THE EYE OF ALL-SEEING WONDER

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INTERNECINE!

A scenario of co-operation and conflict

This adventure takes place when a ship carrying the player characters is wrecked on a small uncharted island in the Deeps of Chanayaga. It is suitable for characters with a little adventuring experience, the best fighters having Melee values around 21-26.

As written, the adventure Assumes that the player-characters are employed aboard the ship as marines. One or two characters might be sorcerers, again in the employ of the ship's owner.

Other options are possible. Some of the players might be sailors. It is possible that a foreign passenger is aboard. Further player characters could show up as marooned sailors from previous wrecks. In fact, the adventure provides a good excuse for bringing together quite a disparate group.

The journey

The ship on which the characters are travelling, the Meteor, is one of two Sescha-class fighting galleys accompanying the Illustrious, a Tnek-class merchantman, as escort. The flotilla set out from Jakálla, sailing close to the Tsolyáni coast until they reached the small island west of Ngeshtu Head. They then struck out south into open ocean as far as Ssamris Isle. The intention was to sail west from Ssamris Isle until they made landfall around Lairu Harbour, then down the coast to Tsamra. In theory this route (as opposed to sailing right round Penu'im Bay) should clip some 10-15 days off the journey time. It should also not have been too risky at this time of year (the month of Halir).

Alas, it is the fate of man to be at the mercy of the gods. A storm blew up barely a day out of Ssamris. The flotilla was scattered. It was all the crew of the Meteor could do to hold her together as she ran before the wind, driven on all through the afternoon and night.

By morning the storm has died down. The Meteor is taking on water and has the additional problem of carrying very little in the way of supplies. But the day brings a glimmer of hope when they sight an island ahead. The mast has split, so the rowers bend wearily over their oars and slowly the Meteor limps into the shelter of a placid bay.

The island

The island is roughly oval, seven kilometres long by four across, with a coastal fringe of thick jungle, above which steep grassy hillsides rise towards the soaring peak of an extinct volcano in the centre. (Of course, the characters won't discover the extent of the island unless they send out scouting parties.)

The referee may find it helpful to sketch the bay where the Meteor puts in. The beach, of white coral sand dotted with a few rocks, is 35 metres wide and backs onto a area of dense jungle. To the characters' left as they come ashore, the beach tapers to a strand only 15 metres wide that stretches into the distance. To their right, a high shelf of overgrown rock blocks the beach after only 200 metres or so. At the foot of this rock they see the wreck of a Mu'ugalavyáni bireme

The ship's company

The Meteor's crew are all members of the Blazoned Sail Clan. The ordinary oarsmen (of whom there are forty-two) are of the Deilesha and Ra'agana lineages—all of social status 2. The oarsmaster, carpenter and stroke-singer are of the Nerukan lineage (status 3-4). The captain and first mate are cousins belonging to the Farrekesh lineage (status 6).

There are twelve marines. This includes the player-characters. Assume that any non-player marines are average ex-troopers with Melee values in the range 19-24.

Naturally someone is in command of the marines. Lord Hetepek hiAztlan (the ship's owner and thus everyone's employer) will have previously assigned this position to the player-character with the best soldiering experience. If this character dies in the course of the adventure, command will pass to the marine of highest social status.

Also aboard is Lady Chamakiyang hiAztlan, Hetepek's wife. Her presence gives the characters good reason to hope that Hetepek may come looking for them. She is also a potential source of discord, and of headaches for both the marine commander and the captain.

Rescue chances

Lord Hetepek was aboard the Illustrious when the storm blew up, and may already be scouring the area for signs of the Meteor's fate. Of course, the characters have no way of knowing whether the Illustrious weathered the storm, but it is a fair asSúmption. Even so, they would be foolish to sit it out in the hope of rescue. The island they are on lies almost four hundred kilometres south west of Ssamris and is not marked on any charts. Hetepek has no reason to suppose they can survive more than a few days on the supplies aboard to Meteor, and any search of the area could take weeks. In fact he will make the attempt anyway, but the chance of the Illustrious finding the island is only 3% each day. (Check for this on the third and subsequent days. Once the characters put back to sea, the chance of the Illustrious finding them drops to 1% daily.)

Repairs

The captain orders the Meteor hauled up onto the beach. After a brief inspection, he estimates repairs will take two or three days. He immediately tries to establish an authoritative tone: "We must Assume the Illustrious will be circling in the area trying to find us. In the meantime, we need food and a supply of fresh water. And I want a party to look over the Mu'ugalavyáni ship yonder..."

The player-characters may wish to dispute who is in overall command. The problem is that there is no formal chain of command. In normal circumstances, the marines are supposed to take charge during sea battles and to organize shore parties. Unless the player character leading the marines agrees to defer to the captain, it is probable that the whole group will begin to polarize into factions.

For the referee's information, 120 man-days' work is required to make the Meteor seaworthy. They could set to sea before this work is complete, but it would be taking a risk. Someone will need to supervise the repair work, and at the end of each day this person must make a +5 Shipbuilder check. A critical success on this roll means that 25% extra progress has been made (eg, if forty men were working they will have achieved fifty man-days worth of labour). Critical failure means the day's work is wasted; ordinary failure means half the work is wasted.

The captain has 6 levels of Shipbuilding, while the carpenter has 12. Ideally, then, it should be the carpenter who oversees the work. Tsolyáni regard for status being what it is, however, the captain will actually do this in consultation with his clan cousin the carpenter, the net effect being to average their skill levels for the purpose of repair checks.

The bireme

Searching the Mu'ugalavyáni bireme reveals a few dead sailors and many dead oarsmen. They were apparently killed in the wreck. Evidently most of the rowers were slaves, as can be seen by the bronze torcs around their necks. This is odd, as slaves are not usually set to work as oarsmen in the Five Empires. A few of the slaves seem to have been set free—perhaps by a kindly slavemaster as the ship foundered? Many are still chained to their oars, and from their condition it looks like the wreck occured maybe a week or more ago.

Curiously, about a dozen of the rowers are not here. It seems that they must have survived the wreck and were unchained so as to be moved elsewhere.

The bodies of one or two of the slain show sharp gaping wounds. Anyone who has fought Hlüss has a chance (unmodified Cleverness check) to recognise these characteristic injuries inflicted by their jag-edged swords. Anyone who can read Mu'ugalavyáni (or who is Mu'ugalavyáni) will spot the glyph stamped into the slaves' collars that indicates they were property of the state. The same glyph is visible on an open despatch-locker located in a small raised cabin at the stern of the ship. Someone succeeding in a -5 Soldier/Reasoning check realizes that the likely explanation for the bireme being rowed by slaves is secrecy. Free men might blab when in their cups, but slaves could be put to death when the bireme reached its destination with no one any the wiser.

Survival

The ship's remaining supplies will last for only two days. Tall trees along the back of the beach sport a profusion of large dark nuts under their glossy foliage. A +5 Survival check identifies these as G'ar nuts, providing edible blue flesh once the hard shell is broken open. Any characters gathering them must make a +5 Dexterity check, with critical failure indicating the character falls while climbing and suffers 1D10 minus 1D6 damage. (Ingenious characters may find other ways to gather these nuts.)

Few of the fruits and berries to be found on the island are much like anything back home in Tsolyánu. Without the Survival skill, they will be reduced to trial and error to determine what is safe to eat. A character sampling anything rolls D10:

1-7 = the fruit is okay;
8-9 = stomach cramps reduce Stamina by half for the rest of the day;
10 = poison requires an unmodified Stamina check or incapacitated for the rest of the day.

Each person gathering G'ar nuts can get enough in two hours to provide one person's daily food requirement. In theory this would be an ideal task for the player-characters and other marines, while the sailors get on with repairs. Characters of respectable status may chafe at doing any such undignified work, however. ("We are warriors, not farmers!") This is a challenge that the player-character in charge must deal with, or else risk losing authority.

Scouting

It will be necessary to send out at least one group to search for fresh water. A kilometre or so along the beach they come across a strange broken object the size of a boulder. The substance it is made of is not stone, but a light calcinous material about as hard as pumice. Other similar objects are nearby.

Continuing another half-kilometre, they find the source of these objects, lying across a reef of rocks like a giant broken egg. It seems to be some kind of wrecked vessel—but not like any craft that ever sailed out of Jakálla harbour! It is platter shaped, about thirty metres across, filled with a flooded honeycomb of low tunnels. It seems to be made of the same substance as the "boulders" on the beach. (This is in fact a Hlüss hive-ship, as a -5 Sailor or unmodified Magical Lore check will identify. It was thrown up by the storm onto a spur of rock at the end of the beach. It is so badly damaged as to be completely unseaworthy.)

Higher up, at the edge of the trees, there are signs of burnt-out fires and a makeshift Hlüss camp. There are several dead Hlüss here, obviously slain by sword-wounds, including one Hlüss noble with many gems remaining in its carapace. These gems are worth a total of maybe 1000 Kaitars, but will take almost half an hour to prise out.

While the characters are having a go at getting the gems, they may well be surprised by two or three "runt" Hlüss. These are tiny wizened versions of the full-sized creature, ranging from twenty to forty centimetres in length. Cast out by the full sized Hlüss to fend for themselves, their only aim is to grab a bit of food (ie, flesh) and scuttle off into the jungle with it.

Shipwrecked mariners

The scouting party subsequently encounter two figures who dash off as soon as they're seen. One, who has a Tsolyáni look about him, turns and hesitates as he gets a closer look at the party, then stops running and calls his companion back.

Approaching warily, the pair introduce themselves Aisenish Turel and Zakaren hiAhanur. Both came to the island on the wrecked bireme. Aisenish is a sailor, and Zakaren is a slave from Tsolyánu. (Originally from Penom, and of the Flowering Life Clan, though he has been a slave for ten years and by now is almost used to it. Indeed, up until a week ago he had a better life then he ever did as a free man.)

These two were part of a foraging party sent out by Prince Hurusamish (see below). They were ambushed by Hlüss. "We managed to get away," says Zakaren, "but now we can't find the others. Aisenish thinks they must have relocated to another camp. We've had to fend for ourselves these last three days, and a bloody nightmare it's been too, with those Hlüss scuttling about at all hours of the night. Safest time's the middle of the day, funnily enough..."

A tale to tell

Aisenish and Zakaren cannot tell the characters much. They were aboard the Mu'ugalavyáni bireme, the Scourge of Hrsh, which was transporting several officers the Company of Mourners in Sable to Ssamris Isle. En route they encountered a Hlüss ship which must have ventured into plunder.

Caught in a sudden storm, both ships were blown far off course. The Hlüss ship was wrecked first. The Scourge of Hrsh stood out to sea until the rowers tired, then it too was wrecked. The soldiers and surviving crew freed a few slaves, but were forced to flee when the Hlüss showed up. That was over a month ago. For the last three days, Aisenish and Zakaren have been on their own.

The Hlüss

The Hlüss apprised the damage to their ship and realized it was irreparable. The surviving slaves taken from the wrecked bireme were used for egg-laying, but then the ship's "mother" died of injuries it had sustained in the wreck. Stranded on the island, the Hlüss switched into a colonizing mentality, rather as some social insects do. They divided into two factions, each supporting a "princess". These factions are now at war with each other. Both factions desire more humans for egg laying: the "runt" Hlüss (about half normal size) are all they can hatch from the local Jakkohl-like fauna.

These is one Hlüss lair at each end of the island, located in caves in the jungle. The strong acid reek of these places gives anyone who has encountered Hlüss ample warning not to enter. Each lair comprises one "princess" and one "chamberlain" (who do not fight), two "lords" (old warriors distinguishable by the gems studded into their exoskeletons) and about twenty ordinary fighters. There are also several paralysed slaves in whom eggs have been laid, but these will not hatch for another hundred days.

The Mu'ugalavyáni

The Scourge of Hrsh was transporting Prince Hurusamish Gatlena, commandant of the Company of Mourners in Sable, the elite Mu'ugalavyáni state security legion. He was on his way to Ssamris Isle with orders that would place him in command there. By the terms of the treaty of 2021 AS, the Mu'ugalavyáni are only supposed to maintain a token presence on Ssamris Isle and Tsolyáni shipping is to be given free passage. Prince Hurusamish's orders were to change all that. The plan was to rapidly build up a large fleet at the island and use it to launch a full-scale invasion against the outlying Tsolyáni islands (Ganga, Vra and Thayuri). Thus the Mu'ugalavyáni hope to snatch territory from their old foes while the Imperium is off-balance from the threat of civil war.

Since Prince Hurusamish and his men are outnumbered by the Hlüss, they have set up a hideaway on the upper mountain slopes. From there they observed the crippled Meteor putting in to shore. Naturally Hurusamish is keen to get off the island, but he is content to let one day go by while the sailors make repairs. During the morning of the second day, he will choose his moment to try to seize control of the Meteor.

Hurusamish's scouts have reported some sort of factional conflict among the Hlüss. He knows nothing about the reason for this, of course, but he is enough of a realist to know that such a lode of luck cannot last. His aim will be to get off the island once he judges the repairs to the ship to be at least three-quarters completed.

Prince Hurusamish is accompanied by his ruthless second-in-command, Lord Surendish Ju'una, and six elite troopers. All wear light excellent steel and are armed with excellent steel swords. The Prince also has an Eye of Healing with 6 charges and an Excellent Ruby Eye with 12 charges.

Also in the Mu'ugalavyáni group are the captain of the Scourge of Hrsh, his Aridani bo'sun, two sailors and four slaves. None of these will fight unless their lives depend on it.

Hurusamish's strategy

Hurusamish is outnumbered by the Tsolyáni, but a direct assault to wrest ownership of the Meteor is not his only option. First he will try approaching the marines, preferably while they are scouting and hence without a rabble of sailors to back them up. He knows that if he can establish an authoritative position over the marines, the Tsolyáni sailors will go along with that.

Hurusamish starts by explaining the situation as regards the Hlüss and pointing out the importance of a truce. His tone ought to make it clear to the characters that this would not involve a partnership of equals. Remember that Hurusamish is a tough soldier, accustomed to command. By making sure that his men refer to him conspicuously as "His Highness the Prince", he capitalizes on the respect for social rank that pertains throughout the Five Empires.

If Hurusamish sees that the Tsolyáni will not buckle under, he will target the character in charge with a formal challenge to mortal combat. This mirrors the form of a Qadarni battle challenge, and it would be very difficult (-5 Soldier/Etiquette check) for the character to avoid it without serious loss of face. (Players may not appreciate the importance of face. If so, explain that the character cannot remain in authority if this challenge is not met.) Prince Hurusamish will not fight in person, but appoints one of his men. Similarly, the Tsolyáni commander can appoint a champion from among the marines. The Mu'ugalavyáni champion offers to exchange weapons with his opponent to make things more even, insofar as he himself has steel armour.

Only if the player-characters manage to worm out of fighting a duel will Prince Hurusamish commence direct hostilities. If his champion loses the duel, he grudgingly accedes to an equal partnership. (The player-characters ought to have the sense to realize that this is the best they can hope for when dealing with a person of such exalted status.)

If it comes to a fight and the Mourners in Sable succeed in overpowering the marines, the Meteor's sailors will surrender. (One blast of the Excellent Ruby Eye is more than enough to convince them!) Hurusamish will accept the parole of any character who lays down his arms. He then, quite courteously but firmly, will insist on placing metal shackles on Lady Chamakiyang to prevent her using further sorcery. If things do get to this stage, the characters are in trouble. Hurusamish is prepared to take Chamakiyang and any other Tsolyáni nobles along with him when he leaves, but he intends to strand the rank-&-file marines because they are non-essential personnel.

Setting to sea

The Meteor can carry enough water to supply sixty-one people (the entire ship's company) for five to eight days. (The difficulty of hygiene means that barrels can go bad, hence this margin of uncertainty.) Finding freshwater streams on the island is not difficult, but transporting full one-Nmecha barrels (each weighing 60 kilograms) back to the beach will require some effort.

Cargo space is also sufficient to store a week's basic rations. This can be supplemented while at sea by a character making a +5 Survival or Fisherman check, which will add one day's food for 1-3 people (1-6 people on a critical success.) The sailors won't have any time for fishing, as they will be engaged in rowing and other chores.

Once at sea, the characters are faced with several options:

1. Sail around hoping that the Illustrious will show up. The chance of that is only 1% each day.

2. Sail due north. Mu'ugalavyáni coastal waters lie about 1400 kilometres in this direction, whereupon the chance of encountering another ship climbs from virtually nil to 10% or more each day. The mainland lies another 300 km north, and the ship will probably make landfall quite close to the Tsolyáni border.

3. Sail due west. The chance of encountering coastal shipping becomes 10% a day after 950 km, and another 150 km will bring them into Fashaa Port, on the Livyáni coast.

Making headway

There will be no more storms once back at sea—unless the referee is feeling vicious and wants to maroon his players on HlüSsúyal! The distance covered each day depends on several factors including the prevailing wind, the health of the crew, and the captain's skill. Abstract this by rolling 2D6+3. Subtract 1 for every ten man days the Meteor was short of optimum repairs, down to a minimum of 1. Multiply the final result by 20 kilometres to give the base distance covered in a day, Assuming the captain succeeds in a +5 Ship's Captain check. (Critical success increases the distance covered that day by 25%. Failure reduces it by 25%—or 50% on a critical fail.)

Running out of time

Whether or not they realize it, the characters are working against the clock. Scouting parties may have caught sight of groups of Hlüss stalking one another around the jungle interior. By noon of the third day there will be no such sightings. The Hlüss civil war is over. There is just a single undisputed Hlüss "mother". Now they need some hosts for their eggs...

The Hlüss attack comprises three jewel encrusted "lords" and twenty-five ordinary fighters. A group of ten launch a diversion from the trees at the top of the beach while the remainder emerge from out of the sea. (Hlüss are semi-aquatic, remember.) At this point, a +5 check based on the average of a character's social status and Soldier level is needed to hold firm. Anyone failing this check runs for the trees. (Player-characters are exempt from making the check. If and when their morale breaks it should be as a result of role-playing choice, not random dice rolls.)

To save having to make forty-seven separate rolls for the Blazoned Sail people, the referee can just Assume that all but 2-12 of them will panic. The captain and first mate should be among those who stand their ground.

None of the Mourners in Sable will panic. If Hurusamish is in charge by this stage he will have his men fight side-by side with the Tsolyáni against the Hlüss, and if they acquit themselves well he'll be honour-bound to take them all with him in the Meteor.

Principal characters

Lady Chamakiyang hiAztlan (22 years old, status 16) is proud, beautiful, pampered and wilful. A princess in her own land (Chung An Satar—see last Issue) she is accustomed to obedience. She does not hold any specific position of authority in the ship's company, but that won't stop her. Almost as soon as the Meteor is dragged ashore she will start iSsúing strident commands. She wants a parasol set up over some mats and cushions. She wants a good breakfast. She wants less noise from the work force. Characters may begin to think she wants something else, too, but since she is their employer's wife they had better not try it. Another factor to consider is that she is a 9th level Ritual Sorceress with Carminry +5, Necromagy +4, Pathogenesy +4 and Venefice +5.

Hafarek hiFarrekesh (30 years old, status 6) is the captain of the Meteor. He distrusts soldiers because he believes the military are jacks-of-all-trades. In an emergency like this, he would rather fall back on his own expertise than trust to a bunch of marines "whose main interest is in designating tasks and shouting orders." Hafarek is completely guileless; if the party descend into factional squabbling he will refuse to have any part of it.

Prince Hurusamish Gatlena (51 years old, status 32) is the commandant of the Company of Mourners in Sable—the black-liveried "legion of executioners". He is a man of honour, but first and foremost he is motivated by his duty as a Prince of Mu'ugalavyá. Thus he recognizes that sometimes one must put the needs of the state above one's personal honour. He is carrying coded documents (see above) which he will destroy rather than see them fall into Tsolyáni hands. To decipher these, a character must follow a +5 Literacy check with a -10 Mu'ugalavyáni/Spy check.

Lord Surendish Ju'unu (43 years old, status 25) is Hurusamish's second-in-command. A practical-minded and ruthless man whose extreme zeal for the god Hrsh blinds him to the possibility of admirable qualities in a non-worshipper. He would as soon simply butcher the Tsolyáni marines ("...and the heathen witch!") and enslave the sailors.

Sergeant Tharandesh Ngale (23 years old, status 10) is in charge of Prince Hurusamish's elite bodyguard. An earnest, dedicated young man. He has five troopers under him, one of whom has 6 levels of Assassin.

The employer

To develop the lead-in to this adventure (the voyage from Jakálla to Ssamris), the referee will need some background detail on the player-characters' employer:

Hetepek hiAztlan (22 years old, status 25) is a charismatic young warrior who has had a meteoric rise in wealth and influence. After a relatively impoverished childhood in the village of K'gashtene outside Jakálla, followed by a term in the Legion of Mighty Jakálla, he had the good luck to become bodyguard and steward to a lord of the Tlakotani Clan. This gave him a good financial base and brought him to the notice of some high-ranking nobles and bureaucrats. Driven by boundless energy and vision, he has almost single-handedly revitalized the fortunes of the ancient Silver Links Clan.

A worshipper of Dlamelish, Hetepek is always courteous to women since in his view they share the nature of the goddess. He is clever, but his intelligence is solely of a practical down-to earth sort. He has no patience with abstract concepts. He believes utterly in his own destiny ("I am the clan; the clan is me!") and is driven by inexhaustible ambition. He rewards loyalty with generosity, treachery with ruthless reprisal.

Final notes

The title of the adventure was intended as an ironic comment on the factionalism of both the Hlüss (which I expected the players to perceive as entirely biological) and the humans (which they would of course justify as politics, not biology).

In practice, the internecine splits ran deeper than I thought, the Tsolyáni group beginning to show signs of fragmenting as soon as they arrived on the beach—something I have tried to reflect (and even encourage) in writing this version. Interestingly, it is pretty much the same thing that happens to the group of isolated legionaries in Professor Barker's novel *Flamesong*.

In a sense, the adventure is like a nightmare equivalent of one of those "corporate survival weekends"—except this is the real thing! Characters who manage to hold things together and bring the group through the ordeal in one piece will be rewarded with high rank and responsibility. Hetepek recognizes and values such ability. Characters who are found wanting will most likely never have to worry about facing Hetepek's wrath. Their just deserts will be a unmarked grave on an uncharted beach—or worse, ending up as food for a new clutch of Hlüss larvae.

MV = Melee Value, Dam = Damage, HP = Hit Points, Arm = Armour, Stam = Stamina

	MV	Dam	HP	Arm	Stam
Tsolyáni					
average marine	24 (sword)	+1	**13** [3/5/7]	4	13
average sailor	11 (club/oar)	0	**12** [3/5/7]	0	13
Mu'ugalavyáni					
Hurusamish	30 (sword)	+1	**13** [3/5/7]	6	13
Surendish	29 (sword)	0	**13** [3/5/7]	6	14
Tharandesh	35 (sword)	+2	**16** [4/6/9]	6	15
average soldier	31 (sword)	+1	**15** [3/6/8]	6	15
Hlüss					
average 'lord'	32 (sword) 9 (sting)	+2	**17** [4/6/9]	4	14
average fighter	21 (sword) 12 (sting)	+1	**15** [3/5/7]	3	12

The Hlüss stings inflict a base 1D6 damage and are poisoned. Characters stung must make a -3 Stamina check. Ordinary failure reduces the character to one half-action a round. Critical failure (or a second sting) results in paralysis. Recovery takes 1-5 days if a Detoxify spell or Eye of Healing is not available.

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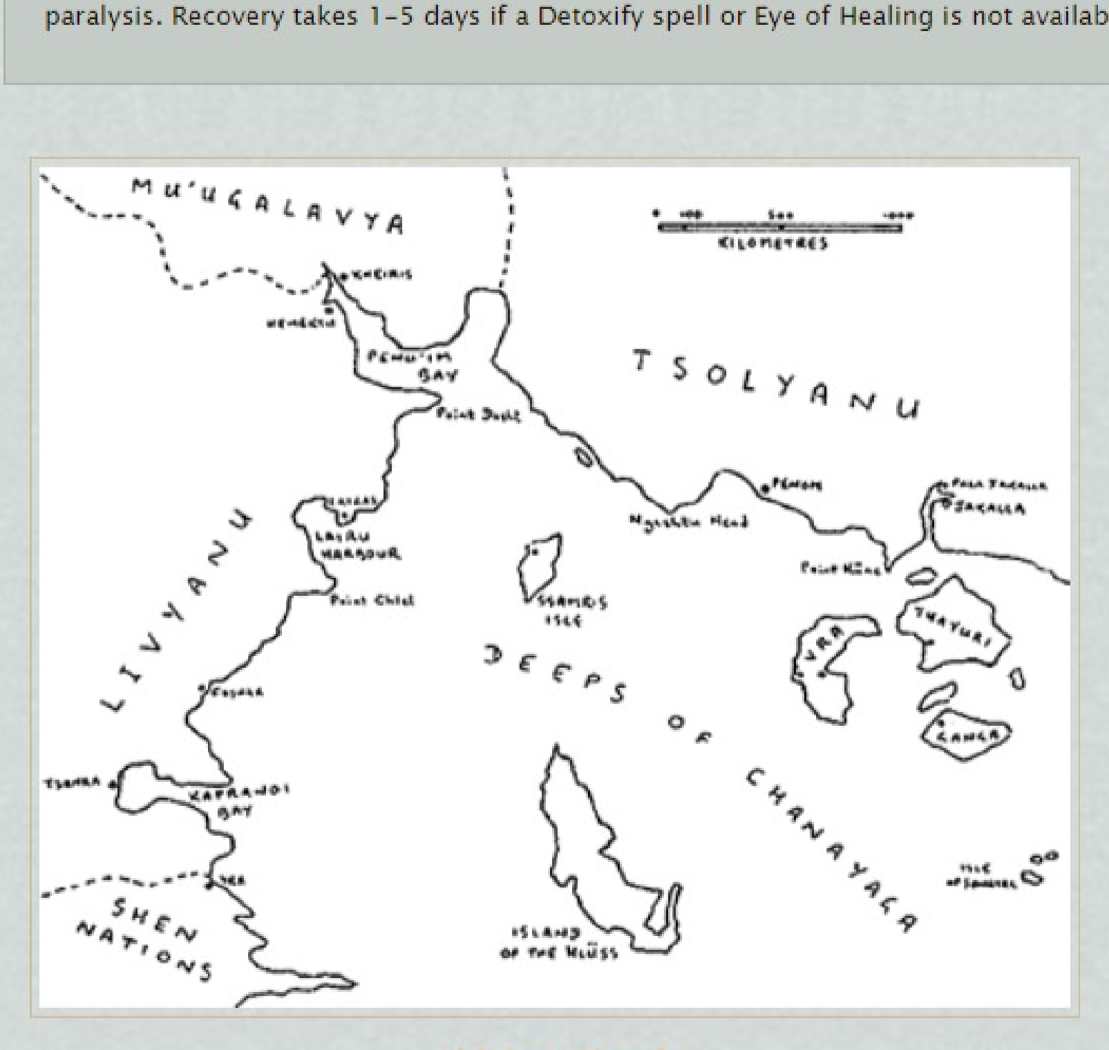

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