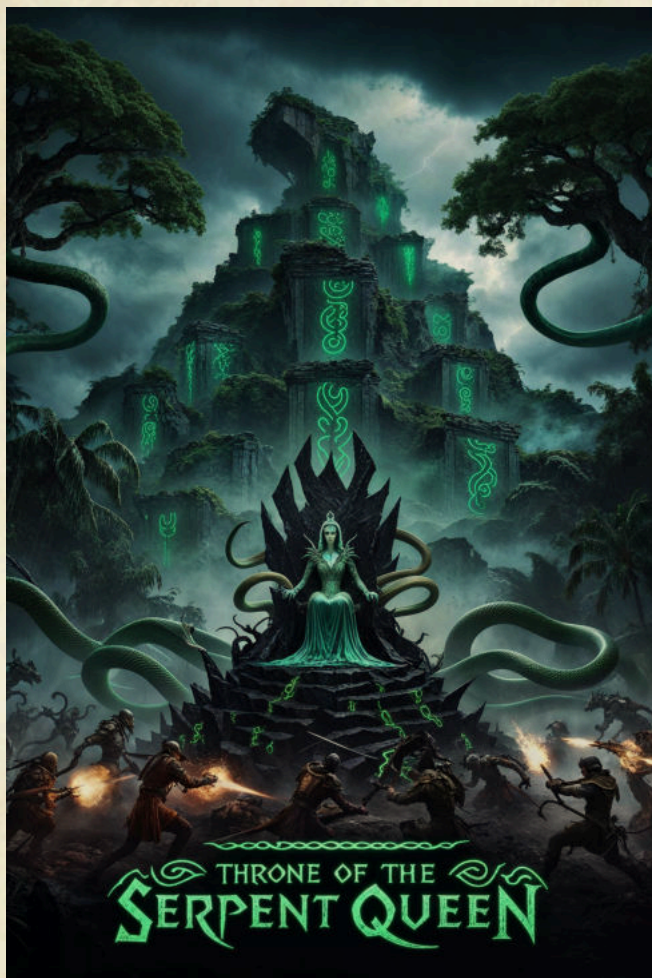


THRONE OF THE SERPENT QUEEN



CAMPAIGN OVERVIEW

Title: Throne of the Serpent Queen

Theme/Genre: Fantasy, Mystery, Political Intrigue

Tone: Tense and Suspenseful, with moments of triumph and danger

Target Level: Level 5

Expected Duration: 2 hours

Player Focus Preferences:

- Combat: Medium
- Roleplay: High
- Exploration: Medium

BACKSTORY AND SETTING

THE WORLD

The land of Varnath is a realm of ancient rivalries and hidden magic. Nestled between sprawling empires and forgotten ruins lies the jungle-encompassed province of Atroxis. Once the heart of the enigmatic Azhreth Dynasty, serpent worshipers ruled here with an iron grip before mysteriously disappearing centuries ago. Their secrets have been swallowed by the towering canopy of the Emerald Jungle.

LOCAL AREA

The adventure commences near the crumbling ruins of Zareth-Ka, the lost capital of the Azhreth Dynasty. The settlement of Green Veil, a hub for traders, scholars, and mercenaries, has become the focal point for those scavenging for relics and lost history. Recently, whispers have emerged of the Serpent Queen, Issalith, rising once more, spreading her influence from Zareth-Ka, awakening the jungle's ancient terrors.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The dynasty's power was rumored to be bound by a pact with Ophidian, the god of serpents and poison. A mysterious calamity ushered their downfall, leaving Zareth-Ka in shambles. The curse of the dynasty haunts the land still, and those who delve too deeply into the jungle often return maddened, claiming to hear whispers and see spectral visions.

IMPORTANT NPCs

- **Sylvara Moonspecter** (Elven Scholar): A historian deeply fascinated by the Azhreth Dynasty, Sylvara has recently deciphered ancient relics suggesting Issalith's return. Driven by noble but ambitious motives, she seeks aid to verify her findings.
- **Captain Andros "Ironfang" Thorne** (Human Mercenary Leader): The pragmatic leader of a band of mercenaries hired for exploratory missions to Zareth-Ka. Beneath his hardened exterior lies a fear of the jungle's unnatural rumors.
- **Issalith, the Serpent Queen** (Villain): The ruler of Zareth-Ka with designs on reclaiming her ancient throne. Charismatic yet ruthless, she intends to spread Ophidian's dark influence.

PLOT HOOK

OPENING SCENE

The players find themselves at Green Veil's bustling inn, "The Emerald Fang," amidst a growing storm. As heated discussions unfold around them, Sylvara bursts in, breathless and clutching a map inscribed with Azhreth symbols. Her voice quakes with urgency:

"It's too late for patience! The tombs... the whispers! She rises again. If Issalith claims the Serpent Throne, Varnath will fall under her poison. We must stop this menace now. You—join me! Time is running short!" As her plea hangs in the air, a scout bursts into the inn, collapsing with desperate mutterings:

"Her shadow haunts... emanating from Zareth-Ka. Obsidian beasts protect her..."

Primary Objective:

The party is tasked with stopping Issalith, the Serpent Queen, from ascending to the Serpent Throne and activating the ritual that would awaken Ophidian's dominion.

KEY LOCATIONS

LOCATION 1: THE GREEN VEIL (STARTING AREA)

Atmosphere:

A bustling yet tense settlement perched on the jungle's edge. Makeshift huts shudder in gusty winds, and the air is laden with damp earth, ale, and the glow of lanterns. Traders and mercenaries exchange nervous whispers about serpents in the jungle under the persistent patter of rain.

NPCs and Encounters:

- **Sylvara Moonspecter:** Shares crucial intelligence and offers the players a map to Zareth-Ka.
- **Captain Andros Thorne:** Offers conditional escort services, warning of mercenaries deserting as the jungle grows "too loud."
- **Suspicious Merchant:** Selling jungle supplies, he secretly reports to Issalith and plots to hinder exploration. Could pose a minor combat or roleplay threat if revealed.

Possible Encounters:

- Engage with locals for supplies, lore, and rumors about jungle dangers.
- Weather events test the tension with ominous jungle wildlife sounds.
- An unexpected attack from Issalith's agents, such as a venom gas bomb in the inn, intensifying urgency.

LOCATION 2: THE OBSIDIAN CROSSING (INTERMEDIATE AREA)

Atmosphere:

Ruinous serpentine bridge spanning a mist-laden river, flanked by eerie serpent statues. Vines weave among ancient stones, as the distant rhythm of drums echoes from within the jungle.

Challenge/Encounters:

- **Combat:**
 - **Jungle Stalkers:** Venomous predators (CR 3 giant snakes or CR 4 Yuan-ti purebloods) utilize hit-and-run tactics, leveraging the terrain.
 - **Obsidian Sentinels:** Stone serpent golems with glyphs inscribed, requiring a dispel, a riddle solution, or force to bypass.
- **Puzzle:** An altar demands "The price of ambition," revealing the deepest desire to each player via a glowing orb. Progress demands surrendering a treasured item or confessing a burdensome secret. Failure to offer payment triggers a trap raining poison darts.

LOCATION 3: THRONE OF ZARETH-KA (FINAL AREA)

Atmosphere:

A temple in decay, overrun by nature. The grand hall, with its glowing green veins, centers around the Serpent Throne. Issalith sits regally, ringed by ghostly serpents.

Environmental Details:

- Magical glyphs empower Issalith's defenses with illusions and disorienting magic.
- A poisonous mist pervades, requiring Constitution saving throws every round (DC 13, half damage on success).

ENCOUNTERS AND CHALLENGES

FINAL COMBAT

- **Issalith, the Serpent Queen** (CR 7 Yuan-ti Abomination, spellcaster variant): Utilizing hypnosis, poison magic, and spectral serpents, she divides and conquers.
- **Minions:** Spectral snake swarms (homebrew, CR 4) serve to distract and restrain.

Tactics:

Issalith channels her throne's power to cast potent spells like **Hypnotic Pattern** and **Acid Arrow**. Her strategy is to isolate targets with serpents while dismantling group cohesion.

Mechanics:

Three obelisks energize Issalith's powers. Destroying them diminishes her abilities and neutralizes the poison mist, though enraging Issalith, driving her to an all-out assault.

CLIMAX AND RESOLUTION

FINAL CHALLENGE

Stop Issalith before her ritual nears completion, growing in strength to become almost undefeatable if she succeeds.

Stakes:

- **Success:** Players thwart Issalith, claimed treasure, and earn Sylvara's gratitude.
- **Failure:** Issalith's empowerment allows her influence to spread, cursing the landscape.

REWARDS

LOOT

- **Serpentfang Dagger:** +1 with a crit causing DC 13 Con save vs poison.
- **Amulet of Ophidian Resistance:** Advantage against poison damage.
- 570 GP in relics, artifacts of historical weight.

STORY REWARDS

- Sylvara becomes an ally, pledging aid and knowledge.
- Green Veil heralds the players as champions, bestowing further opportunities and alliances.

SUPPORTING DETAILS

- **Custom Encounter Tables:** Unveil jungle perils like giant spiders, will-o'-wisps, and assassin vines.
- **Simple Maps:** Provide sketches for the bridge and temple, facilitating tactical gameplay.
- **Atmospheric Music:** Enhances immersion through jungle sounds, whispers, and spectral chants.

FLEXIBLE OUTCOMES

Player Agency Choices:

- **Side with Issalith:** Becoming her enforcers, they forsake Varnath, embracing a new dark path.
- **Abstain from Intervention:** Green Veil succumbs as Issalith's influence spreads, subsuming additional forces for her army.

POST-GAME WRAP-UP

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- Which aspect of the one-shot stood out: combat, roleplay, or puzzles?
- What moments felt the most heroic or immersive?
- Are there desires to explore more of Atroxis in future arcs?

EPILOGUE OPTIONS

- Sylvara offers continued ventures into Azhreth's mysteries.
- The rulers of Varnath seek the group for their proficiency in handling jungle warfare and the arcane arts.