



# The Ahau Chronicles



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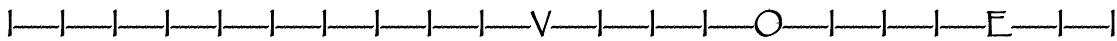


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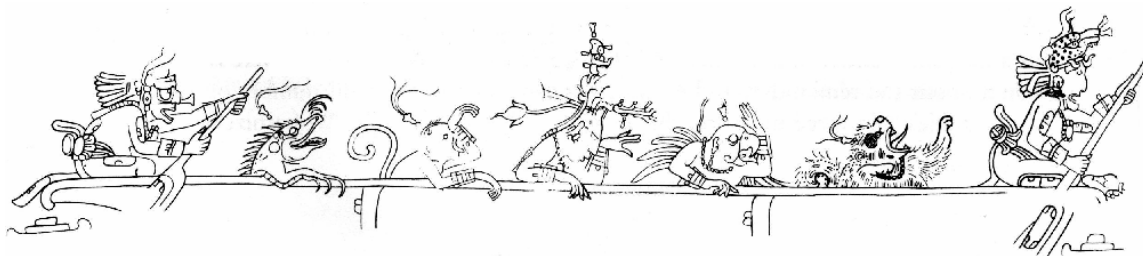
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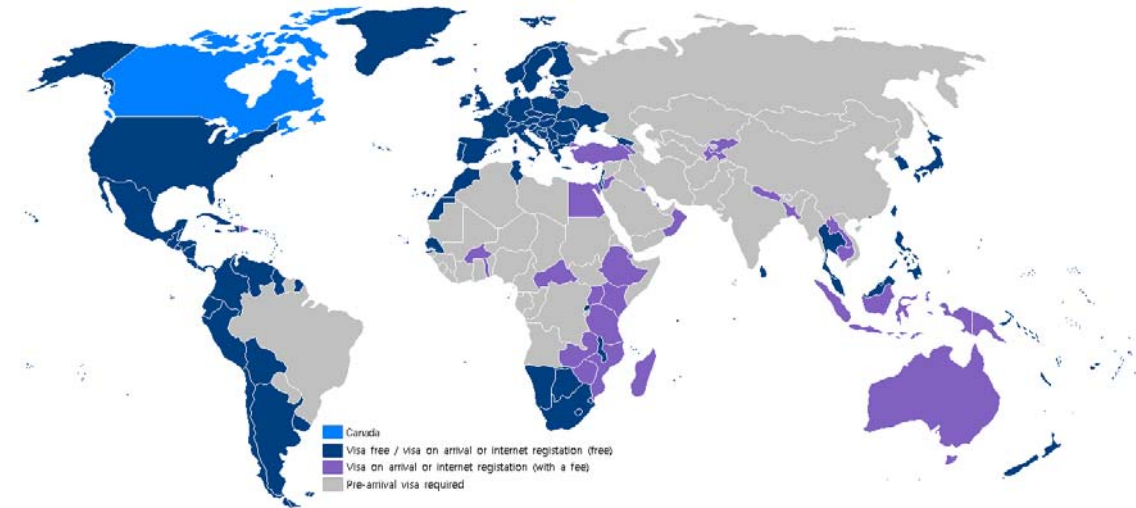
Failure and Success



At 5am in the morning on August 6 I left my home in New York and drove to JFK airport for my flight to Brazil. I was feeling energized after learning that the new Mars rover had made a successful touchdown on the Red Planet just hours before. There was also a sense of anticipation to fly through Panama, a country I had not been to since 1997. I parked at the airport and made my way to the ticket counter in Terminal 7. You can imagine my surprise when I arrived and realized that this was the exact same desk where we had filmed the opening sequence of the *Apocalypse Island* movie 3 years ago.



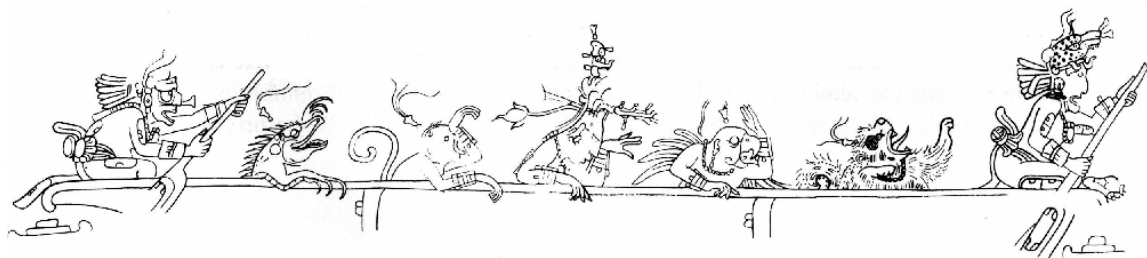
After an hour waiting in line with the lovely folks shown above I wearily approached the ticket agent and handed over my passport. As I was starting to feel better that I was finally moving beyond the serpentine line and the interminable shuffle I noticed the ticket agent thumbing through my passport. Since my name is fairly common it sometimes shows up on travel watchlists but the border guards are usually dismissive since I don't match the description of a large Afro-American male. That's when the ticket agent looked at me and asked with an accent: "Do you have a VISA for Brazil?"



As the map above shows, Canadians still need visas to visit many countries of the world including most of Africa and the Far East. Turns out that visas are also required in Brazil (as well as Paraguay and Surinam) in the Western Hemisphere. Though I had traveled the length of the Americas I had never once needed a visa to enter any country. So it never occurred to me to do the most rudimentary of homework on the new country I was about to visit. And so my answer was: "No. No I don't have a VISA."

And that's when things became difficult. The agent was not allowed to permit me to board the plane if I did not have a valid visa for entry into Brazil. He must have known at that moment that I was not flying to Brazil that day. For me, the realization took a little longer to sink in. When the agent started to look into the next available flights to Brazil I knew that something serious was going to happen NOT as planned.

And so I did not get on that flight. Instead I staggered through the airport, dazed, trying to get my bearings. The anger that welled up inside of me, the victim of a global governmental conspiracy, burned doubly hot because I knew **it was my own fault**. The most basic travel preparations include a look at visa requirements for your destination country. Explorer James Turner was left behind because his papers were not in order. It took me twice as long to drive home as it did to drive the same distance to the airport earlier that morning. I kept making wrong turns and getting lost, unprepared for the strange journey through that exotic land of New York on the unexpected afternoon of August 6<sup>th</sup>.



Seizing on the theme of the unexpected, I will spare you the gory details of me grappling with the vagaries of Brazilian immigration requirements and spending hundreds of dollars trying to solve my problem (all the while suffering a sort of out-of-body sensation as if my mind was in Brazil) but I will instead jump ahead three days to Thursday, August 9<sup>th</sup> when I unexpectedly received the email below:

Hi James!

We hope you are excellent!

I write you from Juan Fernández Island because we like to know if we can contact you for to do an activity for december, we dont know so much about 21/12 but we like to learn and to do a good ceremony.

Could you help us? know you how to get funding for this action? have we time for this?

Greetings!

Alejandra Martínez

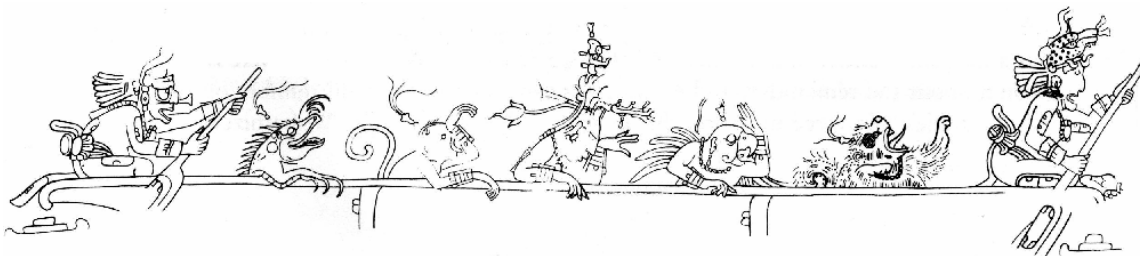
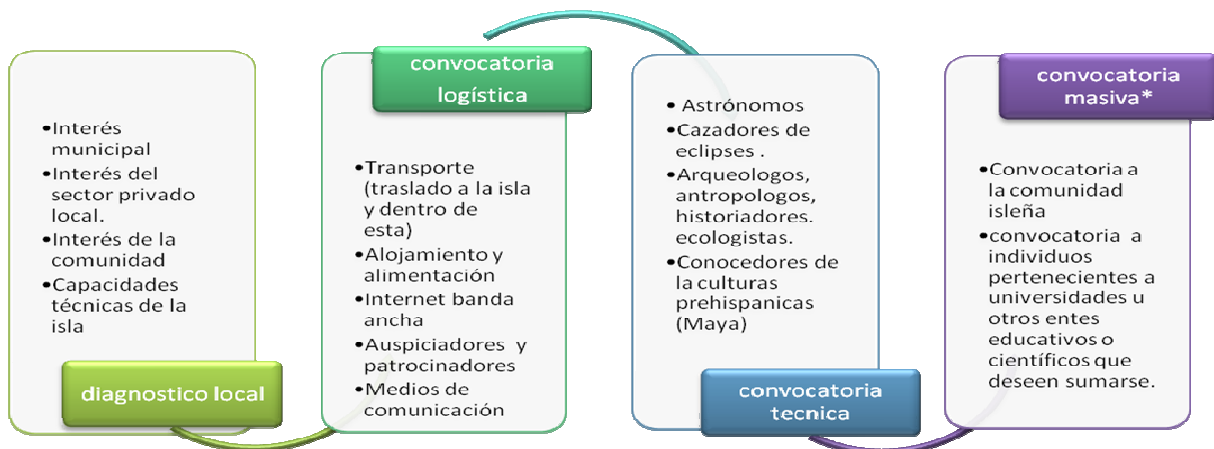
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Alejandra Martínez Carrasco

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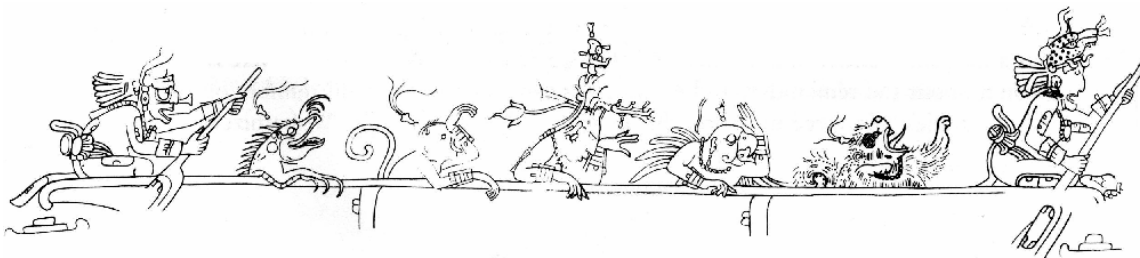
Even as I read the email again on this page I still can't believe it is real. Here was the Tourism Office of Robinson Crusoe Island reaching out to me to help them with a 2012 celebration. In my immediate response I pointed out to Ale that the November eclipse is the true spectacle and she quickly agreed. And now we are in the midst of planning an eclipse festival spanning November 7-14<sup>th</sup> with guest speakers, visiting scientists, astronomers, anthropologists and tourists alike. The Tourism Office has taken over logistics and will work to put the nuts and bolts together. Alejandra has even created a working proposal complete with attractive flow charts.



The Tourism Office is tackling many of the biggest logistical issues such as electrical and broadband capacity. They are reaching out to their continental counterparts for assistance with planning and marketing. And in one of the most promising developments, they are pressing the authorities in Valparaiso to offer up a ship to bring people and supplies to the island. This would be a huge benefit for bringing large quantities of cargo and travelers to the island in a cost effective manner and would make the eclipse festival accessible to a much wider range of people by keeping travel costs low. The navy ship *Aquiles* is a supply ship that travels to the island and would be the perfect vessel to accomplish all of our needs. It would sure beat the Tio Tomas!



So far the schedule consists of three days of activities in the village of San Juan Bautista followed by two days of transitioning to the other side of the island with several days activities in the vicinity of the monument climaxing with the eclipse on the evening of Nov. 13<sup>th</sup>. Alejandra spent last weekend at the Planos del Yunque where I suggested we set up for the eclipse viewing and she thought the location was “amazing!”



The island organizers have produced a list of public and private organizations that will be approached for involvement in the festival. In the public sphere these include the Juan Fernández Municipality, the Regional Government of Valparaiso, the National Council of Culture and Arts, Chilean National Television (TVN), the Chilean Air Force (FACH), the Chilean Navy, and CONAF, the forestry department that administers the island parks. In the private sphere they will contact Banco de Chile, other Chilean TV networks (Canal 13, Chilevisión, Mega), Chilean astronomers, and Desafío Levantemos Chile, the charitable organization founded after the 2010 earthquake and tsunami by philanthropist Felipe Cubillos who would later perish in the tragic plane crash on the island last year.

The speed with which these developments have occurred are breathtaking and I am still in disbelief that all my dreams are being realized. The island eclipse festival will have food, music, art, science, exploration and general all around comradery. I hope it will enable the islanders to forget some of the pain of their recent troubling past and embrace a vision for a new happier future filled with hope and joy. By rediscovering the island and reintroducing it to the world there is a chance that the tourism industry will revive and reinvigorate life on the island so that the dark days following the tsunami can be forgotten. The potent symbol of the eclipsed sun setting into the ocean will hopefully mark an end to the sorrows of the past and enable a new beginning when it rises, reborn, on the following day.

And now if you'll excuse me, with visa in hand, I have a plane to catch to Brazil on this most joyous of Ahau days....

