

Lost Horizon (Shangri-La) by James Hilton (1933)

This was the first paperback book.

Rutherford found Conway [who he previously met & others thought to be dead] with amnesia in a hospital in China. Onboard a ship Conway heard someone playing Chopin on the piano. This triggered his memory & for the next several hours told his story. At the next port Conway disappeared again [said he wanted to go back].

31May1930 a plane with 4 passengers left Baskul [Iran], but the pilot kidnapped them & crash landed in the Tebit mtns. The passengers were: Conway [WWI vet & British consul], Roberta [missionary], Bernard [American fugitive] & Charles [young vice-cosul]. Conway was 37 & spoke several languages. They were miles from anywhere, with no food or clothes for the cold. The pilot died, but soon they were greeted by men from Shangri-La. They were taken to a monastery & treated well.

For such a remote place, you wouldn't expect such luxuries as indoor plumbing & a piano [especially since the only way in was a 2' wide path]. A town lived thousands of feet below in the sheltered valley of the blue moon. Everyone was polite, happy & content. The monks believe in avoiding excess. There was gold in the valley, but they didn't go crazy over it. They used it to buy things from the outside world. One of their great treasures was the 20,000-book library. Conway was enchanted.

The High Lama soon sent for Conway [the others were not ready to hear] & explained things to him. In 1719 a monk [Perrault] came to evangelize & stayed. He built buildings & worked with the people. 1794 he thought he was ready to die, but didn't. He realized he wasn't aging as fast as people in the outside world. 1804 an Austrian [Henschell] came & setup a system that porters would bring goods & meet them a day's journey away. During their conversation, Conway realized the High Lama was Perrault himself, but how?

Bernard decided to stay [it was a good place to hide & he liked the gold] & Roberta agreed she needed to witness to the locals. People age quickly when they leave Shangri-La. The young girl [Lo-Tsen] that played the piano was in fact born in 1866. The High Lama was about to die & told Conway he waited a long time for him & the destiny of Shangri-La was in his hands. He died that night. Conway was in shock when Charles came pleading for Conway to escape with him [porters were only 5 miles away & Lo-Tsen was with them. Charles manipulated him into going with him.

Hilton did research into the story & confirmed as much as he could. One interesting fact was the hospital said an old Chinese woman brought Conway in.

Quotes: People make mistakes in life through believing too much, but they have an awful dull life if they believe too little. (James Hilton)