

ANY PORT IN A STORM



A ONE SHEET ADVENTURE FOR THE DAY AFTER RAGNAROK BY H. M. 'DAIN' LYBARGER

The islands of the Coral Sea may be British possessions, but the Japanese regularly prey on merchant shipping from their base on Nauru to the north, and the natives have developed strange customs, thanks to contact with outsiders during the War.

Heroes traversing the Coral Sea either by boat or seaplane are spotted and pursued by the *Hokoko Maru*, a Japanese commerce raider. Tamakua, in the Duff Island chain, has a shallow harbor—too shallow for the Japanese cruiser to risk. The single native village on the island seems like a welcome refuge...

A FRIENDLY, WELCOMING PEOPLE

The brilliant blue water of the bay leads to a white sand beach. The only sign of human habitation in this island paradise are a row of beached outrigger canoes, and a tower of bamboo poles lashed together with braided coconut-fiber rope, just visible above the jungle foliage.

The locals who run to meet the heroes' vessel wear a mix of Polynesian clothing and factory-made Japanese uniforms—though the latter are inventively re-interpreted in ways no spit-and-polish military officer would approve. They seem eager for the heroes to meet their leader, and beckon them toward a path leading inland, away from the bamboo tower.

The village is a half-mile walk through the jungle from the bay, and consists of a dozen or so wood and bamboo structures raised on stilts around a central clearing. Wooden columns, carved with leering faces, support steeply-pitched thatched roofs, and some of the buildings incorporate curving sheet metal panels in their walls, obviously segments of aircraft fuselages and wings.

Hoanui, the village headman, steps down from the largest building in the village, and spreads his arms wide in greeting. He wears native dress and his prized possession, a bright blue hat. The hat is a British naval rating's cap identifying the wearer as a Motor Mechanic to anyone who makes a Common Knowledge roll. Hoanui's face is deeply lined, but his glittering eyes miss nothing as he greets the heroes *"Since the war, we get few visitors. We must celebrate your arrival!"*

LUAU

The celebration is a feast that evening featuring roast pig, baked yams, raw fish, a paste made from taro root, and a great local delicacy; sliced Spam. Two bonfires are lit in the center of the village, and mats are unrolled in circles around the fires for seating.

By the local custom, men and women eat separately. Female heroes will be expected to sit with and eat with the village women.

The older women spent most of the day preparing the food, and the younger women do the serving, carrying large platters from diner to diner. Observant (or suspicious) heroes making a Common Knowledge roll recognize some of the platters as sheet metal segments with Japanese markings—parts of a Ki-56 cargo plane. Drummers provide music, and village youths dance and perform acrobatics to entertain Tamakua's honored guests.

The natives never stray far from the fires, as if they are wary of the darkness or the jungle, but some of the young women serving dinner flirt outrageously with the male heroes.

Hoanui watches, and seems pleased if any of the heroes respond to the flirtation.

The heroes may note during dinner that several village men eat hurriedly and excuse themselves before dusk.

Later, after nightfall, torch light is visible beyond the stretch of jungle separating the village from the beach. Distant sounds of chanting come on the evening breeze, but no one in the village takes any notice.

Heroes may wind up in the edge of the jungle at some point, either seeking privacy in the arms of a local woman or investigating the torch light and chanting. In the latter case, they'll see something truly peculiar.

"ROAD BILONG CARGO"

Each evening, two village men don a pair of carefully-preserved Royal Navy uniform jackets and carved wooden "headphones". They climb a bamboo tower and chant ritual formulae as others spread and light rows of floating lanterns marking out a full-size false "landing strip" across the edge of the bay. The eerie words from the tower are in English; *"Zero Niner Two approach. Zero Niner Two cleared for landing. Zero Niner Two approach..."*

Hoanui cheerfully explains the ritual, if asked. *"When the British Tars were here, during your war, many planes landed. Much good cargo came to Tamakua; tinned meat and milk, fine clothes; many good things. We saw that you white British people do not have to work for your fine things, you call cargo from the sky with your magic. We watched, most carefully. Now we do the same!"* He is perhaps overly quick to reassure the heroes; *"We are good allies to our British friends, we only use the white magic to call Japanese planes to us!"*

Magic or no, the lit runway in the inky Pacific darkness works well as a decoy, and a lost aircraft could easily be lured to a terrifying crash in the bay...



ASSIGNATION

The following morning, smoke from the *Hokoko Maru* is visible near the horizon. The coast isn't clear yet. The heroes have time to explore the island, speak with villagers (the few who speak a little English, anyway), and otherwise relax. If they didn't discover the ritual the night before, this is a good time for them to run across the bamboo airstrip. The natives don't mind the heroes' presence at all. In fact, Hoanui seems extremely pleased to have them here. "Later I will introduce you to my daughter. Very pretty girl, very shy around strangers."

Near dusk, the male hero with the highest Charisma is approached by a young woman who strides lithely out of the jungle, clad in a scarlet sarong. She's alluring—mesmerizing, in fact—but the hero doesn't recognize her. If she'd been at the feast, he'd certainly remember. Could this be the daughter Hoanui mentioned? She's not talkative enough to confirm or deny that supposition. She appears to have just one thing on her mind: getting the object of her attentions alone somewhere. Resisting her charms takes more than willpower; the target must succeed on a Spirit roll versus her *puppet* power.

KISS OF THE SERPENT WOMAN

The girl the heroes think is the headman's daughter is actually a *Mae*, a serpent-creature which appears in the form of a beautiful maiden. She comes out of the jungle to lure men from their tribes and homes—and drain them of life! If her target avoids being alone with her (perhaps to prevent the presumed displeasure of her "father" Hoanui), there is a horrible discovery when day breaks; the withered husk that was once one of the headphone-wearers from the cargo ceremony, dumped in a grove of bamboo not far from the village.

The villagers refuse to speak of the man's death; even mentioning it is taboo. Although they're obviously distressed, it's equally obvious that they've seen this kind of thing before.

ISLAND HOSPITALITY

Hoanui is well aware of the *Mae* and the threat she poses. He was overjoyed at the heroes' arrival, because every able-bodied male stranger is one less member of his own clan at risk. To keep the heroes around as long as possible, at his first opportunity Hoanui sabotages their vehicle. He learned diesel mechanics during the war, so whether the heroes arrived by plane or ship, he's able to foul their engines in a way that won't immediately look like sabotage. The first time the heroes try to leave Tamakua, their engines fail to start. Fixing the problem requires a Successful Repair roll. With a raise, the hero working on the engines detects that they've been tampered with.

MAE DAYS

The *Hokoko Maru* lurks in the area for another two days, but now the island seems more like a prison than a refuge. Each night the *Mae* returns, approaching the most handsome stranger who still survives and luring him toward the jungle. If she gets someone alone, she attacks! If a hero escapes to warn his companions, the *Mae* targets one of the village men instead.

If confronted, Hoanui will unapologetically admit everything; his deception, his sabotage, and his intent to get the heroes killed to save some of his own people. All that remains is his plea for aid. "The Mae hates the white magic. She lay sleeping many years, until we discovered the cargo ceremony. Now she tries to make us close the road to cargo, and return to the poverty of the old ways."

If the heroes destroy the *Mae*, how long will it be before a new one arises? In the meantime, they've made interesting friends—who have the disturbing ability to coax planes from the sky...

Mae

A *Mae* is a 'seductive serpent' that feeds on human life-force. There is likely only one *Mae* on any given island—perhaps they are "dryads" born of the tropic jungles. In their natural forms, *Mae* have scaly humanoid torsos and long serpentine tails. Their transformation ability might be illusion rather than physical shape-shifting.

ATTRIBUTES: Agility d8, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d10, Vigor d10

SKILLS: Climbing d10, Fighting d8, Intimidation d8, Notice d8, Persuasion d12, Stealth d6, Taunt d10

PACE: 7 **PARRY:** 6 **TOUGHNESS:** 8

Special Abilities

- **BITE:** Str+d4
- **DRAINING KISS:** Instead of a normal attack, a *Mae* can make a touch attack (with her lips). Each Raise on the *Mae*'s Fighting roll inflicts one wound on her target.
- **REGENERATION:** If a *Mae* succeeds with Draining Kiss, she makes a Vigor roll to heal any damage she has sustained. A success heals one wound; each raise heals an additional wound.
- **SUPERNATURAL ALLURE:** Charisma +6.
- **FASCINATE:** *Mae* can use the *puppet* power on lone male humans, using Persuasion as their arcane skill.
- **CHANGE FORM:** *Mae* can transform from their half-human/half-serpent form into beautiful maidens.
- **SERPENT FORM:** *Mae* slither quickly, but cannot run. Their tails give them +4 to Grapple rolls.

Credits

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