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Lost Horizon: A Novel



Synopsis

James Hilton's famous utopian adventure novel, and the origin of the mythical sanctuary Shangri-La, receives new life in this beautiful reissue from Harper Perennial. A book that the New Yorker calls "the most artful kind of suspense . . . ingenuity [we] have rarely seen equaled," Lost Horizon captured the national consciousness when first published in the 1930s, and Frank Capra's 1937 film adaptation catapulted it to the height of cultural significance. Readers of Mitchell Zuckoff's harrowing history of a real-life plane crash in Dutch New Guinea, Lost in Shangri-La, as well as fans of novels ranging from The Man Who Would Be King to Seven Years in Tibet to State of Wonder will be fascinated and delighted by this milestone in adventure fiction, the world's first look at this sanctuary above the clouds. The new Perennial edition also features a bonus essay on Lost Horizon by Don't Know Much About History author Kenneth C. Davis.

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Customer Reviews

When I was a teenager, I went to see the movie Lost Horizon seven times. During my 74 years, I read the book many times. After I retired, I made four trips to that part of the world, and spent many months each time searching for that wonderful Shangri-La dream. If you have never read Hilton's classic, and you are a person with an optimistic spiritual outlook, then The Lost Horizon is a must for you. If you read it and want to believe it, then you should visit Burma and the temples of the ancient city of Pagon, and then spend time in the three kingdoms of the Himalayas: Nepal, Ladakh and Bhutan, in that order. You will be moved to tell others, or write about your spiritual experience. I was so moved. May your days be filled with the magic of life. Sirrom

What struck me most about this book is how non-dated it was for having been written in 1933. First of all, the story starts in Afghanistan during an airlift to evacuate foreign nationals during an anti-western revolution. Next, the main characters are essentially skyjacked to an unknown destination against their will for unknown purposes. As for the characters, they seem very familiar and contemporary also: a world-weary and burned-out government bureaucrat, a gung-ho and impatient young military officer, a business man that has stolen over 100 million dollars from investors through stock fraud, and a fundamentalist Christian missionary that believes in one "true" religion and holds all others in contempt. There is also the conviction among several of these characters that globally "the whole game's going to pieces." However, there is also something hauntingly timeless about this story. It occurs to me that the hidden civilization of Shangri-La is based on the mythical kingdom of Shambhala, where immortal masters live that look after the evolution and welfare of mankind. The great mountain of Karacul that looms over the valley also seems symbolic of Mt. Meru- the axis of the cosmos- and where the gods are reputed to dwell. It is certainly no coincidence that most of the people that find Shangri-La are the world weary- and the journey comes close to killing them. That would seem to be a metaphor for spiritual enlightenment. For this is what the lucky and the worthy find in Shangri-La, all the time in the world, or rather out of the world, for contemplation, preservation of all the worthy attainments of the human race, and the pursuit of wisdom. Sounds pretty close to heaven to me....An interesting side note is the fact that Lost Horizon was the first paperback title ever published by Pocket Books in 1939. This particular edition bears the same classic cover art as the original.

The story of a group of people who survive an airplane crash in Tibet and find shelter at a mysterious monastery is extremely well known, but unlike most novels, *Lost Horizon* is less about its characters and their situation--interesting though those elements may be--than it is about their thoughts and ideas. Written as it was on eve of World War II, these thoughts and ideas center upon developing a way of life that preserves, rather than destroys, that which is finest in both humanity and the world in general. The novel is elegantly and simply written and possesses tremendous atmosphere. Although enjoyable as a purely "fun" read, it is also thought provoking, and the thoughts it provokes linger long after the book is laid aside. I can not imagine any one not being moved by the book, both emotionally and intellectually, regardless of their background or interests. If such a person exists, I do not think I would care to meet them. Although James Hilton wrote a number of worthy novels, *Lost Horizon* is the novel for which he is best remembered, a great

popular success when first published and a genuine masterpiece of 20th Century literature.

When I read this book, I was transformed! I could actually breath the fresh, cold, Himalayan air that Conway and his entourage and the people of Shangri-La breathed. The language the novel is written in is beautiful and picturesque. When Conway and his companions flee the warring land they come from, (in a way) they find themselves hijacked, whisked away to paradise: Shangri-La, a place where the air is clean and the living is natural and spiritual and, "moderate." Where people live naturally long lives, hundreds of years, in peace, in love, at one with nature. Hilton's book wisely illustrates that some can never be happy in paradise, they must go on and on searching, but too incredulous to ever actually find anything. In Shangri-La the people, the good, natural people await the destruction of the "outside world," which will surely occur at it's own hand sooner or later as long as people rule themselves with war, lack of moderation, hatred, and a lack of regard for the spiritual nature of humanity. Then the people of Shangri-La will spread the paradise to the far reaches of earth. No doubt, James Hilton has read not only the Bible, but many other spiritual books, because I find myself thinking of Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity (as opposed to Christendom), Hinduism, and other Eastern religions and forms of spirituality and well as Western religion and forms of spirituality. What an inspiring view. The "outside" world will eventually destroy itself if humanity continues on the road of "unintelligent leadership," war, hatred, discrimination, excess, selfishness, lack of moderation, lack of respect and care for nature, lack of conservation, lack of respect for self, and lack of respect and care for other human beings and all our fellow animals. The question is: Will there be a "Shangri-La" there to save us? Do we really want to take that chance?

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