVE:

When the players emerge, they will find the cave system abandoned. If they search or convince the guard to help them, they can find the arsenal (and may have to pick the lock to open the case): knives and shotguns (with real ammo as well as rock salt) enough for all. All the rest of the Terra Arcanum agents are gone, and the Tiki-Squid is nowhere to be found.

SHOWDOWN ON THE CLIFFS:

When the players exit, they find that the mammoth herd has moved near the opening. They are just grazing there and pose no threat to the PCs, but could provide cover, because from the cave the PCs can see that the Terra Arcanum agents and the Captain have gathered at the lip of the cliffs that overlook the sea about 150 feet away. Only two of the agents are armed with shotguns, the rest have nothing but ritual knives—so even though they outnumber the now-armed players, they are likely to be overpowered. The Captain is apparently chanting something and raising the Tiki repeatedly while the other agents make ritual gestures; in the waters 20 feet below is the Venture, but so is the kraken. They are performing the ritual in hopes of drawing

the kraken away from the Venture so that they can board without being eaten.

The ground between the PCs and the Terra Arcanum is open, so any approach will almost certainly be detected, but the players might still get the jump on their enemies. Alternately, players might go to the back of the mammoth herd and fire a few shots (or devise some other threat, such as starting a brush fire) which will drive the mammoths towards the villains and over the cliff. If this happens, wipe out all but 2 of the baddies and the captain. However the fight goes, when the captain is hit hard, he will be knocked over the cliff (or he will jump rather than surrender), and will take the Tiki-Squid(s) with him. But the Tiki will fall from his hands as he plummets, so when he hits the water he has nothing but his crawl stroke to save him from the monster of the deep. This is the Uncertain Death for both him and the Tiki—either or both might come back in a later game, but for now, the players remain trapped in the Hollow Earth. At the GM's discretion, Scullery might speed off in the Venture with the Kraken in pursuit, or he might simply disappear while the kraken destroys the Venture for once and all. Even if he never makes it to the water, the kraken will still destroy the Venture out of annoyance at having its ritual interrupted.

RESOLUTION:

Now the players are trapped without a boat or without a "key" to the portal. At this point, the GM gets to say the famous line: *"What happens next, and how—or if—you escape the Hollow Earth is a story for another day."*

After the fight, if there are any Terra Arcanum agents left alive a character with high social skills could convince them to join with the party (source of replacement PC's).

WHERE TO GO FROM HERE:

If this is used as the start of a longer story, I suggest keeping the characters on the coast lines in order to maintain the nautical themes. Of course, if you do this, you have a moral obligation to bring in

pirates. The players might try to build a raft to escape, only to be captured and pressed in to service by a pirate crew where they have a new set of adventures. Then maybe they go to Blood Bay, scrape their way up the buccaneer ranks, get their own ship, form rivalries and alliances with other crews, and continue to hunt for the dastardly Captain Scullery who pops up from time to time to cause the worst of their problems. Yes, indeed, an extended story called "Pirates of the Inner Seas" might be so good you won't even miss having a mad scientist in the mix.

Tiki-Squid Idol

Artifact 2

When this idol is "charged" with a one hour ritual performed on dry land, it will open the Bermuda Triangle portal into OR out of the Hollow Earth (but not both). Note that each idol is a one-way ticket; it can never be reprogrammed to open the portal in the other direction. One important side effect, however, is that it tends to draw in Krakens who often sink ships shortly after arriving in the Hollow Earth or shortly before escaping.

The Tiki-Squid is carved out of a mineral that has a jade-like green tinge but is also a little translucent, reminiscent of crystal. Nobody sees it move, but every time someone looks at it, it seems to be in a new pose; as if it is undulating so slowly that the human eye can't track its motions. The idol has been used by certain South Pacific islanders to summon krakens to consume sacrifices.