

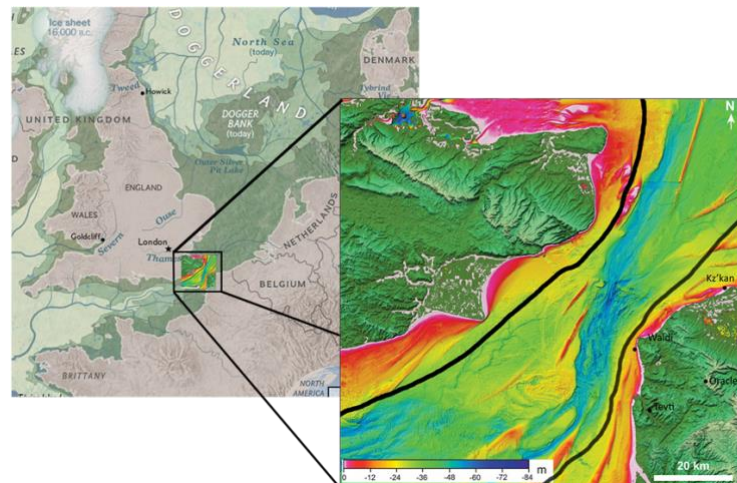
## Synopsis for Clouds

Some 10,000 years ago, at the tail-end of the last ice-age, lowlands, today covered by the North Sea, were drained by a restricted but turbulent channel between modern Britain (known as **Shi'djûr** in the story) and France.



*Artist's impression of the gigantic waterfall that existed between modern day England and France between 14,000 to 10,000 years ago.*

The English Channel, at that time known as the **Narrow Sea**, stood at a much lower level than seen today. At the time of the events in this story, the white cliffs were inland and fringed by wide coastal plains and shallow lakes. The densely forested plain on the south side of the Narrow Sea was home to quarrelling tribespeople, the **Tevti**, the **Waldi** and the **Kz'kan**, who had over-hunted the local game to the extent that they were on the brink of starvation.



*Location of the story. 10,000 years ago, the shoreline was several kilometres further out to sea and many metres lower than present day.*

The story commences when **Tul'í**, daughter of **Hr'eld**, the chief of the Tevti tribe, is temporarily banished from the village in punishment for her involvement in the death of one of the tribe's young girls. Although Tul'í is not directly to blame for her friend's death, she feels responsible.

Tul'í's father, the senior father of the Tevti, considers that his daughter must be tamed of her arrogance and offers her as a mate to the ruler of the Kz'kan, **N'rk**. However, the aim of the alliance

is to eliminate the Waldi from the land and divide it up between Tevti and Kz'kan. Tul'í, unaware of the overarching plan, accepts her punishment and goes into banishment knowing that she has the skills to survive the short amount of time she will be alone.

Isolated in the forest she meets with **Kerr'yn**, a young seer of the **Élnn** people from the south who is seeking fulfilment of an ancient tribal legend. The legend tells that in Shi'djûr, the land seen to the north of the Narrow Sea, abundant resources exist. Kerr'yn also possesses the knowledge to construct a boat with which to cross the sea, a feat that has never been done as the straits between the two land masses are home to the **Dancers**, turbulent waters that kill the unprepared, allowing no-one to pass.

Tul'í does not initially believe Kerr'yn's story. But, on meeting and being accepted by his companions, she becomes convinced that not only is the mission of the Élnn possible but that it seems to be supported by the gods.

Tul'í offers herself as an intermediary to seek collaboration between the tribes so that they can help with the preparations necessary to mount the expedition to Shi'djûr. In disguise, she meets with N'rk and realises that it is the same man who, many years before when she was very young, attacked a party of Tevti hunters and killed several of them, including her grandmother. Unbeknownst to her, the attack was instigated in cahoots with Hr'eld in a ploy to seize power from his own father.

After a disastrous encounter with N'rk, in which he is injured, and another with **Ran'ilf**, the giant and champion of the Waldi, her efforts result in awareness of the mission amongst the tribes and the organisation of an unprecedented conclave of tribes to negotiate terms for collaboration. Both N'rk and Ran'ilf claim Tul'í as their mate, a situation that can only be resolved through mortal combat. Cooperation to carry out the Élnn plan is overtly agreed between the tribes. Tul'í herself is to be the prize of the bout between the claimants.

N'rk and Hr'eld, however, have other ideas and, when attention is diverted, together with Tul'í's brother, **T'bor**, they attempt to snatch her from a cave concealed in Tevti lands and in which the Élnn have been hiding. The attack fails. N'rk and T'bor are seriously injured and the plan to prepare the expedition advances unhindered by any more deceit.

Once the boat is completed, and because of Tul'í, Kerr'yn is reluctant to leave. He is persuaded of his destiny by **Dua'kí**, a Waldi wise woman and an adept of **Ur'ka**, the ancient knowledge. Before there can be any contest, Ran'ilf foregoes his claim on Tul'í but commits himself to being her unquestioning servant. As she knows he would be a resourceful, intelligent leader in Shi'djûr, she commands him to embark with the expedition.

The boat departs for Shi'djûr leaving Tul'í behind under the protection of the shaman of the Oracle; this only until those on the southern shore see confirmation that the expedition has succeeded by means of a fire to be lit on the opposite shore.

On confirmation of the migrants' arrival in Shi'djûr, the tribes meet to witness Tul'í complying with her part of the agreement to N'rk. This latter has been disfigured and remains hidden from view in a draped bier. T'bor, although outwardly recovered after the accident in the cave, remains docile until he sees his sister preparing to exact her revenge and sacrifice herself rather than submit to N'rk. As the very moment she prepares to act, T'bor moves to throw N'rk's bier off the precipice and save his sister. N'rk, although mutilated, is in full possession of his strength and jumps out of the bier, meeting T'bor in a one-sided fight. Hr'eld, unable to watch his own son being killed, intervenes, an action that results in his own death as well as that of N'rk.

In the ensuing confusion Tul'í, protected by the spirit of gods, appears to grow in stature and commands the frightened people to work together. She commands them to await her second coming - and disappears.

Three years pass; time in which communication between the two sides of the Narrow Sea is maintained via yearly beacons that Tul'í prepares. Kerr'yn watches with pride as the colony establishes itself. Then, deciding the prophecy has been fulfilled, he quietly leaves to cross back

over the Narrow Sea alone. His craft is destroyed in the channel but eventually he lands, barely alive, on the southern shore.

Avoiding all contact, he makes his way to the Oracle to consult with the shaman. He wants to know what has happened to Tul'í. On arrival at the Oracle, he finds that the old shaman has been replaced by another. He soon becomes aware that the sobbing he hears behind the screen could only belong to Tul'í.