Kon-Tiki: Across the Pacific by Raft Study Guide

Kon-Tiki: Across the Pacific by Raft by Thor Heyerdahl

BOOKRAGS

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Plot Summary

Thor Heyerdahl, a Norwegian zoologist, explains how he develops a theory on how the Pacific islands were originally settled from South America. While on a zoological expedition with his wife to the island of Fatu Hiva, they discuss the constant trade winds that blow from east to west, Thor's first piece of the puzzle. Had people from South America, 4,000 nautical miles away, taken advantage of the trade winds at some remote time in the past?

After writing a full presentation of his hypothesis, Thor tries to bring it forward in New York City, where his ideas are rejected without examination by the scientific community. Thor has committed the cardinal sin of stepping out of his area of specialization. One of his critics snidely suggests that if Thor thinks South Americans sailed to Polynesia on rafts, he should try to do the same. Thor decides that this is a fine idea and pursues it.

Through determination and his natural skills with people, Thor finds the financial and official backing for his adventure. He meets his first crewmember, Herman Watzinger, while in New York City. By letter, he invites Knut Haugland, Erik Hesselberg and Torstein Raaby to join, and they all accept. A sixth crewmember, Bengt Danielsson, joins as the raft is being built in Peru.

Problems arise all along Thor's quest to build the raft. The financial backing falters. Governments demand much paperwork and are sometimes reluctant to help. The necessary green balsa logs are not accessible during the rainy season. Working as a team with Herman, Thor breaks through all the roadblocks and succeeds in building the raft, christened the Kon-Tiki, and launching it within his time window.

The voyage starts out rough as the landlubbers learn how to handle the raft in high seas. A few days later, the weather calms down and they proceed onward at a good clip. The crewmembers discover that the ocean is full of fish and strange creatures, one of them a whale shark that comes to visit. While passing by the Galapagos Islands, the ocean currents threaten to take them off course, but favorable winds and currents bring them back. Herman falls overboard and is nearly lost at sea, being as the raft cannot be stopped or turned back. Quick action of the crew saves his life.

As they approach the South Sea Islands, two storms damage the raft, but not enough to put it out of commission. The easterly wind threatens to run the raft into dangerous coral reefs. The crew fights hard to change course. Fortunately, a wind from the north comes up, and they make it around the reefs.

The first Polynesian island they encounter proves impossible to land upon due to strong currents and winds. The second island seems a better candidate, but is surrounded by an impassible coral reef. The natives of the island try to tow the raft through a small break in the reef, but the raft is too heavy and the current too strong. The third island becomes the crew's landing spot. The ocean pushes the raft into a reef, damaging it somewhat, but all make the landing safely.

The crew sets up camp and tries to revive their radio. They succeed in doing this and make contact with Hal in Los Angeles, a ham operator who had been receiving broadcasts from the raft through most of its voyage. Natives from the nearby island of Raroia come to visit and invite the crew to their village for festivities of honor. The crew celebrates with the villagers until a schooner from Tahiti comes to pick them up and tow the raft into harbor.

The crew enjoys more festivities on Tahiti. A Norwegian cargo ship picks up the crew and raft. Their adventure over, Thor and the crew return to civilization triumphantly successful in their daring voyage across the Pacific on a raft of ancient design.

Chapter 1, A Theory

Chapter 1, A Theory Summary and Analysis

Thor Heyerdahl, a Norwegian zoologist, explains how he develops a theory on how the Pacific islands were originally settled from South America. While on a zoological expedition with his wife to the island of Fatu Hiva, they discuss the constant trade winds that blow from east to west, Thor's first piece of the puzzle. Had people from South America, 4,000 nautical miles away, taken advantage of the trade winds at some remote time in the past?

The Pacific Islanders, or Polynesians, have a common oral history that agrees on their origin. An old man named Tei Tetua tells the story. In ancient times, a chief-god named Kon Tiki brought his people to the islands. The chief-god had white skin and a beard, and belonged to an advanced culture that built stepped pyramids. Additionally, the large sculptures on Easter Island were supposed to be the work of Kon Tiki's people. Thor's wife remarks that similar ancient structures and monoliths exist in South America.

Not only do the oral traditions agree on the origin, but also on the lineage of island chiefs back to the origin. The Polynesians use a string-and-knot tool to assist their memories, which is similar to a tool used by the Inca Indians in Peru. By counting back generations based on 25-year increments, the estimated time of arrival for the first Polynesians is 500 A.D. By the same method, a second wave arrived at about 1100 A.D., possibly from the northwest of North America.

The possible connection to Peru strengthens by an ancient Incan story that includes bearded white men who built the stepped pyramids of that country. The chief-god of these white men was named Kon Tiki (Sun Tiki) or Illa Tiki (Fire Tiki). The white men were massacred by a Peruvian chief named Cari, but apparently, Kon Tiki escaped with some of his people and friendly Incans. The connection seems very likely when Thor considers other common details in the stories:

"I was no longer in doubt that the white chief-god Sun Tiki, whom the Incas declared that their forefathers had driven out of Peru on to the Pacific, was identical with the white chief-god Tiki, son of the sun, whom the inhabitants of all the eastern Pacific islands hailed as the original founder of their race. And the details of Sun-Tiki's life in Peru, with the ancient names of places round Lake Titicaca, cropped up again in historic legends current among the natives of the Pacific islands" (p. 25).

Thor also considers the Stone Age technologies of the Polynesians when the first European explorers discovered the islands. This coincides with the technologies present in South America when it was first discovered, while to the west of the islands, the technologies had advanced much farther by the time of 500 A.D., and certainly by 1100 A.D. A competing theory claims that the original Polynesians had come from the

west, not the east, and probably from Asia. If this is true, the original Polynesian technologies should have been past the Stone Age.

Interrupted by his service in World War II, Thor must put away his developing hypothesis. After the war, he takes up the quest again and puts together a full description in manuscript form based upon the vast amount of data available in museums and libraries. He decides to present his ideas in New York City.

Chapter 2, An Expedition Is Born

Chapter 2, An Expedition Is Born Summary and Analysis

Thor presents his manuscript to an ethnologist named Carl in the man's New York City museum office. Carl rejects the idea of ancient Incas settling the Pacific islands without reading one word of Thor's argument. Stating in absolute terms, the ethnologist maintains that no South Americans ever traveled to the islands by balsa wood rafts. He does, however, plant a seed in Thor's imagination—Carl proposes that Thor should try going to the islands from Peru by raft.

Feeling very down from the rejection, Thor visits a friend in Greenwich Village, who is also named Carl. His friend advises that most scientists specialize. Nobody in the profession wants anyone else tying pieces together into a coherent whole. Thor announces that he plans to attempt the raft trip, and Carl thinks it is a crazy idea. Still, a successful trip would attract attention and support the hypothesis.

Thor takes a room in the Norwegian Sailor's Home to save money, where he finds many seasoned men of the sea. He learns from them that small vessels often do better than large ships during storms because the small boats ride the waves. Large ships tend to plow into them, which brings massive amounts of water onboard. One sailor thinks that the raft trip is very possible, except for navigation. Thor looks into this. He discovers that the prehistoric Incan rafts included centerboards, apparently for stability, a square sail and a long steering oar. This solves the problem of keeping the raft on course.

Weeks later and with no word from the other places to which he had sent copies of his theory manuscript, Thor visits a friend named Wilhelm in the New York countryside. Wilhelm is an old seaman and knows everything about navigation, so Thor asks him about the possibilities of sailing a raft from Peru to the Pacific islands. Wilhelm thinks the chances for and against this are about equal. Thor points out that the journey would help support his hypothesis. Wilhelm considers the time element and suggests a four-month period. If all goes well the trip should take 97 days.

Back in New York City Thor goes to the Explorers Club, where he is a junior member from work he had done on the Marquesas Islands. There he listens to a lecture by Colonel Haskin about equipment newly developed for the military that might also be of interest to explorers and field scientists. Peter Freuchen, a Danish arctic explorer, rejects the new equipment in favor of technologies developed thousands of years ago that still work today, such as the kayak and igloo. At the end of the lecture, Colonel Haskin offers any of the equipment for expeditions, as long as the explorers report their experiences back to him.

The next morning at the Sailor's Home, Thor meets Herman Watzinger, a university-trained engineer, who expresses interest in the raft project. He becomes the first of

Thor's five crewmembers. Thor invites Herman to the Explorers Club where they talk about their plans with Freuchen, an immediate supporter of the adventure. Freuchen contacts the press and a benefactor. In return for newspaper articles and lecture tours after the voyage, the benefactor promises to provide funding. The next day Herman quits his job. He and Thor go to work full time to make the adventure a reality.

Their first order of business is to select the other four crewmembers. Thor writes to Knut Haugland, Torstein Raaby and Erik Hesselberg asking them simply to join the expedition. All three write back and accept. The last crewmember slot remains open.

Thor writes to Bjorn Rorholt, a problem-solving man he had met while in the service, to help find a contact in the supply department of the American army. A few days later Bjorn calls and tells Thor that the foreign liaison office of the American War Department wants to know the details. Herman and Thor take a train to Washington D.C.

They drive out to the Pentagon in Otto Munthe-Kass', who is the Norwegian military attaché, car and wander about the huge building in search of the foreign liaison office. The meet Colonel Lewis who comes to an understanding of their request—free food and equipment in return for reports on how well the new supplies work. Colonel Lewis then directs the two adventurers to the next higher commander who can authorize the deal. The commander at first has doubts, but finally allows the deal based on the "courage and enterprise" (p. 49) of Thor.

Thor receives help from others. Admiral Glover of the Naval Hydrographic Institute offers current navigational charts. Colonel Lumsden arranges a conference at the British Military Mission to discuss the issues around sailing a raft over 4,000 nautical miles and brings in the latest British equipment, including shark repellant powder. Thor asks if it really works, and Colonel Lumsden says that the British navy would also like to know that.

A major setback occurs. The financial manager of Thor's backers takes ill and no further financing can be authorized until he recovers. The backers do agree to dismantle the financial syndicate, but this also takes time. Thor needs to find money quickly because time is running short, and he cannot stop the wheels that he has set into motion.

Otto Munthe-Kaas comes to the rescue by personally financing the adventure with the expectation of repayment once Thor and crew successfully complete the journey. The soon-to-be primitive sailors start arrangements to fly to South America, only to be stymied by the bureaucracies of requirements and rules. Still in New York City, they appeal to one of their backers, a former correspondent at the United Nations. The correspondent arranges with the delegates from Peru and Ecuador, where the adventurers must go to obtain large balsa logs for the raft construction. Impressed with the journey's purpose to prove that Peruvian, and perhaps Ecuadorian, ancestors settled the Pacific islands, both delegates assure full cooperation. The assistant secretary of the United Nations, Dr. Benjamin Cohen, gives Thor a letter addressed to the President of Peru, a personal friend of Dr. Cohen's. By luck, Thor meets the Norwegian ambassador, Wilhelm von Munthe, who promises support for the voyage.

Having secured money and smoothened their bureaucratic course, Thor and Herman settle into a four-engine propeller airplane for their flight to South America. They still have enough time to build the raft and set sail that season.

Chapter 3, To South America

Chapter 3, To South America Summary and Analysis

Thor and Herman land in the port of Guayaquil and take a hotel in the hot, humid weather. They learn enough Spanish to get around, with their first major order of business being the procurement of large, fresh balsa logs. None grow close to the coast any longer, and none of the sawmills have appropriate logs, so the only place to chop them down lies inland, within the jungle. However, the rainy season has started, which makes the jungle inaccessible due to deep mud.

Herman and Thor think hard for a solution. By using a map in the hotel, they determine that they can enter the jungle from behind by traveling over the Andes Mountains, harvest trees on a plantation owned by Don Gustavo, and float the logs downriver to the coast.

They fly to Quito, the capital city of Ecuador, setting at 9,300 feet above sea level. After landing, their pilot, warns them that head-hunters inhabit the jungle area of Quevedo, their destination, while Thor and Herman try to eat a meal. The grisly details cause Thor to stop eating and Herman to chew his beef slowly without much relish.

The next day, with the help of the Norwegian Consol General, Herman and Thor obtain what they need from the American Embassy in the form of a jeep and a driver to cross the Andes. Early the next morning, Captain Agurto Alvarez delivers the jeep, which is full of gasoline cans, with orders to drive the two men to Quevedo. He is heavily armed to fight off any bandits encountered along the way and gives Thor a big revolver from the Consol General. They rapidly travel on good roads to the village of Latacunga. Here the road turns into a goat trail, and they travel through the foothills among very primitive natives herding llamas. The women spin wool as they walk.

"The farther we went, the fewer the Indians who spoke Spanish, and soon Agurto's linguistic capacities were as useless as our own. A cluster of huts lay here and there up in the mountains; fewer and fewer were built of clay, while more and more were made of twigs and dry grass. Both the huts and the sun-browned, wrinkle-faced people seemed to have grown up out of the earth itself, from the baking effect of the mountain sun on the rock walls of the Andes. They belonged to cliff and scree and upland pasture as naturally as the mountain grass itself. Poor in possessions and small in stature, the mountain Indians had the wiry hardiness of wild animals and the childlike alertness of a primitive people, and the less they could talk, the more they could laugh. Radiant faces with snow-white teeth shone upon us from all we saw. There was nothing to indicate that the white man had lost or earned a dime in these regions. There were no billboards or road signs, and if a tin box or a scrap of paper was flung down by the roadside, it was picked up at once as a useful household article" (p. 65).

While traversing the high mountains, the road often petered out, and they would search along scree and grassy ridges for the next stretch. The finally reach the downward run into the jungle, but clouds block their view as they descend upon long loops in the road. By the time they reach the jungle, rain falls in torrents. They spend the night in huts discovered along the way and continue the journey the following morning.

A rapidly running river blocks any further travel by jeep, but some half-breed Indians offer to float the vehicle across by balsa raft. On the other side of the river and not very far away, the log-seekers roll into Quevedo. The settlement consists of two rows of wooden houses with palm leaf roofs. Don Federico, the plantation manager, welcomes them into his house and arranges a feast of suckling pigs and chicken. He then promises to look for large balsa trees growing wild near his bungalow, as the plantation has become inaccessible due to deep mud.

That evening they take a walk around the bungalow after the rain lets up. Federico keeps many kinds of fragrant wild orchids in coconut shell pots hanging from the trees. While Herman smells one, Angelo uses his whip to bring a poisonous snake to the ground and kills it. The snake had slithered too close to Herman's head. Back in the bungalow, they witness two scorpions battling each other, the insects' shadows looking huge against the wall. Federico tolerates the scorpions because they keep the cockroaches down, but warns everyone to shake out their clothes in the morning before getting dressed.

The next morning Federico sends his men out looking for appropriate balsa trees. He, Thor and Herman tackle a tree that Federico knows about close by, and in the ways of the Polynesians, they name the tree before felling it. This one receives the name Ku. Chopping down the sap-engorged wood is not easy because the ax blade tends to bounce back rather than bite in.

After hours of sweaty work, the huge tree crashes down. A big ant stings Herman in the leg, a wound that causes him pain and swelling for days. The ant is called a kongo, and its sting is worse than a scorpion's. Despite this, Herman does not slow down in his search for more balsa logs.

By the end of the week, twelve balsa trees have been felled, stripped, peeled, and named: Ku, Kane, Kama, Ilo, Mauri, Ra, Rangi, Papa, Taranga, Kura, Kukara and Hiti. These names come from Polynesian legends of those who accompanied Kon Tiki from Peru, according to Thor's untested hypothesis. Federico's men drag the logs to the riverfront by the bungalow.

With the help of two river-wise natives, Thor and Herman lash the logs into two temporary rafts and float them downriver. They see alligators and huge iguanas, and then pass by small settlements while the river current quickly transports them toward the sea by day and night. Closer in to civilization Thor and Herman take a steamboat to Guayaquil, where Herman will wait for the logs to arrive and then take them by steamer to Peru. Thor takes a plane to Lima, the capital city of Peru, to arrange for a raft-building site.

His first stop is with the Peruvian marine minister, Manuel Nieto. Nieto tells Thor that he must first obtain permission from the Foreign Ministry. Thor must seek a meeting with the President of Peru, a task he suspects to be impossible. However, the President has developed curiosity about the adventure from articles in the newspaper and does grant the meeting. Due to language difficulties an interpreter named Reveredo, an officer in the Peruvian air force, joins the meeting. Once President Rivero understands, he grants anything that Thor may need to get his expedition underway.

Thor requests space in the Peruvian naval yard to build, supplies and workshops. He picks up the sixth member of the expedition, Bengt Danielsson, an explorer who had just come off a canoe expedition on the Amazon River, which had ended in Peru. Bengt had read about Thor's adventure and volunteers. The other crewmembers start to congregate in Peru.

Knut Haugland and Torstein Raaby attack the massive amounts of paperwork, weighing in at twenty-six pounds. Ironically, Thor's mother writes that she wishes he could escape the bureaucracy for the safety of the raft. Herman suffers a neck injury and is treated in the Lima Hospital, but the man is in tremendously strong shape and heals quickly.

Contrasting with the huge naval vessels, the pile of raft building materials seems pathetic. Nevertheless, the crew goes to work constructing the raft with the help of Peruvian sailors assigned to the task. First, nine of the thickest logs are picked for the main raft and lashed together in the water. They lay a deck of split bamboo, construct a two-pole mast out of hard mangrove wood, a small cabin in the middle of the raft, and various features to make life on the raft easier. Five centerboards made of fir are installed to stabilize the raft against winds and waves.

After construction is completed, curious naval experts visit the raft floating next to a temporary dock. None of the experts has encouraging reactions. Every one of them gives different reasons why the expedition will fail. If storms do not destroy the raft, the logs will begin to sink halfway to the islands. A Norwegian captain gives the worst prediction. He says that the raft cannot travel fast enough before the hemp ropes that lash it together wear away. He recommends chains. Thor and crew stick to their objective with the faith that if ancient South Americans had made the trip, they could also.

The crew finishes the official paperwork to leave the country, which brings in a humorous scene. Two questions deal with how one has entered and plans to leave the country. For Bengt Danielsson, he says he entered the country by canoe and expects to leave by raft. The clerk rips the form out of his typewriter and accuses Bengt of playing with him.

The crew loads provisions on the raft. Two hundred and seventy-five gallons of fresh water in thirty-seven cans, military rations for four months, wicker baskets of coconuts, fruit and sweet potatoes, a radio, scientific instruments, camera film, and boxes for each crew member's personal items make up the load. Some of the provisions go under the

deck, some are lashed on deck, and the shortwave radio equipment receives a corner inside the hut.

A tugboat tows the raft to the Callao Yacht Club for its launch. Many people show up for the historic occasion, causing the crew to vow that they will each paddle a single log to the islands rather than return to this mob. Gerd Vold, the expedition's secretary, christens the raft Kon-Tiki with coconut milk because the champagne had been stowed on the raft. President Rivero gives them each a farewell audience, and before leaving dry land, the crew goes into the mountains to drink in as much earth and rock as they can to gain a strong desire for the open ocean.

Chapter 4, Across the Pacific

Chapter 4, Across the Pacific Summary and Analysis

On April 28, the Kon-Tiki is to be towed out to sea by a naval tug, the Guardian Rios. Somebody had given Herman a green parrot in a cage, which he sits with on the raft as Thor approaches. Herman heads into town for a last beer, and Thor waits for the arrival of the other crewmembers. The tugboat shows up early, and only Thor is on board the raft. Sailors efficiently tie up the raft and begin towing it, even though Thor protests energetically. The parrot releases itself from the cage. Thor wrestles the bird back in while being towed out to sea alone.

Finally, Thor gets his message across to the tugboat crew. They send a small motorboat out to fetch the rest of the crew, but only succeed in bringing curious women back who want to stand on the raft with the vexed Thor. Eventually the crew and motorboat converge, and the towing of Kon-Tiki continues.

The beginning of the journey does not go smoothly. The tug line breaks and must be spliced. Once out in the Humboldt Current, a cold water current that heads westward to the Pacific islands, and released from the tugboat, no wind comes up to propel the raft. Once a wind does blow, steering becomes a problem. The crew improvises and learns through experience how to keep the bow pointed in the right direction, but then the sea becomes very high from the combined trade wind and current. Fortunately, the raft performs well in the high seas, like a big cork. The design proves superior to boats because any shipped water flows around the logs. Holes in the raft are advantageous, whereas in a boat they are disastrous.

The crew takes turns at steering and learns how to manage this in high seas. Two crewmembers take the oar in three-hour shifts. They then stagger the shifts so that each man has no more than two hours at the grueling task. Knut deals with severe seasickness, so the crew improvises around the lost shift member. A few days later, the ocean calms down and Knut recovers.

Another advantage of the raft shows itself. As a swell comes underneath, it lifts the raft up, but the mass of the raft tends to flatten out the wave like a steamroller.

The radio picks up the naval station at Lima. The crew learns that the American ambassador's airplane is flying out to see them with Gerd Vold on board. The plane circles repeatedly, and the crew watches closely, but the plane never finds the raft and the crew does not hear the engines. Unable to spot the relatively tiny raft, the plane returns to Lima.

The raft moves along at a good clip, averaging 55 to 60 sea miles per day, with the best day covering 71 miles. However, the current threatens to land the raft at the Galapagos

Islands, which is not only the wrong destination, but the islands have no fresh water. Nothing can be done other than hope for favorable currents and winds.

Concern turns to the logs and ropes. They test the logs for absorbing water, one of the problems expressed by the naval experts. It turns out that water penetrates for only the first few inches, and then the tree sap keeps the logs from taking on any more. The ropes tighten in the water and press into the soft balsa wood, an unforeseen advantage. Another objection from the experts was that the ropes would wear out, but just the opposite happens. The logs actually protect the ropes from wear.

After about a week at sea, the currents bring the raft past the Galapagos Islands and onward toward the right destination. The water turns from green to blue, and the sea clams down quite a bit. Tuna, bonitos and dolphins (dorados) accompany the raft. The crew uses a flying fish that had dropped on the deck as bait. They hook two good-sized dorados, thereby supplementing their food rations. At night, with the paraffin lamp shining, flying fish regularly drop on board, attracted to the light. Cleaned and scaled, the taste of flying fish resembles that of trout. Knut complains that one flying fish hits him in the hand rather than dropping right into his frying pan and hot cooking oil.

One night a rare deep-water fish that resembles an eel—a snake mackerel—comes on board. The crew discovers that this type of fish regularly rises to the surface at night, which nobody in a typical ship would ever notice. They preserve one in a jar of formaldehyde. Thor reflects on this and other experiences:

"The sea contains many surprises for him who has his floor on a level with the surface and drifts along slowly and noiselessly. A sportsman who breaks his way through the woods may come back and say that no wild life is to be seen. Another may sit down on a stump and wait, and often rustlings and cracklings will begin, and curious eyes peer out. Therefore, it is on the sea, too. We usually plow across it with roaring engines and piston strokes, with the water foaming around our bow. Then we come back and say that there is nothing to see far out on the ocean.

"Not a day passed but we, as we sat floating on the surface of the sea, were visited by inquisitive guests which wriggled and waggled about us, and a few of them, such as dolphins and pilot fish, grew so familiar that they accompanied the raft across the sea and kept round us day and night" (p. 117).

The crew witnesses phosphorescent shrimp that swim free or somehow attach themselves to other, larger creatures. Three very mysterious shape-shifters appear underneath the raft one night, each of which Thor estimates are five fathoms (nine meters, about 30 feet) long. They never see the creatures on the surface but know they are not whales because they do not come up for air.

One day a very special visitor circles and follows the raft—a whale shark. Whale sharks are the largest fishes in the world. The head resembles a frog's but is massively wide, and the whole beast weighs in at about fifteen tons, stretching up to sixty feet long. The crew worries about an attack, but the whale shark displays no signs of aggression. It

feeds on nothing larger than plankton. Erik, egged on by foolish shouts, throws a harpoon into the head of the whale shark, which promptly dives, snapping off the harpoon line. Luckily, the whale shark does not harm the raft while making its escape from the uninformed humans.

Chapter 5, Halfway

Chapter 5, Halfway Summary and Analysis

The journey turns into a daily routine of keeping the raft on course, Bengt reading his books on sociology, Herman taking scientific observations, Knut and Torstein working on the radio that needs constant maintenance, and Erik checking their position with a sextant. Thor keeps the logbook and takes photographs. Everybody takes turns at cooking. If some issue comes up, the entire crew talks about it before any decisions are made.

Torstein and Bengt stick to the prepackaged rations as an experiment, which is fine by them because neither cares for seafood. The other crewmembers freely partake in the different fish that the ocean provides, including barnacles that attach themselves to the raft.

Thor speculates on what the South Americans may have taken on their voyage. Gourds could have held water, as could lengths of large bamboo. More water could have been collected from rain. Flying fish regularly land on the raft, and the cook collects them in the morning to make breakfast. Oftentimes bonito swim onboard as the ocean washes over the stern. Thor believes that the same events would have happened for the original travelers as well. Leaves of the coca plant were probably chewed to stave off fatigue while providing a certain amount of immunity to drinking seawater. The crew discovers that mixing an amount of seawater with fresh also provides salt that the body craves in hot conditions. Additionally, the South Americans probably brought sweet potatoes and coconuts. The supply that Thor has brought sprouts during the voyage.

This leads Thor to further speculate that the existence of sweet potatoes and palm trees on the South Sea Islands indicates that humans had brought them there. The idea that drifting potatoes or coconuts does not have credence due to the salt water destroying the ability to germinate, literally spoiling the potatoes and coconuts.

Small crabs born by bird feathers floating on the ocean come on board the raft. One fairly large crab becomes a pet, the crew members feeding it scraps as they take their shifts at the steering oar. The crabs also eat plankton, a food source that the crewmembers filter out of the water and eat either raw or cooked in a soup. At night, the plankton glows like jewels.

Whales appear at times. They sometimes rush toward the raft, a disconcerting sight, only to dive below it at the last second. The intelligence of the whales impresses Thor, especially when compared to the whale shark. None of the whales actually attacks. Thor concludes that whales that attack vessels have been attacked first.

Pilot fish and dorados accompany the raft. The dorados are easy to catch and good to eat. The pilot fish look like tiny zebras fanned out in front of the raft, but are too small for

food, especially with all the other species available. Sharks begin showing up. The crew catches many of them, which range from six to ten feet long. The meat is good after soaking it in brine for a day, but the skin is very tough to break. The sharks bring more pilot fish that adopt the raft, and most sharks have remora fish stuck to them. The remora fish has a sucking disk on top of its head, and they are impossible to remove. Some release themselves and attach to the bottom of the raft.

A certain part of the ocean contains many octopi and squids, about which the marine experts warned the crew. While going through this area, the crew sleeps with machetes to cut off any tentacles that come creeping onboard. However, no giant octopi or squids show themselves. Smaller ones do, and oddly, the squids end up on the roof of the hut. The mystery comes clear when a shoal of squid demonstrate their flying capabilities when being chased by a predator. The squids shoot water out the front of their bodies, which propels them at high velocity out of the water backwards for distances up to sixty yards.

Noticing a reef marked on the chart and checking the shipping records, the crew decides to veer northward to see if they can verify the reef. Excitement builds that they may discover a new low-lying island. The change of direction brings the raft into an unfavorable angle to the wind, which causes more water to be shipped. Although not in danger of sinking, the crew sleeps wet more often than usual. When they arrive at the site of the reef, they let out a weighted line 500 feet long, but cannot find any bottom. Disappointed that they have discovered nothing, the crew turns the raft back to its original course. However, the exercise reveals to the crew how the centerboards can be used in navigation by raising and lowering them in various configurations.

At the exact halfway mark of the journey, the raft sails at a point 2,000 miles away from land to the east and west, and a few hundred miles from islands to the north and south. The psychological impact is one of being in a unique place on earth, one that very few people have every experienced. The crew feels a certain amount of stasis, where their world consists of a circle of ocean, the arc of the sun during the day and the stars at night, always the same.

Chapter 6, Across the Pacific

Chapter 6, Across the Pacific Summary and Analysis

Thor remembers the first time two crewmembers take the rubber dinghy for a row. They begin laughing, which makes the other crewmembers wonder if the two men had lost their minds. Upon return, two more go out and realize what is so funny. It is the sight of the Kon-Tiki, a pathetically tiny bit of wood on the massive ocean, being piloted by a crew of scruffy, bearded, nearly naked men. On a subsequent outing, the crew decides to always keep a line tied to the raft and dinghy, as losing the raft would prove deadly. Thor reflects that falling overboard would also be disastrous, as the raft cannot stop or go back to pick up a lost crewmember, foreshadowing an event to come.

The raft gives the crewmates an impression of solidity within the vast ocean. Jungle smells inside the cabin comfort them, and the covering affords a break from the immense sky and ocean blending into blue during the day, black at night.

"We tried to find an explanation for this curious fact and came to the following conclusion. Our consciousness was totally unaccustomed to associating a palm-covered bamboo dwelling with sea travel. There was no natural harmony between the great rolling ocean and the drafty palm hut that was floating about among the seas. Therefore, either the hut would seem entirely out of place in among the waves, or the waves would seem entirely out of place round the hut wall. So long as we kept on board, the bamboo hut and its jungle scent were plain reality, and the tossing seas seemed rather visionary. But from the rubber boat, waves and hut exchanged roles" (p. 172).

When out on the dinghy at night, the men realize that time doesn't matter. It may be 1947 A.D. or B.C., but the ocean and sky remain the same. Thor concludes that ancient people had led just as rich lives as modern humans, perhaps fuller and richer.

Thor believes that white people with beards somehow came to South America, possible across the Atlantic, and had brought with them sophisticated stone-working skills. The archaeological evidence supports this hypothesis because the great monuments and statues of South America appear suddenly, with no interim period of development. The same occurs on the South Sea Islands. He comments at length on Easter Island, where statue building had become widespread to the extremes. The faces of the statues have long ears, narrow noses and thin lips. Thor imagines that the white, bearded race had these features, with the long ears coming from a practice of stretching the lobes with weights. In addition to this, many of the statues have red rocks sculpted and balanced on top, possibly reflecting that the white race had red hair.

Unfortunately, Christian missionaries had gone to Easter Island, named as such because it had been discovered on Easter Sunday in 1722, to convert the natives. One

of the things the missionaries did was to destroy a set of tablets that accounted for island history. Thus, the story of Easter Island will never be well understood.

Thor points out that the native names for Easter Island also indicate that it had been settled first before the rest of the South Sea Islands. One name refers to "the navel of the islands," another to "Great Rapa," as opposed to a similar island called "Little Rapa" to the west. The third name, "The Eye Looks (toward) Heaven," is the same name for South America.

The crewmembers begin to have fun with the sharks that they had earlier feared. Holding a bag of cooking scraps tied to a bamboo pole causes the sharks to beg like a dog. Grabbing the sharks by the tails leads to a game of hauling sharks as long as ten feet onto the raft. Once the sharks are tipped head downward, they become immobile and easy to handle, but once on board they revive and start snapping at anything nearby. The crew must then be careful to avoid the beasts until they flop overboard or die.

The parrot given to them before starting the voyage gives much pleasure and entertainment. Initially only speaking Spanish, it soon learns Norwegian expletives. The parrot likes to tell the crew to haul when they tighten up lines, and when sharks are on board, the bird becomes very excited. However, two months into the voyage a wave knocks the parrot overboard. The crew tries to find it with the rubber boat and looks for signs of it in shark stomachs, but to no avail. The parrot is lost.

The radio operators contact a ham operator named Hal in Los Angeles. They relay weather information to Hal, who then sends it to the US Weather Bureau. The Bureau appreciates the rare weather data from the remote South Pacific. The transmitter runs on only six watts of power, but this is enough to give the other crewmembers disconcerting shocks, which results in isolating the radio corner with sheets of cardboard.

The crew encounters the first of two storms. The raft weathers the first storm well enough, and afterwards the crew witnesses a frenzy of fish activity. All the predators attack prey with a vengeance, as if tomorrow will not come. Tuna attacks dolphins and sharks attack tuna. Blood tinges the water and keeps the frenzy going.

About two weeks later another storm strikes. Just before the full force of the storm hits, Herman falls overboard. Pushed by high winds, the raft rapidly moves away from him. The panicked crew launches the rubber boat. Torstein grabs a bamboo float tied to the raft and dives in with the lifeline. He makes it to Herman first, while the rest paddle the rubber boat back to the raft and begin hauling in the two men. After the close call, all become very silent. Then the storm comes up and takes their minds off of watery graves.

The storm lasts five days, sometimes reducing its strength, sometimes regaining. Once over, the crew discovers that the raft has lost much of its sturdiness. Ropes have

loosened, and a few have broken. The main logs move independently of one another and much of the decking has been lost.

Frigate birds begin to appear, a sign of land. The currents and winds cooperate to move the raft ever further toward a cluster of islands. The crew sees a whole flock of land birds all heading in one direction, and navigate that way. Each day brings more birds until one evening, the crew sees a stationary cloud. This is a sure sign of land, and they waste no time in heading for it.

Chapter 7, To the South Sea Islands

Chapter 7, To the South Sea Islands Summary and Analysis

By early morning, Herman spots the island and calls Thor on deck to look. As the sky lightens toward the sunrise, they see the line of land in the distance and determine that the name of the island is Puka Puka, the most eastwardly lying part of the Polynesian chain. The natives send up smoke signals to invite the crew to land, but this ends up being a harder than anticipated. Winds and currents force the Kon-Tiki away from the sight and smells of land.

The next morning they see clouds over the islands Fangahina and Angatau. Three days later, they sail near Angatau, and certain that they would make their landing there, the crew hoists the flags of America, Britain, Peru, Sweden and the Explorers Club. However, an impassable coral reef encircles the island except for one narrow passageway, across which the natives of the island live.

The natives come out in all four of their ocean-going canoes to help land the raft. However, with much effort from all and working against a contrary wind, the raft cannot be budged. Knut goes ashore to find more help, but with only four canoes, no further help is available. The Kon-Tiki drifts away from Angatau without Knut, which concerns the crew. Fortunately the natives paddle out into the night to return Knut to the raft, and then, afraid of drifting too far away from their home, take off after the crew gives them appropriate presents for their efforts. Knut then explains how he attempted to communicate with the chief, an unsuccessful effort, and how the natives tried to trick him into staying.

"'Have a good time ashore?' Torstein asked enviously.

"'Oho, you just should have seen the hula girls!' Knut teased him" (p. 238).

The raft moves toward the dangerous Takume and Raroia reefs, which stretch along a line 40 to 50 miles across their path. The crew tries to navigate northward, but the winds change and they try a southward route. They make it around the Raroia reef to a string of small coral islands. The wind forces them toward an island protected by a high reef. Not having any option but to go with the raft into the reef, the crew makes preparations. They determine what each man should do once the raft hits the reef and secure all their gear and supplies. Soon afterward, the sea rises just before the reef.

Several high waves break over the raft, and the men hang onto ropes with all their strength. Thor worries about losing a man, which would ruin the whole adventure. Their only hope is to keep with the raft and let the big balsa logs take the pounding against the reef. Death by drowning is not the biggest threat, but leaving the raft and being crushed to death against the reef is.

The raft hits and becomes caught in an overhang on the reef. The water keeps pounding the raft against the reef while the men hang on for dear life. Finally, the suction of a receding wave followed by a high incoming swell lifts the raft to the top of the reef. The men jump off onto the reef as the waves push the raft into a secure position.

Thor makes sure that all his crewmembers are uninjured. They then go to work salvaging equipment and supplies. Amazingly enough, they manage to bring to shore all the important things: radio, water, cooking equipment, and even Erik's guitar. The calm lagoon teams with life, including small sharks that curiously approach the men but retreat from a hand-slap on the water. Thor walks into the palm jungle where fragrant flowers grow and birds fly around his head. He lies down on the warm sand and appreciates being at last on dry land. The other crewmembers join him. Henry climbs a palm, cuts a cluster of green coconuts loose, and they all enjoy the refreshing milk.

"'Purgatory was a bit damp,' said Bengt, 'but heaven is more or less as I'd imagined it'" (p. 255).

Chapter 8, Among Polynesians

Chapter 8, Among Polynesians Summary and Analysis

The crew inspects its tiny island, which is two hundred yards wide with the highest point only six feet above the lagoon. They find an old, unpainted wooden cross, an old shipwreck and see another island in the distance. Erik collects an armful of hermit crabs, and Knut builds a fire to cook them. Everybody still has their sea legs and stumble around on the solid earth.

The crew drags the big square sail ashore and set up a shelter bordered by flowering bushes on three sides and looking out over the lagoon. They sleep well on mattresses made of palm fronds and wake to find rainwater held in the sail, which Bengt stores away, then goes to the beach and catches fish by chasing them into channels he makes in the sand. The radio men go to work trying to revive the transmitter.

They had transmitted just before hitting the reef and promised contact within 36 hours, but they fail to meet the deadline. When Torstein finally makes contact, it is with a man named Paul in Colorado. Paul thinks one of his friends is playing a trick on him when Torstein tells him about the crew and the raft stranded out in the Pacific on a desert island. Torstein keeps trying and finally makes contact with Raratonga in the Cook Islands and Hal in Los Angeles.

Erik and Herman wade out to a larger island to the south. Here they find the wreckage of an old Spanish ship that had carried rails. Some of the rusty cargo is scattered over the reef. On their way back, eight large poisonous eels attack, forcing the two men to the top of a coral block. They swing at the eels with machetes, killing one and wounding another. The blood attracts sharks, which gobble up the dead eel, kill the wounded one and scatter the remaining. The men jump to another block and make their getaway.

The days go by without much else happening, and the crew starts to feel that they should soon be on their way. They cannot live forever on the island. They see two sails in the distance approaching and recognize the crafts as outrigger canoes. The men on the canoes wave, and the crew on the island waves back. When the Polynesians land, one can speak a little French, and in this way, the crew and natives communicate. The natives say they are from a nearby village. The villagers had seen the crew's fires at night, but since nobody could get past the Raroia reef without their noticing, the chief had decided that ghosts lived out there. They now understand that the crew had come over the reef on a raft. Bengt goes back with the natives to their village, then returns the next morning. Many canoes with sails appear. The village chief has come to meet the other crewmembers.

The chief's name is Tepiuraiarii Teriifaatau, but goes by the shorter version, Teka. He is an educated man, having gone to school in Tahiti, and knows that the capital of Norway is Christiania. Teka asks Thor if he knows Bing Crosby. He then says that foreign

vessels seldom visit Raroia, but copra schooners from Tahiti visit regularly to pick up coconuts. One should be arriving soon.

Bengt reports that the village consists of 127 natives, no white people, no school and no radio. However, the village plans to throw a big reception for all the crew.

Teka becomes very interested in the raft. He says that the Kon-Tiki is not a boat but a pae-pae, which means "raft" or "platform" in Polynesian. Teka also says that his people no longer use the pae-pae, but many of the old men in the village remember ancient stories about them.

The natives bring out fowl, eggs and breadfruit from the canoes. Along with fish speared in the lagoon, they all have an impromptu feast, during which the crew tells their stories from the voyage. The natives especially like the story about the whale shark, which none of them have ever seen. The radio picks up church music, then hula music. The natives start to dance their versions of the hula.

The next morning a very high tide comes in. This floats the Kon-Tiki, which had been pushed into the lagoon earlier, and the natives tie up the raft to a palm tree. Bengt and Herman go back with the natives to examine a small boy with a deadly abscess on his head while the other four crewmembers inspect the bottom of the raft. Some ropes have broken, but the nine main logs remain intact, except for some flattening from going over the reef. The next day the natives come back to fetch the rest of the crew.

At the village, two chiefs greet them, Teka and Tupuhoe, who is a vice-chief. Teka has status because he can read and write, thus keeping commerce with the copra schooners honest. Tupuhoe, a large man with an engaging personality, is the village chief in all other ways. The chiefs and crew walk through the village, made up of traditional structures and bungalows made from lumber and corrugated steel. The largest building is the village meetinghouse, where the crew is to stay. They enter the meetinghouse from the rear and then out onto a broad set of steps. Everybody in the village stands before them very somberly. The villagers sing the French national anthem badly while the French and Norwegian flags are hoisted on a pole in front of the steps. The villagers then go into a traditional song with lyrics designed especially for the crew of the Kon-Tiki. The singing improves greatly.

Thor speaks to the crowd with Teka translating:

"I told them that I had been among their kinsmen out here in the South Sea Islands before, and that I had heard of their first chief, Tiki, who had brought their forefathers out to the islands from a mysterious country whose whereabouts no one knew any longer. But in a distant land called Peru, I said, a mighty chief had once ruled whose name was Tiki. The people called him Kon-Tiki, or Sun-Tiki, because he said he was descended from the sun. Tiki and a number of followers had at last disappeared from their country on big pae-paes; therefore we six thought that he was the same Tiki who had come to those islands. As nobody would believe that a pae-pae could make the voyage across

the sea, we ourselves had set out from Peru on a pae-pae, and here we are, so it could be done" (pp. 277-278).

Tupuhoe becomes fired up about how the old legends are all true, which disturbs Thor. He does not want to undo what the Christian missionaries have done, so he explains that although Kon Tiki had truly existed as a man, it was up to Jehovah to decide if he now dwells in heaven or hell. Tupuhoe and the villagers accept this explanation cheerfully. Three old men approach Thor, and one tells about the legend of Maui, who had come to the islands from Pura, or the part of the sky where the sun rises. The whole village shakes hands with all the crewmembers, and then the feasting begins.

The food is lavish and tasty. After eating their fill, the villagers begin to pound their palms rhythmically against the ground, and then a man with a drum plays along. Two men with guitars join in, and soon a group of young girls dances their hula versions. The whole village eventually dances, including all the crewmembers.

The next day Knut and Torstein make radio contact with Hal. Herman and Knut describe the sick boy's symptoms, and Hal relates them to a local doctor. The doctor gives instructions. Herman and Knut follow them out, and with the aid of the medicines salvaged from the raft, cure the boy. Soon many villagers show up to the newly christened doctors with many ailments, some of which can be helped and others at least not made worse.

A few days later, a new ceremony of adoption brings the crewmembers into the tribe by bestowing Polynesian names. Tupuhoe names Thor Varoa Tikaroa, meaning the spirit of the village's first king, Tikaroa. Herman becomes Tupuhoe-Itetahua and Bengt becomes Topakino, the names of two old-time heroes who had fought and killed a sea monster. Torstein receives the name of a former village chief, Maroake. Erik becomes Tane-Matarau and Knut Tefaunui, named after two famous navigators and sea heroes from the village's past. The ceremony ends with two village men dancing out the fight with the sea monster.

The villagers celebrate for days longer. The radio delivers a welcome message from the governor of the French Pacific colonies, who has sent out the schooner Tamara to bring the crewmembers to Tahiti. A copra schooner runs aground on the reef before the other boat arrives, and the villagers try to salvage it, but holes wear into the hull. When the Tamara arrives, it pulls the copra schooner off the reef, and villagers then make temporary repairs to the hull. Towing Kon-Tiki with the crewmembers aboard the schooner, the Tamara sails to Tahiti accompanied by the copra schooner, to be permanently repaired in dry dock.

Four days later, the Tamara enters the Tahitian harbor of Papeete, where a huge crowd awaits them. The Kon-Tiki is tied up to a wharf, which attracts many curious visitors. More greetings and feasts ensue, with the crewmembers thoroughly enjoying the festivities and attention. Norway sends a cargo ship named the Thor I to bring the crewmembers back to their homes. Thor and crew leave Tahiti, their adventures finished and a point established—it is possible to travel over 4,000 nautical miles from Peru to

Polynesia on a raft made of balsa logs. This does not prove Thor's migration hypothesis, but it removes one of the objections to it, the world receives a great modern adventure story, the Polynesians gain a better understanding of their origins, and Thor Heyerdahl has a book to write.

Characters

Thor Heyerdahl

Thor Heyerdahl has an idea. He suspects, from his study of zoology on a South Pacific island and subsequently hearing of the ancient legends, that a white race of people with beards and stretched earlobes first settled the South Pacific islands. He writes up a formal argument for his hypothesis and tries to present it to various museums and universities in the United States, but meets with resistance. His idea goes against the current ways of science, where every scientist specializes.

Discouraged but not defeated, Thor decides that he should build a raft like the ancient South Americans used and sail it from Peru to the South Pacific. He wants to prove that this can be done. He gains the interest of Peter Freuchen, a fellow Explorers Club member, who puts Thor into contact with his first investor. Thor then attempts to gain the support of the US military for supplying experimental survival gear. Despite setbacks, he finally gathers a crew and support from the appropriate government officials. He flies off to South America with Herman Watzinger, his first crewmember.

Thor runs right against the rainy season in Peru. He cannot obtain any large, fresh balsa logs to build his raft because the jungle is inaccessible. He and Herman think the problem over and come up with an idea to approach the Ecuadorian jungle from behind, through the Andes Mountains. The US embassy grants the use of a jeep and driver to bring them over the mountains, and there, in a jungle rumored to have headhunters and known to have bandits, Thor finds the logs he needs. With some native help, Thor and Herman float the logs downriver to the coast.

The other crewmembers arrive, including Bengt Danielsson, who has heard of the great raft voyage. The crew, including Thor, now numbers six. They construct the craft in the Peruvian naval yard, are towed out to sea by tugboat and begin their 4,000 nautical mile voyage.

Through a rough beginning, concerns of the currents taking them off course, storms and a final, dramatic landing, Thor narrates the crew's follies, triumphs, close calls, and other experiences while on the ocean. He lands with all his crew intact, and they enjoy an extravagant Polynesian welcome. In the end, Thor may not have proven his hypothesis, but he undeniably demonstrates that a raft constructed in the same manner as used by ancient South Americans can indeed cross over to the South Sea Islands.

Kon Tiki

Kon Tiki exists only in legends, but Thor Heyerdahl is convinced that the legends tell of a man who had existed at one time and who had taken a flotilla of rafts across the Pacific and settled the South Sea Islands.

Kon Tiki was white-skinned and had a beard. His people had somewhere learned how to work rock into statues and huge stepped pyramids. They lived in what is now Peru along with the natives and built a culture around Lake Titicaca that threatened a rival chieftain. A battle ensued, driving the white-skinned people out of South America and onto the Pacific Ocean in rafts, as Thor believes. These white people, along with friendly natives, first settled the South Sea Islands, bringing with them coconuts and sweet potatoes to cultivate.

The name Kon Tiki is familiar to some of the elders living on the islands and to the Peruvians. Whether Thor is right in his ideas does not matter to science. It is just a hypothesis with circumstantial evidence. Despite this, the impact of the modern Kon-Tiki voyage on both the South Americans and Polynesians carries with it a level of pride in ancestry. Somebody originally settled the South Sea Islands, and these people came from somewhere. Kon Tiki gives the original settlers an identity, and thus a stronger identity for the modern Polynesians.

Herman Watzing

Herman learns about Thor's idea to sail a raft across the Pacific while taking a meal with him at the Norwegian Sailor's Home in New York City. Herman becomes Thor's first crewmember and ally in the adventure, accompanying him to South America, over the Andes Mountains and into the Ecuadorian jungle in search of the right balsa logs for the raft.

A very athletic man, Herman suffers a neck injury in South America that threatens his ability to accompany Thor and crew, but he recovers amazingly fast due to being in such good shape. While onboard Herman performs his duties well, and he adds an amount of sardonic humor to the voyage. His skills include taking scientific measurements using various instruments, often from the rubber dinghy.

Knut Haugland

Knut brings his radio expertise to the crew. He first helps by tackling the massive amounts of paperwork involved before the voyage can begin. He suffers from seasickness during the first few days of the voyage. He jokes about the flying fish not landing right into the hot grease of his frying pan while on cook duty. Upon arriving at the first possible landing site, Knut goes to the island with the natives to find more help in bringing the raft to shore. This attempt fails, and he nearly becomes stranded on the island. Knut later teams up with Herman to cure a sick native boy.

Torstein Raaby

Bengt joins the crew while preparations are being made in South America. He had just come off an expedition in which he traveled the Amazon River in a canoe all the way to Peru. He tells a clerk that he entered Peru by canoe and expects to leave by raft, which

upsets the clerk. During the raft voyage, he reads many books on sociology, and like Torstein, only eats the military rations. He first goes to the village where Teka and Tupuhoe act as co-chiefs and reports back to the crew.

Erik Hesselberg

Erik is the crew's navigator. He keeps track of where they are on a chart and estimates where they will be, given the current conditions. Egged on by other shipmates, Erik throws a harpoon deep into the whale shark's head, which encourages the beast to leave from the vicinity of the raft. Erik is the musician and the artist of the crew. He ships a guitar, plays and sings traditional Polynesian tunes, and paints the face of Kon Tiki on the sail.

Bengt Danielsson

Bengt joins the crew while preparations are being made in South America. He had just come off an expedition in which he traveled the Amazon River in a canoe all the way to Peru. He tells a clerk that he entered Peru by canoe and expects to leave by raft, which upsets the clerk. During the raft voyage, he reads many books on sociology, and like Torstein, only eats the military rations. He first goes to the village where Teka and Tupuhoe act as co-chiefs and reports back to the crew.

Tei Tetua

While on a zoological expedition on the island of Fatu Hiva, Thor meets Tei Tetua, a very old man and the last of his tribe. Tei Tetua tells Thor the story of how his people first came to the islands by way of Kon Tiki, a white-skinned, bearded man who is also considered a god. This stimulates Thor's imagination, from which he constructs his hypothesis that South Americans could have sailed rafts to the South Sea Islands at around 500 A.D.

Peter Freuchen

Peter, well-known for his arctic explorations, is a senior member of the Explorers Club in New York City. He listens to Thor and Herman as they explain their plans to sail a raft from South America to the South Sea Islands. Excited and wishing he could accompany them, he begins the preliminary tasks by contacting possible investors and other people who can help make the idea a reality.

Colonel Haskin

Colonel Haskin delivers a speech on experimental military equipment that explorers might find useful at the Explorers Club in New York City. Thor attends and becomes

excited about the possible use of the equipment on his raft voyage. Peter Freuchen disdains the modern equipment, preferring the ancient ways of the kayak and igloo, thus encouraging Thor's use of an ancient raft to cross the Pacific from Peru to the South Sea Islands.

Otto Munthe-Kass

Otto is the Norwegian military attaché in Washington D.C. He drives Thor and Herman to the Pentagon, where they meet Colonel Lewis and strike up a deal to use experimental military equipment and rations on the voyage. When Thor's financial backing falters, Otto comes to the rescue by personally financing the voyage until the other funds become available.

Colonel Lewis

Colonel Lewis works in the Pentagon and meets with Thor and Herman. He immediately sees the value in testing experimental military equipment and rations on the voyage, but when he presents the plan to his superior officer, the officer balks at the deal. He does not believe that Thor and crew can deliver back any reports of value. The superior officer does give in when he considers the enterprising nature of the voyage and the courage involved.

Colonel Lumsden

Colonel Lumsden sets up a meeting with the British Military Mission to discuss the use of British experimental equipment. One of the more fascinating items is a shark-repellent powder. Upon being asked if the powder really works, Colonel Lumsden tells Thor that this is what the British want to find out, as well.

Dr. Benjamin Cohen

Dr. Benjamin Cohen is the assistant secretary to the United Nations. He composes a letter regarding Thor and the voyage to the President of Peru, a personal friend, which plays an important role while Thor and Herman are in South America. The letter garners attention and opens doors.

Don Gustavo

Don Gustavo controls the balsa plantations in Peru and Ecuador. He advises Thor that harvesting fresh balsa logs is impossible during the rainy season, due to the deep jungle mud. Don Gustavo does make arrangements with a plantation on the Andes side of the jungle, where Thor and Herman find their logs.

Captain Agurto Alvarez

Captain Agurto Alvarez is the man assigned by the American Embassy to drive Thor and Herman over the Andes Mountains and into the jungle to find fresh balsa logs. He carries many weapons to fight off bandits, but they encounter none during the trip. Agurto kills a poisonous snake that threatens to bite Herman.

Don Federico

Don Federico manages the plantation near where Thor and Herman obtain their fresh balsa logs. He gives the two adventurers a feast when they arrive, explains how to handle scorpions and shows them his wild orchid collection. With the help of Don Federico's men, Thor and Herman find all the logs they need and float them down a river to the coast.

President Rivero

President Rivero of Peru grants a meeting with Thor. The meeting does not start out well due to language barriers, but with an interpreter, President Rivero enthusiastically supports Thor's voyage. The President grants anything that Thor might need to construct the raft as the voyage will enrich Peruvian history and promote current national interests.

Gerd Vold

Gerd is the female secretary to the Kon-Tiki voyage. She christens the raft with a coconut that shatters and sprays milk and fragments all over those attending. Gerd also accompanies the American ambassador as they fly out to sea to make contact with the raft during the early days of the voyage. This attempt fails, which indicates just how improbable a rescue would be.

Hal

Hal is a ham radio operator in Los Angeles who makes contact with the Kon-Tiki. He relays weather reports all along the voyage. At the critical time when the raft faces the reef and the crew their possible destruction, Hal takes the last broadcast that asks for a 36-hour window before calling out the rescue teams. When the crew restores their radio, Hal helps them to cure a native boy by acting as liaison between a Los Angeles doctor and the crew.

Teka

Teka is the chief of his village, consisting of 127 people, on Raroia. He had been educated in Tahiti, where he learned to read and write French. A clear thinker and able to make sure that business deals are honest, he is a valuable chief but not the true chief in the ancient sense. His vice-chief, Tupuhoe, plays that role. Teka first goes to meet the crew of the Kon-Tiki.

Tupuhoe

Tupuhoe is the true chief of the Raroia village. He does all the social and spiritual rituals, changing his demeanor from friendly and jolly to very serious as the occasion requires. Tupuhoe initiates the festivities given in honor of the crewmembers and bestows upon them honorable Polynesian names, thereby adopting them into the village.

Objects/Places

Raft

The raft, christened the Kon-Tiki, is built according to ancient South American design. It sports a large square sail, a long steering paddle and center boards that help in navigation.

Balsa Logs

The key component of the raft is a set of green balsa logs. The logs are buoyant even when green, as the sap is lighter than sea water. The sap also keeps out the sea water, thereby making a 4,000 nautical mile voyage possible.

Steering Oar

The steering oar on the raft is a key component for navigation, but very difficult to handle in heavy seas. The crew improvises a lever on the shaft to help and sometimes lashes the steering oar during calmer weather.

Tahiti

Tahiti is the main Polynesian island. The crew spends their last days in Polynesia here before heading home on a Norwegian cargo ship.

Center Boards

The center boards on the raft at first seem only to provide stability. Later, the crew discovers how the center boards can be used to assist navigation.

Hut

The hut on the raft gives the crewmembers shelter from the sun and elements. It also serves as a refuge from the ocean that reminds the men of land.

Flying Fish

Flying fish jump out of the water and glide for long distances to escape predators. They often land on the raft during the night, and since they are good eating, the fish become breakfast for the crewmembers.

Dolphin (dorado)

The dolphin is a fish that the crewmembers find delicious, easy to catch and fascinating in how it can change its colors. Dolphin also makes good shark bait.

Shark

Sharks often hang around the raft. At first very wary of the sharks, the crew becomes so accustomed to the predators that they catch the sharks by the tail.

Whale Shark

The whale shark is the largest fish in the world. The crew encounters one, and it hangs around the raft. The sheer immensity of the fish makes the crew nervous that it might attack, and so Erik throws a harpoon deep into the whale shark's head.

Plankton

The crew tries eating plankton, which consists of small shrimp and fish larvae. Thor finds the plankton to be good raw or cooked. He marvels at the variety of organisms, and how they are phosphorescent.

Guardian Rios

The Guardian Rios is the tugboat that takes the Kon-Tiki out to sea at the beginning of the voyage. At first only Thor is on board the raft, but he manages to communicate with the tugboat, which sends a motorboat back for the rest of the crew.

Humboldt Current

The Humboldt Current flows from east to west in the southern part of the Pacific Ocean. Thor and crew take advantage of the current to speed their voyage. Their fastest rate is 71 nautical miles in a 24-hour period.

Tamara

The Tamara is the schooner sent by the French government to pick up the crewmembers and to tow the raft into port. It also helps take a stranded trade schooner off the Raroia reef.

Thor I

The Thor I is the Norwegian cargo ship that brings the crewmembers back home, along with the raft. It ships 4,000 tons and has a big crane for loading and unloading.

Fatu Hiva

Fatu Hiva is a Polynesian island on which Thor does zoological research. Here he first develops the idea that the original islanders had come from South America. This leads to the voyage of the Kon-Tiki.

New York City

New York City is where Thor attempts, unsuccessfully, to advance his hypothesis about the origins of the Polynesians. However, he also spawns the idea of the raft voyage and finds support in New York City.

Norwegian Sailor's Home

The Norwegian Sailor's Home affords food and lodging to Thor when he runs out of money. He also meets Herman at the Norwegian Sailor's Home and learns much about the ocean from the sailors who live there.

Explorers Club

Thor is a member of the Explorers Club, and here he finds support for his raft voyage. He also attends a presentation on experimental military equipment and rations, which leads to supplying the raft voyage.

Washington D.C.

Washington D.C. is where Thor obtains the support of the military for supplying his expedition. He may not be able to give the military useful reports on the experimental equipment and rations, but the whole idea of sailing a raft across the Pacific Ocean is enough to gain cooperation.

Guayaquil

Guayaquil is the Peruvian city in which Thor and Herman begin the tasks of gaining permissions and building the raft. Here they come up with the idea of traversing the Andes Mountains to obtain fresh balsa logs.

Quito

Quito is the capital city of Ecuador and is located high in the Andes Mountains. Thor and Herman fly to the city, and there they obtain a driver and jeep to cross the Andes.

Quevedo

Quevedo is a small village in the Ecuadorian jungle and the destination of the jeep trip across the Andes Mountains. Here Thor and Herman find enough fresh balsa logs to build the raft.

Lima

Lima is the capital city of Peru, located on the coast. Thor obtains a raft building site in the nearby Peruvian naval yard after meeting with the President of Peru.

Galapagos Islands

The Galapagos Islands lie to the north of the desired course to Polynesia. Currents threaten to take the Kon-Tiki to the Galapagos Islands, but shifts in current and winds bring the raft back on course.

Easter Island

Easter Island lies to the south of the Kon-Tiki's course. Thor writes about the mysterious statues and carvings on the island, and how they may relate to his hypothesis of ancient migration from South American to the South Sea Islands.

Puka Puka

Puka Puka is the first Polynesian island that the crew encounters. Winds and currents pull them away from landing there.

Angatau

Angatau is the second Polynesian island that the crew encounters. Landing seems more possible, and native islanders come out to help. However, again currents and winds pull the Kon-Tiki away.

Raroia

The crew lands, albeit quite roughly on a reef, at an uninhabited island near Raroia. The natives come out to meet the crew and throw a big festival in their honor on their home island of Raroia.

Themes

Capabilities of Ancient Humans

Thor and crew prove that for long-distance sailing, fresh balsa logs tied together with ropes perform better than modern alternatives, such as chains instead of ropes and hulls instead of logs. The logs cannot develop holes from hitting a reef, as can a hull. The ropes shrink in the water and dig into the logs, thus protecting the ropes from wear. Steel chain cannot shrink in water and might pull apart in storms.

A remarkable feature of the raft is its large storage area between the main logs and those that support the deck. Ancient South Americans could have carried plenty of fresh water stored in bottle gourds or large pieces of bamboo for long ocean journeys. The crew discovers that the ocean provides plenty of food—flying fish come on deck by themselves and are delicious. Plankton can be scooped from the water and eaten raw. Dolphin fish hit regularly on flying fish bait, and sharks hit on the dolphins. Other fish species that are good to eat often swim right onto the raft from the back.

Another capability of the ancient raft style does not show itself until far into the voyage. The center boards shoved through chinks in the main logs can be used to assist in navigation, something that can only be discovered by actually sailing the raft.

Considering the westerly flow of the Humboldt Current and trade winds and the capabilities of the ancient raft design, Thor concludes that the people of Kon Tiki's era in South America could have easily crossed the Pacific to the South Sea Islands. Once there, they would have likely settled the very attractive islands surrounded by rich fishing waters.

Perseverance and Cooperation

Of almost equal importance to the successful completion of the voyage, Thor shows unusual perseverance for bringing the project forward and enjoys the cooperation of people in positions of power. He must project an air of certainty that wins people to his side, along with practicing sales techniques perhaps unconsciously, otherwise the doors would quickly slam shut. He first wins over the famous arctic explorer, Peter Freuchen, who starts the wheels turning. Thor uses every resource at his disposal to penetrate into the Pentagon, where he receives the promise of valuable equipment and supplies. The problem with obtaining fresh balsa logs in South America slows him down a little, but not for long. Daring the wilds of Ecuador, he and Herman break the project logjam and float with the balsa logs to the coast. Obtaining the blessings of President Rivero is another masterful stroke. Thor could have lost his temper early on, but he faces the imposing Presidential palace. One small slip with protocol could have stymied the project immediately.

The project comes together like magic, an indication that it is a worthy one that captures the imaginations of those who hear about it. This is what brings Bengt Danielsson to the crew. This is also why the naval experts have so many criticisms to pile onto Thor's shoulders, but here is where his natural perseverance takes over. He knows that the ancient South Americans had made the trip, so he can too. Granted, much of this is arises from Thor's faith in his own hypothesis, but he must have a character trait that runs deeply—obstinacy in the face of naysayers, but with an unshakable respect for others.

The only time that Thor raises a ruckus is when it counts. He seizes the attention of the tugboat crew when they take the raft out too early, and keeps on insisting that the rest of the crew must be on the raft before towing it out to sea. Otherwise he lets the flow take him along, like the Humboldt Current, to what he strongly believes is his destiny. One might imagine that the spirit of the original Kon Tiki is helping out, but in all reality, the perseverance of Thor Heyerdahl turns a dream into a reality. He proves that humans can accomplish what they put their minds to, from the ancient world to the modern.

Adventure and Survival

Adventures can take many forms. Learning new things is an adventure, and one that all the crewmembers know well. Going to war is another adventure that they share, having served in World War II and survived the experience in which so many had lost their lives. Sailing a raft of ancient design across 4,000 nautical miles is high adventure because the crewmembers go voluntarily and knowingly risk their lives to prove a point.

Nature welcomes them to the adventure by tossing high seas at the inexperienced crew, and they determine to either reach Polynesia or die trying. Returning to South America is not an option in their minds, and as the voyage progresses, not an option that the ocean is willing to grant. The crew discovers that they are unable to stop the raft or turn it around. This implies that the ancient South Americans may have discovered the same thing if caught in the Humboldt Current and westerly trade winds.

The wager becomes that to survive, the crew must adventure onward. They have thrown all their chips onto the deck of the raft, and with favorable luck, they plan to win. Their luck holds out when they observe that the raft is actually quite a solid sea-going vessel that smoothens out waves and rides high seas like a cork. The green logs resist seawater and remain buoyant throughout the journey, and when the critical landing on the reef presents the last adventure on the voyage, the logs hold well against the pounding.

Human Migratory Theory

From the stories he hears and the circumstantial evidence he sees, Thor is convinced that the accepted human migratory theory for the South Sea Islands is wetter than the ocean. The accepted theory maintains that the original settlers had come from the west, probably Asia. Thor's hypothesis is that the earliest migration was from South America,

followed by a migration from the Pacific Northwest, over to the Hawaiian Islands, and then down to Polynesia.

Thor looks at Polynesian sculpture and pyramids. He sees a direct relationship to the styles and craftsmanship between the Polynesian works and those left behind near Lake Titicaca in Peru. The DNA evidence may point to Asia, but the artwork points to South America. He then compares legends and finds startling similarities between those of South America and those of Polynesia. Adding to this the fact that the trade winds and currents flow from east to west, Thor concludes that South Americans initially populated the South Sea Islands.

Modern DNA analysis is quite sophisticated. Ethnographic studies have mapped ancient human migrations from the beginnings in Africa all across Europe and Asia, but one event clouds the picture for the Americas—the last Ice Age in which a bridge formed across the Bearing Strait. However, were all ancient Americans from Asia, or did other races somehow find their ways to the continents? The legends of the white-skinned and bearded Kon Tiki hint that science does not understand the entire phenomenon of human migration. Thor Heyerdahl proves that long sea voyages were possible in ancient times, and with his relative ease at reaching the islands, highly probable despite DNA evidence to the contrary.

A logical appeal can be made that as sophisticated as DNA analysis is today, it may very well not be so accurate at reconstructing ancient human migrations. The body of data could be insufficient; the analysis techniques may have flaws, and when all is said and done, the conclusions could be wrong. Conversely, Thor Heyerdahl may be right.

The Power of Myth

The South Americans and Polynesians certainly hope that Thor is right. Their ancient heritage depends on the truth of the Kon Tiki and other mythology that define their people. The power that myth contains exists in people's faith, and to claim myths to be nothing more than creative fiction is to lessen faith and reduce self-esteem. All human cultures either fight hard to retain their cherished myths or hold them quietly in their hearts if another culture's myths dominate.

This can be seen by observing wars based on religious belief and expeditions to find things such as Noah's Arc. At a less obvious level, the power of myth causes the President of Peru to give his complete cooperation and chief Tupuhoe to preach to his people that the old myths are true. Not wanting to undo the mythology building of the Christian missionaries, Thor tries to combine the two, which the villagers accept as a good compromise. Kon Tiki may be in hell, but he did live at one time and did bring the first people to Polynesia, thus the villagers can hope to attain heaven while continuing to believe their ancient myths.

A damning situation had happened on Easter Island. The Christian missionaries found it desirable to destroy as much of the old mythology as possible while replacing it with

their own. In the course of this action, historical documents in the form of stone tablets were destroyed. This may have helped the missionaries' cause, although the old mythology lives on, but it most certainly did nothing to lift the veil of mystery from around Easter Island. This action reflects the negative power in mythology. Too much belief can result in folly. Thor takes the wise path by including ancient native mythology within its younger replacement.

Style

Perspective

Kon-Tiki is an adventure story with the fundamental conflict of humans against nature. The story is also a dramatic attempt to bring forward ideas about ancient human migrations that do not jive with accepted scientific theory. Technically, Thor Heyerdahl is a zoologist. He lacks the academic background for ethnographic studies, but he still has an active mind and imagination. He can tie circumstantial evidence together and come up with likely scenarios that are rejected without consideration by ethnographers due to the lack of hard evidence. He also breaks a cardinal rule among scientists to not drift away from their specialized fields.

However valid the scientific criticisms are, the fact of the matter is that Thor and crew build a raft and sail on the Pacific Ocean in the same way that ancient South Americans are known to have sailed. He audaciously accomplishes what he claims that the ancients could have done, and likely had done. Rather than arguing over collected data in stuffy academic rooms, Thor goes out into the real natural world and demonstrates that he is undeniably correct in this particular matter, despite all the objections from the specialists and experts.

If something can be done, then given enough time, something will be done. This fundamental human trait has not changed over the ages. Another that does not change is human motivation. Fear motivates the most strongly, and whoever sailed to Polynesia probably did not do this for a lark. It was either an intentional act of desperation or an accident. Thor goes with the idea that people leave a place because something forces them out, and in this case, he uses an established historical conflict to support his hypothesis. The man Kon Tiki had departed from South America to avoid death by his enemies. The man Kon Tiki is known in Polynesia. Those two dots connect together by the raft Kon-Tiki and its amazing voyage.

Thor writes for those who love high adventure against seemingly impossible odds. That the raft trip ever gets underway is one such adventure, an act of entrepreneurship equal to any in business. The crew of six landlubbers accomplishes a classic conversion into expert seamen by the end of their journey. This is a common plotline in fiction, but here it is done in vivid reality, and nobody dies along the way. The story has a happy and joyful ending, an especially appealing feature for those who want to feel good after the heart-pounding adventure, which is to say just about everyone.

Tone

Thor keeps inter-human drama to a minimum. Squabbles may have broken out on the raft or during the frustrations while arranging for the voyage, but he chooses to discount

these incidents if indeed they happened. Everybody moves ahead with the assumption that success is not only possible, but also inevitable.

Internal conflicts do come out, mostly in Thor. He has his periods of doubt and fear, as would be expected from any person out on a raft in the middle of the ocean. Yet he has also carefully considered the mixture of personalities with whom he spends over three months on the ocean. Knut the joker, Bengt the scholar, Erik the artist, Torstein the technician and Herman the scientist blend well with Thor the dreamer. That no two individuals are alike is an important characteristic of the crew because conflict often arises from two people being too much alike. As such, the crewmembers deal with their own feelings by either keeping them hidden or acting them out in harmonious ways.

Thor characterizes the ocean as being the main threat to wellbeing. High seas make the start of the voyage a major problem, but this tension soon releases with calm weather and a steady movement toward their goal. Thor paces the tension and release, which probably reflects the reality of ocean travel. Major life-threatening tension starts and ends the journey, with lesser problems sandwiched between. The use of mystery regarding some of the sea creatures encountered keeps the story moving, along with sharp observations and a few humorous incidents.

Thor's tone changes from the observant to the breathless, depending on how close to annihilation the crew approaches. He narrates the story as if telling it to a friendly audience in an intimate setting, a good style for any memoir and a very effective one for a true-life adventure.

Structure

The story begins at its beginning and ends at its end. It follows a heroic storyline, where the seekers leave their comfort zones, head off into an unknown world with more courage than experience, encounter great challenges and strange creatures, then come to an idyllic place where they receive high honors. Finally, the Argonauts make a triumphant return home. This part of the heroic story is left to the imagination, and in this case of true-life adventure, the historical record.

Few criticisms can be raised against this format. It fits because that is exactly what happened. One of the problems with putting major conflict at the beginning and again at the ending is that the story might sag in the middle, and during the calm seas, this problem begins to appear. However, Thor bolsters up the calm with interesting observations about the ocean life that surrounds the raft, a fairly long but fascinating description and analysis of Easter Island, and bringing in impressionistic images, such as the crew's shadows on the sail at night while gathered around a paraffin lantern.

Sometimes Thor flashes back to details about earlier conflicts. This technique comes off well because he relates the flashbacks to what is about to happen or the general line of thought that he follows. Overall, the story stays on course with just a few side trips, with

the primary focus being life on an ancient raft in the middle of nowhere, propelled by current, wind and determination.

Quotes

"He poked the coals with a stick to keep them from going out. The old man sat thinking. He lived for ancient times and was firmly fettered to them. He worshiped his forefathers and their deeds in an unbroken line back to the time of the gods. And he looked forward to being reunited with them. Old Tei Tetua was the sole survivor of all the extinct tribes on the east coast of Fatu Hiva. How old he was he did not know, but his wrinkled, bark-brown, leathery skin looked as if it had been dried in sun and wind for a hundred years. He was one of the few on these islands that still remembered and believed in his father's and his grandfather's legendary stories of the great Polynesian chief-god Tiki, son of the sun" (pp. 17-18).

"A sparse little man with a long nose opened the door a crack before he threw it wide open with a broad smile and pulled me in. He took me straight into the little kitchen, where he set me to work carrying plates and forks while he himself doubled the quantity of the indefinable but savory-smelling concoction he was heating over the gas" (p. 31).

"When time is short and plane replaces train, while taxi replaces legs, one's wallet crumples up like a withered herbarium" (p. 50).

"It was good going all along the range as far as the mountain village of Latacunga, where windowless Indian houses clustered blindly around a whitewashed country church with palms in a square. Here we turned off along a mule track which undulated and twisted westward over hill and valley into the Andes. We came into a world we had never dreamed of. It was the mountain Indian's own world—east of the sun and west of the moon—outside time and beyond space. On the whole drive we saw not a carriage or a wheel. The traffic consisted of barelegged goatherds in gaily colored ponchos, driving forward disorderly herds of stiff-legged, dignified llamas, and now and then whole families of Indians coming along the road. The husband usually rode ahead on a mule, while his little wife trotted behind with her entire collection of hats on her head and the youngest child in a bag on her back. All the time she ambled along, she spun wool with her fingers. Donkeys and mules jogged behind at leisure, loaded with boughs and rushes and pottery" (pp. 64-65).

"No two of these men had met before, and they were all of entirely different types. That being so, we should have been on the raft for some weeks before we got tired of one another's stories. No storm clouds with low pressure and gusty weather held greater menace for us than the danger of psychological cloudburst among six men shut up together for months on a drifting raft. In such circumstances a good joke was often as valuable as a life belt" (p. 81).

"We went forward yard by yard. The Kon-Tiki did not plow through the sea like a sharp-prowed racing craft. Blunt and broad, heavy and solid, she splashed sedately forward over the waves. She did not hurry, but when she had once got going she pushed ahead with unshakable energy" (p. 102).

"Knut had been squatting there, washing his pants in the swell, and when he looked up for a moment he was staring straight into the biggest and ugliest face any of us had ever seen in the whole of our lives. It was the head of a veritable sea monster, so huge and so hideous that, if the Old Man of the Sea himself had come up, he could not have made such an impression on us. The head was broad and flat like a frog's, with two small eyes right at the sides, and a toadlike jaw which was four or five feet wide and had long fringes drooping from the corners of the mouth. Behind the head was an enormous body ending in a long thin tail with a pointed fin which stood straight up and showed that this sea monster was not any kind of whale. . . .
"The monster was a whale shark . . ." (pp. 120-121).

"Knut and Torstein were always doing something with their wet dry batteries, soldering irons, and circuits. All their wartime training was required to keep the little radio station going in spray and dew a foot above the surface of the water" (p. 128).

"One day, when we were sitting at tinner, Torstein made a reality of the tallest of fish stories. He suddenly laid down his fork and put his hand into the sea, and, before we knew what was happening, the water was boiling and a big dolphin came tumbling in among us. Torstein had caught hold of the tail end of a fishing line which came quietly gliding past, and on the other end hung a completely astonished dolphin which had broken Erik's line when he was fishing a few days before" (p. 146).

"The closer we came into contact with the sea and what had its home there, the less strange it became and the more at home we ourselves felt. And we learned to respect the old primitive peoples who lived in close converse with the Pacific and therefore knew it from a quite different standpoint from our own. True, we have now estimated its salt content and given tunnies and dolphins Latin names. They had not done that. But, nevertheless, I am afraid that the picture the primitive peoples had of the sea was a truer one than ours" (p. 159).

"The fascination of Easter Island provided us with plenty of subjects of conversation as we sat on deck under the starry sky, feeling ourselves to be participators in the whole prehistoric adventure. We almost felt as if we had done nothing else since Tiki's days but sail about the seas under sun and stars searching for land" (p. 185).

"In the course of an incredibly short time the seas round about us were flung up to a height of fifteen feet, while single crests were hissing twenty and twenty-five feet above the trough of the sea, so that we had them on a level with our masthead when we ourselves were down in the trough. All hands had to scramble about on deck bent double, while the wind shook the bamboo wall and whistled and howled in the rigging" (p. 201).

"Land! An island! We devoured it greedily with our eyes and woke the others, who tumbled out drowsily and stared in all directions as if they thought our bow was about to run on to a beach. Screaming sea birds formed a bridge across the sky in the direction

of the distant island, which stood out sharper against the horizon as the red background widened and turned gold with the approach of the sun and the full daylight" (p. 220).

"In the middle of night we held a council of war. It was a question of saving our lives now. To get past on the north side was now hopeless; we must try to get through on the south side instead. We trimmed the sail, laid the oar over, and began a dangerous piece of sailing with the uncertain north wind behind us. If the east wind came back before we had passed the whole façade of the fifty-mile-long reefs, we should be hurled in among the breakers, at their mercy" (p. 239).

"I shall never forget that wade across the reef toward the heavenly palm island that grew larger as it came to meet us. When I reached the sunny sand beach, I slipped off my shoes and thrust my bare toes down into the warm, bone-dry sand. It was as though I enjoyed the sight of every footprint which dug itself into the virgin sand beach that led up to the palm trunks" (pp. 254-255).

"We all fell for Tupuhoe's broad hearty smile. Teka was a clear brain and a diplomat, but Tupuhoe was a pure child of nature and a sterling fellow, with a humor and a primitive force the like of which one meets but rarely. With his powerful body and kingly features he was exactly what one expects a Polynesian chief to be" (p. 276).

"Waves were breaking out on the blue sea. We could no longer reach down to them. White trade-wind clouds drifted across the blue sky. We were no longer traveling their way. We were defying Nature now. We were going back to the twentieth century which lay so far, far away" (p. 296).

"My migration theory, as such, was not necessarily proved by the successful outcome of the Kon-Tiki expedition. What we did prove was that the South Amnerican balsa raft possesses qualities not previously known to scientists of our time, and the Pacific islands are located well inside the range of prehistoric craft from Peru. Primitive people are capable of undertaking immense voyages over the open ocean. The distance is not the determining factor in the case of oceanic migrations but whether the wind and the current have the same general course day and night, all the year round. The trade winds and the Equatorial Currents are turned westward by the rotation of the earth, and this rotation has never changed in all the history of mankind" (p. 297).

Topics for Discussion

Why does Thor Heyerdahl decide to build the Kon-Tiki and sail it from South America to Polynesia?

Briefly characterize each member of Thor's crew.

What are the unique features of the Kon-Tiki?

Why is the raft named the Kon-Tiki?

Describe how squid fly and end up on the roof of the raft hut.

What makes landing the raft on a Polynesian island difficult?

Why is the voyage of the raft important to Peruvians and Polynesians?

Of what importance is ocean plankton?

Describe the process of catching a shark by hand on the raft.

List and describe three of the principles that the crew discovers about sailing a raft that none of the naval experts foresaw.

Construct an argument in support of Thor Heyerdahl's hypothesis that people from South America first settled the Polynesian Islands.

Construct an argument against Thor Heyerdahl's hypothesis that people from South America first settled the Polynesian Islands.