

HEROES OF RURA-TONGA

PULP ADVENTURES
IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC

GIFT OF THE GODS

By Peter Schweighofer

Get a glimpse at the *Heroes of Rura-Tonga* adventure collection, complete with source material for running a pulp campaign in the South Pacific. Run this adventure outline by customizing the *Any-System Key* stats to your favorite game system. You can find customization notes and guidelines for the *Any-System Key* at the Griffon Publishing Studio website, <http://griffonpub.home.att.net>.

March 2, 1938—After uncovering rumors of a cargo cult on a remote island 100 miles northwest of Rura-Tonga, Professor Higginbotham hired us to take him out to a place he called Antan Island. He didn't seem to know much about the cult itself, just something about natives worshipping some aircraft or meteor that crashed on the island years ago. But he sure pinned the island's exact location, for we found it without any navigational problems. Now if we can just get the natives to take us to their guarded holy of holies....

EPISODE ONE: CARGO CULT

The heroes fly to Antan Island to investigate reports of a secluded tribe of natives perpetuating a cargo cult, worshipping modern technology deposited here by accident and mistaken for signs from the gods. Professor Higginbotham claims he collected tales of this cargo cult from villagers on Rura-Tonga; he hires Captain Sharp and his seaplane to take him to Antan Island to investigate. Finding the island according to Higginbotham's anecdotal navigational information proves surprisingly easy, and the characters quickly locate the native village near a small lagoon on their first aerial survey of the coastline.

FIRST CONTACT

The heroes must make contact with the natives and convince them to lead them into the jungle to the curious shrine to their cargo gods. A crowd of villagers meets them on the beach and leads them to the headman's hut. A shaman emerges in a costume of worn red, silky material and a conical, metal hat; he dances around the heroes, waves some relic at them, then returns to stand before them and hear their requests.

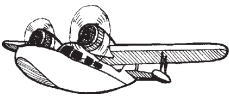
Perceptive heroes realize the villagers are typical South Seas islanders who speak a dialect of the language used by natives on Rura-Tonga. Their dwellings, however, exhibit an odd architecture; although they're built on stilts like native huts on other islands, they have a round, conical form with a single square entry near the base. Those making *Hard notice* rolls spot a few more interesting things:

- The shaman's scepter looks like an old tube or pipe taken from some kind of engine. Likewise his conical "hat" might have once been part of an engine cowling. Anyone touching his costume realizes the red fabric feels like parachute silk.

ULTERIOR MOTIVES

This scenario can be used with the pre-generated characters presented in the *Heroes of Rura-Tonga* adventure sourcebook or with original heroes created by the players. The premise of *Gift of the Gods* depends on one character with a scholarly bent convincing the others to explore rumors of a cargo cult; this same character actually works for an intelligence service and uses the story of anthropological investigation as a cover to retrieve information delivered to the island by allied spies. In *Heroes of Rura-Tonga* Professor Higginbotham poses as an unassuming anthropologist, but really operates as an agent for America's Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI), a perfect cover for the action in this scenario.





LEGENDS

If the heroes can gain the shaman's confidence, he loosely relates the legend of how the sky gods arrived. Many generations ago the islanders saw a ring of lightning in the sky with no clouds, heard a great explosion, and saw the sky split open. A tongue of flame fell from the sky, sending the gods crashing into the island. The villagers found their hut in a crater; when it cooled, they opened the hut door and saw three gods inside, sleeping on their thrones. One woke up, raised his hand, and said one word, "Vosindvir," before his spirit returned to sleep. The natives took the hut and made a shrine in the mountain where the gods now rest until they return at a time of the island's greatest need. To appease the gods and ensure their loyalty, the natives have since venerated them with ceremonies and offerings. The "sky gods" are actually astronauts from an alternate history, parallel earth dimension whose capsule fell through a space-time rift and crashed on the island.

- It seems from his animated language that the shaman believes the heroes are intruders who, if they don't leave, will rouse the anger of the sky gods.
• A wooden totem hangs over the entrance to the shaman's hut; the odd arrangement of bound sticks vaguely resembles the Nazi swastika.

The characters must engage in some good roleplaying and bargaining to convey to the shaman that they are not trespassers but pilgrims seeking the holy place where those who fell from the sky now dwell. They might offer trinkets, trade items, valuables, or personal gear to gain the shaman's trust or win over the natives. The heroes could claim they heard of the sanctuary and wish to place offerings to honor the sky gods. Most peaceful efforts result in a ceremonial trip to the holy shrine. Should these efforts somehow fail, the characters could defeat or evade the natives, then wander off and search the island jungle for the sanctuary on their own.

SKY GOD SHRINE

Whether the heroes accompany a delegation of visitors (led by the shaman) or discover the site on their own, they find the sky god shrine occupying a cave at the base of the huge mountain that rises from the center of Antan Island.

The cave entrance was hand-hewn from the rock in an unnatural triangle shape; some might say the portal looks vaguely like a pyramid. Those clearing clinging jungle foliage from the sides uncover carvings on the surrounding, smoothed stone; they depict a triangular-shaped glyph falling from the sky toward the island, and strange, round-headed men emerging with one arm raised. The decorations also prominently feature the bent cross figure that resembles a Nazi swastika. A curtain hangs just inside the entrance shadows to protect the interior; it matches the red fabric the shaman wears in his costume, but sports a huge black swastika on a white circle in the center.

Beyond the entrance lurks a simple, rough-hewn and circular cave containing a low, conical metal craft of some kind (obviously requiring natives to carve the triangular entrance to get it inside). A single pressure hatch and several portholes pierce the corrugated skin. The craft is a Nazi space capsule from an alternate earth where Germany becomes a world power and explores space. (It is similar in design to the yet-to-be-constructed Apollo capsules from the American space program in the late 1960s.) The capsule fell through an inter-dimensional rift from an alternate future earth, landed on Antan Island, and was retrieved and revered by the natives as the vehicle used by the sky gods. The crew—three men in silvery space suits and round helmets with reflective visors—sit in wooden thrones arrayed in front of the open capsule hatch. Their space suits and the capsule itself have ominous markings the characters recognize: swastikas, the SS rune, and the labels "GDR" and "Grosser Deutsches Reich" ("Greater German Empire" in German).

The natives erected a stone altar before the lifeless "sky gods" where they have displayed various artifacts recovered from the space capsule and other technological items they retrieved from other visitors or wrecked ships and aircraft:

- A one-foot long green pressure tank with a nozzle. "Sauerstoff" ("Oxygen") is stenciled on the side. (Anyone who understands German realizes most of the gear has markings in that language.)
• Pistons from a small aircraft's engine.

Native Shaman (Boss)

Competent Skills:

- command _____
medical _____
persuade _____
sleight of hand _____

Expert Skills:

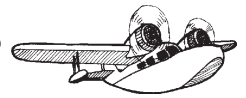
- intimidate _____
notice _____

Signature Skill:

- faith _____

Gear:

- scepter _____
conical hat _____
red silk tunic _____
bag of sacred stones _



- A bulky pistol that looks like a flare gun but actually shoots a ball of compressed electricity (with enough energy remaining for two shots).
- A pair of busted binoculars with an Imperial Japanese Navy stamp.
- Two three-foot long aluminum tubes with timer knobs at one end; each has “Achtung! Sprengstoff!” (“Danger! Explosives!”) stenciled along their length.

If the heroes accompanied the villagers and shaman, the holy man “speaks” for the sky gods, interpreting responses to any questions the heroes might put to the three corpses encased in pressure suits. He also insists they leave appropriate offerings of technology to appease the sky gods.

EPISODE TWO: DEAD-DROP AMBUSH

Upon emerging from the subterranean shrine—or when the action seems to lag—the heroes hear the sounds of aircraft engines and machinegun fire. They catch a glimpse of a small seaplane (a single-engine Supermarine Walrus with no national markings, for those making a *Challenging notice* roll) skimming the treetops, smoke and flames billowing from its engines. Two Japanese fighters on its tail fire their machineguns repeatedly. A moment later they hear the seaplane crash in the jungle less than a mile away and watch the two fighters peel off and head out to sea.

The seaplane carries a British agent (along with the ill-fated crew) trying to deliver secret intelligence to an American operative he’s supposed to meet on Antan Island...Professor Higginbotham (or his character equivalent as explained in the “Ulterior Motives” sidebar). The British agent carries a small metal canister containing 35mm film which, when developed, reveals a series of informative photographs of Japanese naval installations on an island presumably within the nearby Japanese Mandate. The heroes must escape Antan Island while evading the Japanese and possibly rescuing the crashed seaplane crew (and thus the secret film).

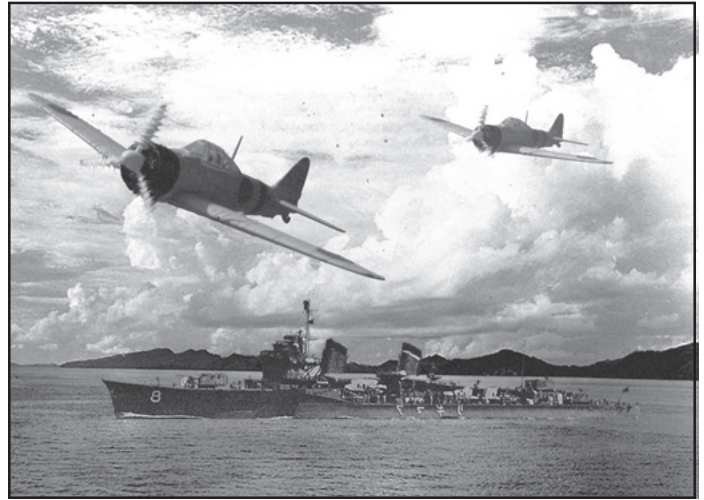
To stop the spy the Japanese navy not only sent fighters to shoot down the aircraft, but deployed a destroyer with a small detachment of soldiers to land on the island, retrieve the film, pacify the village, and detain anyone else witnessing their blunt counterintelligence operation. The Japanese move quickly to cover several objectives on the island:

Village: The destroyer anchors offshore near the village, though its coverage of the air and shoreline remains limited in this position. The landing party first subdues the natives, rounding them up and questioning them about strangers and aircraft. Assuming the villagers mention the heroes’ presence on the island, additional squads deploy to the shrine and the characters’ seaplane to detain them.

Crash Site: A scouting party immediately sets out from the village to scour the jungle for the downed seaplane, its crew, and the sensitive film they carry. If the heroes also seek to rescue crash victims, they must hurry before Japanese soldiers arrive, search the wreckage for the film, haul off any survivors, and burn the seaplane remains.

Sky God Shrine: The squad sent to the shrine tries to capture the heroes if discovered; otherwise they become intrigued by the presence of such an anomaly as a Nazi spacecraft from the future.

Heroes’ Seaplane: If the Japanese reach the Grumman seaplane before the heroes, they post a squad of soldiers to capture the characters when they return.



Japanese Soldier (Henchman)

Competent Skills:

dodge _____

endurance _____

fight _____

notice _____

survival _____

Expert Skill:

shoot _____

Gear:

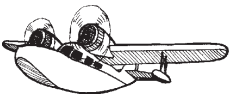
Arisaka 38 rifle _____

bayonet _____

hand grenades _____

canteen _____

knapsack _____



The heroes might employ several strategies to escape. They could use their resources and those taken from the sky god shrine to distract or assault the Japanese. Their own seaplane offers the best means of escape; if they avoid the destroyer's anti-aircraft guns, they stand a good chance of flying off before any Japanese aerial patrols show up. If the heroes maintained an excellent rapport with the shaman and natives from the beginning, they might convince them to rise up against the soldiers and help them escape. Should the characters seek another means off the island, they could happen upon some native outrigger canoes capable of crossing the open ocean. The arrival of some high-level officers aboard a Japanese seaplane might offer another avenue of escape if the heroes can commandeer the aircraft.

FURTHER ADVENTURES

The heroes' mission to Antan Island opens possibilities for further adventures related to the mysterious capsule of the "sky gods" and the secret film of Japanese naval installations in the Pacific:

Counter-Espionage: Shortly after returning from Antan Island (and before the heroes can develop or pass along the film to the proper authorities), a strange Japanese gentleman arrives on Rura-Tonga as a guest of the elusive Gaston Gauthier. Though he stays at Gauthier's well-guarded estate, the guest makes subtle inquiries in town about the characters' trip to Antan Island. The heroes must evade this Japanese spy sent to retrieve the film and eliminate the operative who took it.

Rendezvous Compromised: The heroes make arrangements to fly the film to a rendezvous with an American naval vessel; but their meeting goes horribly wrong when Japanese forces, who intercepted and decoded the rendezvous transmissions, ambush the rendezvous site. The heroes and the Americans take shelter in an archipelago of mango-choked islands inhabited by arboreal cannibal pygmies. They must evade Japanese aircraft, destroyers, and shore patrols and find some way to escape.

Return of the Sky Gods: The heroes form an expedition to return and retrieve technology, samples, and documentation from the mysterious space capsule and the long-dead crew...but a team of German scientists, alerted to the find by their Japanese allies, also travels to Antan Island with the same purpose and a ruthless willingness to eliminate any competitors.

THE ANY-SYSTEM KEY

You can use this adventure with your favorite roleplaying game system. Just visit the *Any-System Key* page at <http://griffonpub.home.att.net/NESys.html> and use the guidelines there to match descriptive gamemaster character abilities and task difficulties to corresponding values in your preferred game. Use the customizable stat forms found in the adventure margins to note values for character stats in your game. You'll also find examples of customizing stats into those of your favorite game system.

BOOK YOUR ADVENTURE TODAY!

Heroes of Rura-Tonga is a pulp-era roleplaying game supplement presenting source material outlining elements for a 1930s pulp campaign in the South Pacific and five, full-length scenarios.

Available soon at the Griffon Publishing Studio electronic storefront at YourGamesNow.com. Visit the studio website at <http://griffonpub.home.att.net> for previews and other support material for *Heroes of Rura-Tonga*.

CREDITS

Written, Designed & Produced by Peter Schweighofer

Photo Credits: p. 1, Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, Farm Security Administration - Office of War Information Photograph Collection LC-USW3-042556-E; p. 3, Navy Historical Center Photographic Section NH 83011 and NH 97761, and the author.

Gift of the Gods and *Heroes of Rura-Tonga* are copyright 2008 by Peter Schweighofer; All Rights Reserved.

Griffon Publishing Studio



<http://griffonpub.home.att.net>