



THE FLOWN SKY

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MATTHEW OLSHAN



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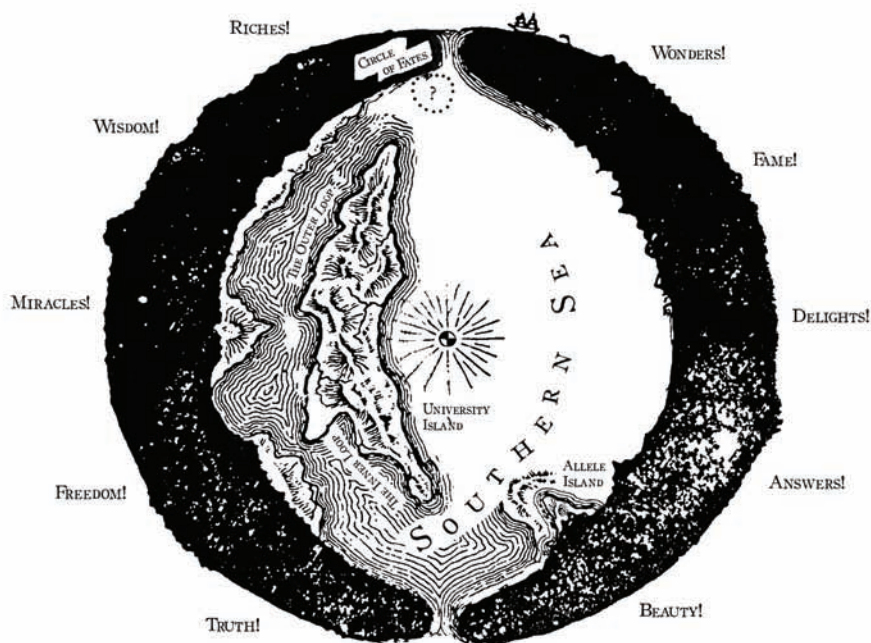
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Early Map of Allele Island

From the collection of
Professor Tertius Legume,
University Island

*A Somewhat Theoretical Map of the
Outside World*



prepared by

T. S. Prospero

Candidate for Diploma in Mystical Astronomy

BEE • NA (bee' nuh) n. One of the lesser tree primates of Allele Island, a species known for its piercing laugh and irritating group behavior. 2. A mischievous chatterbox, gossip, or busybody.

—*An Explorer's Bestiary*,

Dr. Pritchard Sangfroid Mogogo Sping,

Vol. I, p. 73

O PARENT



** P a r t O n e **

CHAPTER ONE

A Lone Beachcomber

THERE was a certain hour of a summer evening on Allele Island when the Southern Sea drew away its surf like the train of a gown, startling the sand crabs and plovers and revealing a hidden world of tidal pools along the shore.

Allele Island was world famous for beachcombing, and summer evenings—when the lengthening rays of the sun poured into the tidal pools, flooding them with amber light—were tailor-made for finding jeweled shells, buttery sea glass, and fossilized bits of extinct beasts.

But for even rarer finds, the best bet was Windward Beach. It was there, at the foot of Mount Minnetubo, the island's brooding volcano, that the powerful currents of the Southern Sea, having flowed uninterrupted for more than a thousand miles, finally made landfall.

Windward Beach was where a beachcomber might come across a crate of unknown fruit, each piece wrapped like a gift in silver-flecked crepe paper; or an ivory music box the size and shape of a seahorse; or, for instance, the wooden

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dollhouse that arrived one morning, complete with furniture and rugs, everything in perfect order, as if it had floated to Allele Island on a cloud, rather than through the turbulent surf.

Beachcombing was the unofficial pastime of Allele Island. Everyone did it, but the island's young Beenas were absolutely passionate about it. As soon as they woke from their afternoon naps, they'd race to the beach, swinging from vine to vine through the thick jungle, pausing every now and then to dangle from their elegant tails and scout ahead for anything brilliant, sparkling, or rare to add to their collections. Once they reached the dunes, it seemed that their clever paws never stopped sifting wet gravel.

Strange, then, that the Beenas avoided Windward Beach with such a fervor. They claimed it was on account of the mischievous waves along the shore, which—it's true—did have a way of rearing up as soon as a beachcomber's back was turned.

But the real reason most Beenas chose to avoid Windward Beach was the notorious shadow cast by Zandra Palace. When no one was looking, the shadow of the palace was said to take the shape of a monster's fists and silently pound the dunes in rhythm with the surf.

A Lone Beachcomber

Zandra Palace, carved by long-forgotten hands into the side of Mount Minnetubo, was a remote and frightening place to most Beenas. It was the home of Queena Beena, who ruled Allele Island from behind the palace walls. No Beena had ever laid eyes on the queen, but her reach extended to every corner of the island, in the form of the Royal Pelicans, who circled tirelessly overhead, ever watchful, crisscrossing Windward Beach on their way to and from the palace.

There was one Beena, however, who loved Windward Beach so much that she made it her home in spite of the unsettling shadows and the steady traffic of stern pelicans. Her name was Eena Beena.

Eena Beena was something of an oddball. Other Beenas preferred crowded treetops, but Eena Beena lived alone quite happily on Windward Beach in a reed hut she had woven herself. The hut, which looked like an upside-down fruit bowl, was a little lopsided, but Eena Beena didn't mind. She liked lopsided things.

Eena Beena had Windward Beach entirely to herself—with the exception of the Royal Pelicans, of course, who always seemed to be hovering over the shallows, gathering strength for the difficult climb to the palace.

She tended the shoreline as if it were her own private

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garden. There was no greater pleasure for her, after a long day of beachcombing and splashing in tidal pools, than to throw open the shutters of her hut and lounge in a hammock, her shoulders aching pleasantly from raking the dunes, perhaps, or from gathering coconuts and stacking them in a neat pyramid. She could lie in that hammock for hours, swinging herself gently with her tail or her big toe, dreaming of the next summer storm and what it might bring to her beach.

Storms were spectacular on Windward Beach, particularly in summer, when squalls would blow up without warning, delivering treasure on the backs of towering waves. Those summer squalls often brought castaways, too, hapless creatures: lizards, baby birds, insects, the smallest of the small, clinging desperately to their improvised rafts, survivors of shipwreck, tidal wave, flood, volcanic eruption, mudslide, and every other imaginable catastrophe.

Eena Beena ran a little hospital at water's edge for these poor creatures. The hospital building was itself a sort of refugee: the same wooden dollhouse that had washed up, untouched, long ago. The sign over the miniature front door, written in squid ink in Eena Beena's shaky, but sincere, letters, read, "Welcome to Allele Island's Free Clinic."

Eena Beena had thought of the name herself. She chose

“clinic” over “hospital” because she thought that “hospital” sounded altogether too grand and imposing. The word “free” was carefully selected as well. She didn’t want her patients to worry—not even for a second—about paying for their care.

Despite the careful thought she’d put into naming her hospital, Eena Beena, who often spoke in a breathless, enthusiastic rush, called it simply “the Clinic.”


Eena Beena was happy to stay up all night at the Clinic nursing a waterlogged beetle or stroking a grieving ladybug with her pinkie. She cared for her patients above all else. “*Life’s* the most important thing!” she liked to say—not that anyone really listened. The other Beenas more or less ignored her, except to make the occasional joke at her expense.

Some called her Pest Girl; others, Nurse Larva. Most Beenas, though, were content to gossip about Eena Beena behind her back.

Eena Beena had heard all the stories. There was the one about how she’d washed up on the shores of Allele Island as a baby, snoring away in an unusual walnut shell boat, “just like one of her creepy-crawlies!”

There were other stories, too. Some Beenas joked that her mother and father were sea monsters who had abandoned their baby daughter because she was too ugly. Others

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blabbered about incompetent pirates who had stolen Eena Beena at birth, only to bungle the getaway across the midnight waves.

Still others whispered that, no, the pirates weren't kidnappers at all, but actually Eena Beena's real parents. In that version, her pirate parents had maliciously cast her adrift, only to give up their criminal ways and spend bitter years searching her out in vain.

Eena Beena knew that these silly stories about sea monsters, kidnappers, and pirates were meant to upset her, but, if anything, they usually had the opposite effect. She found them amusing. She wasn't the type to let the chatter of idle Beenas bother her.

On the other hand, an hour or two after she heard a new story about her unknown parents, no matter how insulting or outlandish, she sometimes found herself staring at the empty horizon over the waves, wondering if some tiny grain of what she'd heard might actually, possibly, remotely, be true.