

Lost in Shangri-La: A True Story of Survival, Adventure, and the Most Incredible Rescue Mission of World War II Study Guide

Lost in Shangri-La: A True Story of Survival, Adventure, and the Most Incredible Rescue Mission of World War II by Mitchell Zuckoff

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Plot Summary

Lost in Shangri-La is a non-fiction book by writer Mitchell Zuckoff. This book tells the overlooked story of a plane crash on the Dutch island of New Guinea in the final months of World War II. Twenty-four people went on a Mother's Day sightseeing trip over the lost valley that had been dubbed Shangri-La, including nine WACs, several officers and a group of enlisted men. The plane crashed and three people survived, including a twin whose brother was lost in the crash, a beautiful WAC, and an enlisted man with severe head injuries. Lost in Shangri-La is the story of these three survivors and the brave paratroopers who dropped into the valley to save them amidst the perils of the jungle, the unknown element of the natives, the danger of nearby Japanese soldiers, and the understanding that the military had no clue how to get them out.

In May of 1944, Colonel Ray T. Elsmore was flying a mission over the island of Dutch New Guinea. This mission took Elsmore over the center of the island where his co-pilot pointed out a large valley he had discovered some time before during his own reconnaissance flight. The valley was large and appeared to contain dozens of native villages as well as several thousand natives who appeared untouched by the passing of time. The natives had small farms with fields of sweet potatoes that boasted primitive irrigation systems. The valley, that Elsmore and his co-pilot dubbed Hidden Valley, was fascinating because of the inaccessibility of it and the wonder of the natives who populated it. In a short time, the press got hold of the discovery and wanted to see it. Two reporters who flew over the valley that spring dubbed it Shangri-La after the utopia in the James Hilton novel Lost Horizon.

In short time, flying over Shangri-La became a favorite pastime of the soldiers stationed on the island. For this reason, Colonel Peter Prossen, the chief of maintenance of the Far East Air Service Command, thought it would help build morale to take a group of soldiers, including members of the WACs, or Women's Army Corp, on a tour of Shangri-La. On the afternoon of Mother's Day, May 13, 1945, Prossen loaded his C-47 airplane with twenty-three people. During the flight, which would take forty-five minutes to reach the valley, Prossen left the pilot's seat and joined his soldiers in the fuselage of the plane. Flying the plane was his relatively inexperienced co-pilot, Major George Nicholson.

As the plane passed over a smaller valley outside of Shangri-La, Nicholson took the plane low over the valley floor. Nicholson spotted a mountain ridge directly in front of them covered by clouds. Too late, Nicholson attempted to gain altitude, but pilot error or a downdraft made it impossible for the C-47 to gain altitude quickly enough. The plane crashed into the side of the mountain. WAC Corporal Margaret Hastings, Lieutenant John McCollom, Tech Sergeant Kenneth Decker, Private Eleanor Hanna, and Sergeant Laura Besley survived the crash. However, Hanna and Besley would die within twenty-four hours.

The three survivors, under the guidance of McCollom, made their way down to a clearing he saw from a tree at the crash site in hopes of being spotted by rescue planes.



Moments after entering the clearing, the three were spotted. Within a day they received medical supplies and food from the rescue planes. However, Margaret and Decker were so injured that they could not walk anymore. Under the command of Elsmore, a group of officers and enlisted men struggled to find a way to rescue the survivors out of the dense jungle. While they pondered the problem, they sent a group of paratroopers commanded by Captain C. Earl Walter Jr. into the valley to treat the survivors injuries and escort them into Shangri-La where they hoped they would be able to rescue them. It would take six weeks for the military to find a way onto the valley floor, six weeks in which the survivors and paratroopers would have to deal with the dangers of the valley and the curiosity and hostility of the natives, before the military finally found a way to send gliders into the valley and rescue the survivors.



Chapters 1-3

Chapters 1-3 Summary and Analysis

Lost in Shangri-La is a true story that was widely reported when it happened, but got lost in the final months of the war. Mitchell Zuckoff came across references to the story while researching other stories and finally could not resist the pull of this adventure story that had never been truly told.

Chapter 1. Missing. In May of 1945, a Western Union messenger made his way to the home of Patrick Hastings in Owego. The telegram from the Army informed Patrick that his daughter had gone missing.

Chapter 2. Hollandia. Margaret, a corporal, was a secretary at a military base in Hollandia, New Guinea for the Far East Air Service Command or Fee-Ask under Colonel Peter Prossen. May 13, 1945 was Mother's Day. Prossen, spent the morning writing a letter to his long suffering wife and three children. Prossen mentioned how depressed many of his soldiers were due to the separation from their families and the harsh conditions on New Guinea. For this reason, Prossen, a trained pilot, had begun to offer sightseeing tours to his men. On that day, Prossen had planned a sightseeing trip over the newly discovered valley dubbed Shangri-La.

Chapter 3. Shangri-La. A year earlier, Colonel Ray T. Elsmore was on a reconnaissance flight with copilot Major Myron Grimes to find a suitable site for a runway in the center of New Guinea. Grimes pointed out a valley he had discovered some time before in an unmapped section of the island. As Elsmore flew over this large valley filled with thousands of natives and their primitive villages, including cultivated farm land with primitive irrigation systems, he was amazed. The valley was so remote, so unreachable, that Elsmore could not understand how the natives got inside it in the first place. Word of this valley, dubbed Hidden Valley by Grimes and Elsmore, spread quickly after Elsmore filed a secret memo about it to his commanding officer General George C. Kenney. Two reporters became interested and took a flight with Elsmore over the valley and later submitted stories to their respective news agencies about it. In the stories, they named the valley Shangri-La after the utopia described in James Hilton's Lost Horizon.

In these chapters, the author introduces Margaret Hastings. Margaret is a beautiful, outspoken and stubborn woman who joined the WACs after failing to get married at the expected age. Margaret wanted to see the world and she felt that joining the WACs would provide an opportunity for this and for adventure. Stationed in New Guinea, Margaret has found herself in a dangerous, inhospitable place. However, Margaret finds joy even in the unpleasant weather and terrain of her temporary home. Margaret was popular with the male soldiers and often went out joy riding in Jeeps or having what she called blanket parties during which she and her companions would drink beer in remote



areas around the base. Margaret was young, beautiful, and carefree even during one of the most devastating time periods in American history.

The author also introduces Margaret's commanding officer, Colonel Peter Prossen in these early chapters. Prossen was a career military man who had three children growing up without him. Prossen was deeply romantic and concerned with his growing family. Prossen was also a caring commander who wanted to build the morale of his troops even though the island where they were stationed and the distance from their families made it seem an impossibility that anyone's morale could be raised. Prossen was a good man and his intentions were pure.

Finally, the author introduces the valley that was dubbed Shangri-La during the war. Shangri-La was a utopia in the novel *Lost Horizon* by James Hilton. This valley appeared to be similar to Shangri-La because it was filled with natives who were untouched by the passing of time. It was also isolated, impossible to get to, and appeared to be a modern man's idea of a utopia. Colonel Elsmore, a pilot with several impressive accomplishments in his past, took credit for finding the valley even though his copilot, Grimes, saw it weeks before Elsmore. However, Elsmore spread the word of the valley and took several reporters to see it. This caused a great many of the bored service men on the island to become interested in the valley and desire to fly over it. This explains why Prossen chose to make the unfortunate decision to fly a group of his service men and WACs over the valley.



Chapters 4-5

Chapters 4-5 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 4. Gremlin Special. Elsmore's unit formed a Shangri-La society in which they created mock certificates that they would give to people who flew over the valley with them. Reporters became enamored with Elsmore and his valley, often interviewing him. Elsmore would make amazing claims about the valley, including telling one reporter of headhunters in the valley. Elsmore also claimed the natives in the valley were exceptionally tall and beautiful and that they raised exceptionally large pigs.

On May 13, 1945, Prossen spread the word among his subordinates in the maintenance division of Fee-Ask that he would be taking a joyride over Shangri-La, a trip he called a navigational training mission in his official logs. They would be flying in a C-47, one that Prossen dubbed the Gremlin Special based on a children's story by Roald Dahl.

After the WACs, Colonel Prossen boarded with his relative inexperienced copilot, Major George H. Nicholson, a school teacher from Massachusetts. Also boarding the plane were the three other crew members. Next came ten male soldiers, two majors, a pair of captains, three lieutenants, two sergeants, and a corporal. Among the enlisted men was Tech Sergeant Kenneth Decker of Washington. Among the Lieutenants were twins Robert and John McCollom. The twins, who had been inseparable since birth even during war, boarded the plane together but could not find seats next to each other. Robert ended up sitting in the front and John took the last empty seat beside Margaret Hastings in the back.

Chapter 5. Eureka! At two o'clock in the afternoon, the Gremlin Special took off for Shangri-La. Prossen left his seat early in the flight and joined the others in the back. No one knows for sure why he did this, except to assume he was attempting to relate to his soldiers in an effort to raise morale. Sergeant Helen Kent, a widow who lost her husband in a plane crash earlier in the war, moved into Prossen's seat so that she might have an unobstructed view of the valley.

Nearly an hour into the flight, the copilot, who had never been to Shangri-La, spotted a village in a narrow valley below. Nicholson lowered the plane to about one thousand feet above the valley so they could see the village. McCollom found himself studying the clouds ahead of the plane through which he could see peaks of a mountain hidden behind it. McCollom called out to the copilot warning him to turn around. However, Nicholson did not have enough maneuverability to make a turn. Nicholson instead began to pull up. The plane began to skim over the tops of trees, causing a terrible sound inside the fuselage. The plane failed to gain enough altitude for unknown reasons, though the official report suggested a downdraft worked against Nicholson's attempts to pull the plane up over the mountain, and it crashed into the side of the mountain. Although the plane hit the mountain at over a hundred miles an hour, the nose was angled up enough to keep the plane from exploding on impact. The fuselage



crumpled in on itself, causing the sides and roof to move inward. McCollom, unhurt, managed to make his way out the back of the plane where the tail section had snapped off. Margaret, tumbled around and snatched up in the arms of a dead man, managed to extricate herself and make it out the back as well. Once outside McCollom could hear a woman calling for help. McCollom went back inside the plane despite danger to himself and rescued Sergeant Laura Besley, Margaret's friend. Going inside again, McCollom pulled out Private Eleanor Hanna.

McCollom could not return to the plane for a third time because of the flames. Seeing movement, however, McCollom found a badly wounded Tech Sergeant Kenneth Decker walking around the right side of the plane. Due to the fact that he held the highest rank and he was relatively uninjured, McCollom took charge. McCollom ordered Margaret to do something about the injured women. Laura Besley had minor burns and cuts, but Eleanor Hanna was burned over ninety percent of her body. Margaret tried to keep the women calm. At the same time, McCollom heard yelling from the side of the plane. McCollom found Captain Herbert Good lying on the ground, but they could not reach him before he died. No one else emerged from the wreckage, including Colonel Prossen or McCollom's twin brother. Eighteen people died inside the Gremlin Special that day.

In these two chapters, the author describes the flight and crash of the Gremlin Special. Important to note in this description is the joyous spirit of those on board the plane and the camaraderie that took place. The author takes pains to name each passenger by name and hometown, giving a human identity to the victims of this tragedy. Of note, the author points out a radio technician who was on the flight because his buddy could not stand to spend his rare afternoon off with a commander he disliked. The author also points out the personal conflict between Corporal Margaret Hastings and Tech Sergeant Ken Decker. Finally, the author notes the relationship between twin brothers, Lieutenants Robert and John McCollom. There is clear irony in the brothers' desire to sit apart, but finding it impossible to find two seats together, so one chose a seat in the front and died while the other randomly chose a seat in the back and walked away with no injuries.

The crash of the Gremlin Special has been investigated by the military. The military's conclusion is that a downdraft prevented Major Nicholson from gaining enough altitude to move above the mountain range. However, the author points out that Prossen, the more experienced pilot of the plane, left his seat and allowed a man who had only learned to fly three years before to take the controls. Not only this, but the inexperienced copilot had never flown into the notoriously dangerous Shangri-La valley and did not have experience with the odd weather patterns or mountainous terrain of the area. Finally, the copilot did not know what he was looking for and therefore did not realize that going to a lower altitude in that area was a dangerous option.

After the crash, Margaret, McCollom, Besley, Hanna, and Decker all walked off or were helped off the plane alive. However, they find themselves on the side of a mountain in a dangerous, rough terrain. Now the reader must wonder how the military will be able to rescue these survivors, four of whom are suffering thus far unexamined wounds.



Chapters 6-7

Chapters 6-7 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 6. Charms. Left alone, Margaret found herself and her two companions rapidly becoming surrounded by flames. Margaret called to McCollom who quickly returned and instructed her to move to higher ground. Margaret moved to a small ledge she had spotted above the wreckage. Margaret discovered when she reached the ledge that she had lost her shoes somehow. Not only this, but Margaret had a bad cut on one foot and hand, as well as burns on her other foot and on her lower legs. Margaret removed her undergarments and made bandages of her bra for her damaged feet.

The tail section had broken off and was setting apart from the burning wreckage. McCollom searched it and found supplies. McCollom and Decker dragged the supplies up to the women and cleaned their wounds as best as they could. Hanna died before morning.

All through the day, the survivors could hear search planes, but the dense foliage of the jungle made it impossible for them to see one another. Late in the afternoon, the exhausted survivors set up some cots they had found and settled down for the night. Laura Besley died in the night.

Chapter 7. Tarzan. Surveying the area from a tree, McCollom had spotted a clearing below the plane wreckage. Convinced that a search plane would never see them in the dense foliage, McCollom decided they must move to the clearing. It was a difficult hike during which they followed a dry creek bed that became a stream because it was easier.

These chapters describe the aftermath of the crash. McCollom, as the highest ranking soldier there, took control even as he tried to deal with the realization that his twin brother was dead. It must have been difficult for McCollom to deal with such a tragic death, a death that few can truly understand due to the deep connection between twin siblings. To make things more difficult for McCollom, two of the survivors, Hanna and Besley, died. McCollom collected all the supplies he could find and tried to make things comfortable for the remaining survivors. However, the only food McCollom could find was a candy called Charms. The candies were hardly satisfying, especially since none of them had eaten since the afternoon meal served just before the flight.

McCollom knew that it was important to remain near the wreckage should they hope to be rescued. However, in the dense jungle where they crashed, McCollom quickly realized that none of the search planes they could hear overhead would ever be able to spot them in such a dense jungle. For this reason, McCollom decided that they should move to a clearing below the wreckage. McCollom pushed the other two survivors to follow him despite their injuries, their exhaustion, and the difficulties of moving downhill through such dense foliage. McCollom was a brave, clearheaded man who made

several good decisions that would eventually lead to the survival of his fellow crash victims.



Chapters 8-9

Chapters 8-9 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 8. Gentleman Explorer. Although Elsmore took credit for the discovery of the valley that became known as Shangri-La, in truth another explorer had found it several years before him. Richard Archbold, the young, directionless grandson of a wealthy oil executive, became interested in biological research. Archbold funded several expeditions into New Guinea and discovered the valley during one of these from his plane. Archbold sent two exploration teams, consisting of Dutch soldiers and others into the valley. The two teams were to start from opposite ends of the valley and meet approximately in the middle. The two teams found the natives to be relatively friendly. However, there were times when the natives would prevent the teams from leaving their villages by blocking their paths with sticks, stones, and their own bodies. The explorers thought this was because the natives were often sworn enemies of the neighboring villages and did not want the visitors to be exposed to danger. Usually the explorers would walk through these barriers and continue their exploration. However, one day a young native man became particularly aggressive and a soldier shot him, claiming the young man was about to stab him with a spear.

Chapter 9. Guilt and Gangrene. The next morning, McCollom, Margaret, and Decker continued their trip to the clearing below the crash site. Margaret was terribly sore and an inspection of her injuries revealed a terrible infection. Margaret knew that Decker must be in as much, if not more, pain than she, but he never complained. By late morning, McCollom and his group found the clearing. Not long afterward a B-17 bomber from Hollandia flew overhead. McCollom and Decker spread out the bright yellow tarps to catch the attention of the flight crew. They waited, afraid they would not be spotted, but soon the B-17 raced its engines and dipped its wings, alerting the survivors that they had been spotted. An hour later they would be surrounded by natives.

In Chapter 8, the author tells the story of the first explorers in Shangri-La. Shangri-La, despite Elsmore's claims, was discovered six years before Elsmore saw it for the first time by a wealthy biological researcher named Robert Archbold. The author tells this story not to make Elsmore's claims appear amusing, but to tell the story of how the first white men in the valley killed one of the native men. This murder was tragic and caused a great deal of anger among the natives who had traditions in which a murder was always repaid with another. For this reason, the author suggests to his reader that the survivors of the Gremlin Special, who were about to come into contact with the natives, could face a certain danger.

In the following chapter, the author tells how the survivors made the final few miles down to the clearing that McCollom had spotted from the crash site. Not long after they arrived, the survivors were spotted by a rescue plane flying overhead, raising their spirits and making them hopeful of rescue. However, the survivors did not realize they were sitting in a garden someone had painstakingly cleared and planted. At the end of

the chapter a group of natives arrive. The author builds suspense by telling the reader about the crimes committed against the natives by Archbald's expedition and then by having the natives arrive as the survivors had just begun to hope for rescue.



Chapters 10-12

Chapters 10-12 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 10. Earl Walter, Junior and Senior. As word spread at Fee-Ask that survivors had been spotted, one man became a part of a group attempting to find a way to rescue the survivors. This man had been a teacher at a military academy in Los Angeles and one of his students was Earl Walter, Jr. Earl Walter Senior was an executive with a lumber company based in the Philippines. Earl Jr. grew up in the Philippines with his father after the death of his mother and later with a stepmother. When Earl Jr. was fourteen, his father became concerned about his education and sent him to the states to live with his step-grandmother. In time, Earl Jr. found himself at a military school in Los Angeles.

Earl Jr. was a difficult student who rarely went to class and eventually was suspended. Sometime later, Earl Jr. joined the military and became a trained paratrooper. When he learned that his father was leading a group of guerilla fighters in the Philippines, Earl Jr. convinced his superiors to allow him to train a unit of Filipino soldiers as paratroopers. However, Earl Jr., despite the success of his unit in training, was never offered a decent mission. Earl Jr. was cooling his heels in Hollandia with his unit, convinced his father had asked the powers-that-be to keep him out of danger. Aware of this, Earl Jr.'s former teacher told Elmore about this group of paratroopers just sitting around with nothing to do, suggesting they be sent into Shangri-La as part of the rescue mission.

Chapter 11. Uwambo. The natives surrounding the survivors were from the village called Uwambo that the Gremlin Special had flown over moments before crashing. The natives were a curious people who lived in a state of perpetual war. Each village had another village that consisted of their mortal enemies. The two villages were constantly at war.

Chapter 12. Wimayuk Wandik, aka 'Chief Pete'. As the natives came into the clearing, the two groups faced one another and waited for someone to make the first move. McCollom quickly told his companions they had no choice but to act friendly. Eventually McCollom went forward and greeted the leader of the natives alone. The two men shook hands.

McCollom dubbed the leader Pete, but his real name was Wimayuk Wandik. Soon Wimayuk introduced McCollom to his people as McCollom did the same. They could not understand one another, but it seemed the natives were friendly and non-hostile. When the natives became aware of the injuries Margaret and Decker suffered, Wimayuk came over and blew into their wounds, performing a small ceremony common to his people that would soothe their frightened souls. During the night, Wimayuk came to watch over them.

In these chapters, the reader learns that even as the military discover survivors from the plane wreck, they find themselves struggling to find a way to get them out of the dense



jungle. Unsure how many survivors there are and the extent of their injuries, the military leaders, including Colonel Elsmore, begin batting around ideas on how to save them. Most conventional rescue vehicles—planes, helicopters, amphibious planes—all seem out of the question because of the terrain, the altitude, or the availability of the vehicles. They even consider paratroopers, but none appear available at the moment. For this reason, the author introduces the story of Earl Walter Jr. Earl Walter Jr. just happens to be a paratrooper with a unit of Filipino soldiers waiting endlessly for a mission.

At the same time, the author introduces the natives of the area in which the survivors find themselves. These natives are part of a tribe called Yani. The natives are involved in perpetual war, war that defines their entire lives, the way they relate to one another, and the way in which the children are raised. This is important because it shows the reader how violent these people are and the danger in which the survivors find themselves. However, when the natives come in contact with the survivors they prove to be more curious than dangerous. The first meeting goes well, with the leader they have dubbed Pete becoming something of a protector to the unfortunate survivors.



Chapters 13-15

Chapters 13-15 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 13. Come What May. Earl Walter Jr.'s unit, the 1st Reconnaissance Battalion (special), were told about the survivors and their potential role in their rescue. Earl Walter Jr. went to his men with a report of the mission, warning his men of the danger. Despite these warnings, all of Walter's men volunteered to go into Shangri-La valley with him.

Chapter 14. Five-By-Five. The next morning, a supply plane flew over the clearing and dropped supply crates down to the survivors. McCollom and Decker went into the forest to collect the first crate while Margaret kept track of where the others fell. McCollom and Decker quickly returned with a radio set nicknamed a walkie-talkie. For the first time in five days they were able to speak with someone from the outside world. McCollom broke the news to the radio man on the C-47 flying overhead that there were no other survivors.

After a brief rest, McCollom and Decker went in search of more supplies. They bring back food. After eating, McCollom looked at the burns on Margaret's legs and dressed them with first-aid supplies found in a crate. Decker then confessed to pain on the back of his legs and buttocks. When he removed his pants, McCollom and Margaret were horrified to find terrible, gangrenous burns. McCollom dressed them as best he could.

Chapter 15. No Thanksgiving. Walter met with his superiors several times to discuss the mission, being warned that if anything went wrong it would be on his shoulders. Walter had his men do several practice jumps since it had been some time since any of them had jumped. Walter's deepest concern was for the two medics who would have to jump into the small clearing. These men were strong, brave men, but the jump would be more dangerous than anything they had done before.

In the clearing, McCollom, Margaret, and Decker waited for another fly-over by the supply plane and hopes of more food. They learned of the planned jump by the paratroopers and warned the men in the air how dangerous the terrain truly was. Later McCollom went in search of the supplies dropped that morning. He brought back clothing for Margaret, blankets, and food that included bacon, eggs, ham, and hash. The three stuffed themselves on the cold food, never stopping to think about lighting a fire.

The natives returned in the afternoon and the one they called Pete brought his wife for them to meet. Later, the natives brought a pig and other food, clearly intending on preparing a feast for the survivors. However, the survivors were too full from what they had eaten from the plane and refused. If they had not, it would have been a sort of reenactment of the first Thanksgiving.



In these chapters, the reader learns how Walter and his group of Filipino paratroopers prepared for their role in the survivors' rescue. Walter was to have two medics jump directly into the clearing where the survivors waited while he and eight others would parachute into Shangri-La valley and set up a base camp. From there Walter and five men would hike to the clearing and bring the survivors back to Shangri-La where they would be rescued by some as yet undecided method. Parachuting into two such dangerous locations took a lot of skill and strength from the brave men in Walter's unit.

As they waited, the survivors finally had food, but their wounds were growing so bad that the survival of Margaret and Decker was suddenly in question. The author shows that they were quickly running out of time. The drop of Walter's men into the area could not come too soon. At the same time, the natives were beginning to show their generous side by offering a feast for the survivors. Even though the survivors turned them down, the natives were still kind and gentle with them suggesting to the reader that the survivors would have little to fear from them.



Chapters 16-18

Chapters 16-18 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 16. Rammy and Doc. On Saturday, May 19, 1945, nearly a full week after the crash of the Gremlin Special, a C-47 flew low above the clearing and dropped medics Rammy and Doc. The drop was a dangerous one that could have resulted in both men's death. However, despite being blown off course and Rammy twisting his ankle, the two men made it down without a hitch. The survivors watched from the ground, praying the two men would make it safely to them. They would not know their fate, however, for several hours. The medics were surrounded by natives when they landed, but they were not hostile and, in fact, offered several teenagers to show them where the survivors were.

After collecting their supplies, the two medics made a hot meal for the survivors, the first they had had in nearly a week. Then Doc removed Decker's bandages and examined his wounds, pouring hydrogen peroxide on his wounds and splinting his broken elbow. They then turned to Margaret, taking their time removing the bandages that were stuck to her burns.

Chapter 17. Custer and Company. The day following Rammy and Doc's jump into the survivor's clearing, Walter and eight of his men parachuted into Shangri-La with a great number of weapons and supplies. Almost immediately, natives from a nearby village began converging on the paratroopers. Walter and his men took up a defensive position with guns at the ready. These natives, part of the Dani tribe, thought Walter and his men were spirits falling from the sky. They were fascinated with their clothing, thinking it was mud they had covered themselves with as a show of mourning. For hours the two groups stood facing one another until finally they began to relax.

Walter and his men set up camp and explored the area, finding a fresh water supply. Back at the clearing, Doc began treating the gangrene in Decker's burns, stripping the wounds of dead flesh and washing it before replacing the bandages. It was a process that took hours with no pain killer to aid Decker's comfort. Then it was Margaret's turn, who bore the treatment as stoically as she could. At the same time, the natives had begun to collect the supply crates and deliver them to the survivors' camp.

Chapter 18. Bathtime for Yugwe. Now that Margaret was beginning to feel optimistic about her leg wounds, she expressed a desire to take a bath. Rammy built a kind of bathtub for her out of his helmet and he took her to a semiprivate area where she could bathe. However, the natives spotted her and would come to watch each day. Margaret was so happy to be clean again, she did not mind. At their base camp in the valley, Walter and his sergeant took a tour of the area and found evidence of the war-like existence the natives lived.



Walter and five men began the hike over the mountain ridge to the survivors' camp. Several natives traveled with them, but once they reached a certain point the natives left and were replaced by others. Walter found them non-threatening, but also unreliable. On their second day of hiking, the native guides led them on a twelve-mile circle that brought them back to their previous campsite. On the third day they were out of supplies and hiked without the noon meal.

In these chapters, the author tells how the medics dropped near the clearing, arriving safely despite the dangers inherent in the drop. The arrival of the medics was a timely event that gave Decker and Margaret hope for the first time in days that their badly infected wounds would not spell amputation or death for either of them. The treatment was terribly painful, but both suffered through without giving in to their pain. In fact, Margaret soon turned to thoughts of hygiene and normalcy.

The arrival of the medics changes the situation for the survivors from something terrible and uncertain into almost a normal situation, creating a camp complete with latrine and bathing quarters. At the same time, Walter and his men struggle to make their base camp and then move to the survivors' camp. Walter discovers that the natives are unreliable in the fact that they are reluctant to move far from their own camps. Walter also suffers from an inability to communicate with the natives and a lack of a map of the area he is trying to navigate through. This will cause a delay in Walter arriving at the survivor's camp, leaving the reader wondering how this will impact the survivors and their rescue from the valley.



Chapters 19-22

Chapters 19-22 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 19. 'Shoo, Shoo Baby.' On Friday, Walter's team waited at their camp for a supply drop from a C-47 with much needed food. Late into the afternoon, Walter and his team walked into the survivors' camp. The camp suddenly swelled to eleven, so Walter set his men to setting up tents. As the group settled in the clearing, they began entertaining one another at night with card games and singing sessions.

Shortly after Walter's arrival at the survivors' camp, funeral supplies were dropped. Walter took McCollom and a group of his paratroopers up to the crash site and buried the three dead passengers and as many bones and personal effects of the eighteen burned in the wreckage as they could while two clerics flew overhead and said a prayer.

Chapter 20. 'Hey, Martha!' About this time, Elsmore allowed the press in on the rescue mission taking place in Shangri-La even as Walter was growing restless with the need to wait for Margaret and Decker's wounds to heal enough for them to march out of the clearing. Walter was drawn out of his boredom and disillusionment by daily discussions with reporters who flew over the survivor's camp in the supply planes and spoke to them over the radio. The reporters were interested in the survivors, particularly Margaret, the natives, and Walter, but often failed to report on the courageous Filipino paratroopers who jumped down to help with the rescue effort.

Chapter 21. Promised Land. With all the press coverage, Walter began to hope that it would lead to a good assignment for him and his men. This hope seemed to be fulfilled when he learned he and his men would be sent to the Philippines upon their return to Hollandia. Now Walter had more of a sense of urgency to get the survivors out of the little clearing. About a month after arriving at the survivors' camp, Walter finally received word from Doc that the patients could make the trek. The survivors and paratroopers left behind a large amount of supplies. The natives collected some of them and placed them in a cave, purifying them with pig's blood and planting a special tree to mark the place as a sacred place.

Chapter 22. Hollywood. When the survivors and paratroopers arrived in Shangri-La, a supply plane flew overhead with Elsmore on board. Elsmore radioed that he had a surprise for the survivors. Margaret hoped for beer, but instead she got a drunk camera man who parachuted into the valley to record their eventual rescue.

In these chapters, Walter and his group arrive at the survivors' camp and bury the dead, putting to rest the crash site before moving on with the living. The paratroopers are forced to wait nearly a month for Margaret and Decker to heal enough to travel. During this time, the press becomes enamored with Margaret, placing the crash on the front page of nearly every newspaper back home. Word goes out to the families of both the

survivors and the dead, finally ending what must have been a terrible period of waiting for news.

The survivors finally are well enough to travel and make their way into Shangri-La. Ironically, the survivors are finally seeing firsthand what they had boarded the plane to see on that fateful Sunday afternoon. They are joined by a cameraman, showing the reader and the world how important the military thinks this rescue effort is and how confident they are that they will be able to get them out. Unfortunately, no one has yet figured out how to do it.



Chapters 23-25 and Epilogue

Chapters 23-25 and Epilogue Summary and Analysis

Chapter 23. Gliders? The rescue planners had considered and dismissed dozens of options as to removing the survivors and paratroopers from Shangri-La. Finally one pilot who was experienced with gliders, Henry E. Palmer, suggested dropping gliders into the valley and using C-46s to snatch them back out with a hook. The United States began a glider program shortly after the attack at Pearl Harbor because of a raid the Germans successfully executed against a fort with the use of gliders. They trained more than a thousand pilots using what they called Waco's, large, box-like gliders made of steel, wood, and canvas. These gliders could land on difficult terrain much easier than a conventional airplane and were more maneuverable. However, no one had ever attempted to snatch a glider off the ground at more than a mile above sea level, so they did not know if the C-46 would be able to gain enough altitude with the added weight of the glider.

Chapter 24. Two Queens. While awaiting rescue in late June, Margaret began visiting a native village near the camp. A native woman, who Margaret dubbed Queen, took an interest in Margaret and they began spending time together. The woman seemed to take a protective role over Margaret. Others became friendly with the natives as well, trading with them quite often. Medic Alfred Baylon began treating mild ailments among the natives, but Walter would not allow him to aid a woman in childbirth afraid the natives would become violent if the birth did not go well.

Samuels and Palmer began practicing their snatch at higher altitudes, but after several failures and an accident with faulty equipment things appeared bleak. At the same time, Walter became aware of a change in the native's attitude toward them. This caused him to become concerned and to post guards at night. The author reveals that the natives were annoyed that the Americans were camped on their battleground, depriving them of one of the staples of their lives: war.

Chapter 25. Snatch. Elsmore decided it was now or never. On June 28, 1945, everyone in the camp woke early. When the supply plane arrived a few hours later, the radio man announced that a C-47 would be dropping a glider into the valley within the hour. The radioman sent down word that Elsmore wanted Walter and the three survivors on the first glider. Walter agreed to the survivors, but insisted that he remain until the final flight out.

When the glider landed in the valley, Samuels immediately reminded Palmer that they did not have enough fuel to wait long before attempting the snatch. Palmer announced the urgency to the survivors, causing them to rush in their effort to collect their belongings. Margaret would regret not having the time to say goodbye to her native friend. Within half an hour, Margaret, McCollom, Decker, Doc, and Sergeant Fernando Dongallo were on board the glider. As Samuels waited, he worried about the cloud



cover descending on the valley, but Elsmore urged him on. Samuels was able to snag the glider on the first pass, but had difficulty lifting the heavy weight fast enough to pass the mountain ridge. As the engines on the C-46 began to overheat, the bottom of the glider was hit by the tops of trees, ripping at the canvas, a situation made worse by a white parachute that had become snagged in one of the wheels. McCollom had to reach down through a tear in the canvas and pull the parachute into the glider to prevent further damage.

Epilogue. The survivors made it back to base without further drama and were met by a whirlwind of press. Over the next two days, the rest of the paratroopers and Cann would be brought out of Shangri-La without a hitch. After the war, missionaries came to the valley known as Shangri-La and later Indonesia invaded the island. In time a town was built in the valley and visitors can see the natives wondering around in the clothing they once thought was an odd skin or get a few to pose for pictures in their traditional coverings. The impact of the Gremlin Special crash continues to have consequences for the natives of the valley.

Several attempts were made by the military to recover the bodies of the crash victims. In 1958, the bodies of Sergeant Laura Besley, Captain Herbert Good, and Private Eleanor Hanna were recovered and reburied. In 1959, the remains of the eighteen inside the plane were recovered and buried in a mass grave at the Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery in St. Louis.

In these final chapters of the book the author describes how the rescue team chose gliders to save the survivors and their rescuers from the valley. It was a daring plan that had no reason to succeed, but somehow it did. Everyone came out of the valley without further injury and went on to live long, fulfilling lives. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for the natives whose world was turned upside down by the news of their existence reaching the outside world.



Characters

Corporal Margaret Hastings

Corporal Margaret Hastings was a thirty year old woman who joined the Women's Army Corps to see the world and to have an adventure. On May 13, 1945, Margaret was on board a sightseeing flight to see the newly discovered valley that had been dubbed Shangri-La by the press. As the plane dipped low to look down upon a native village, the copilot missed the mountain ridge quickly coming up in front of them because of cloud cover. The copilot raised the nose of the plane to try to fly over the obstacle, perhaps saving Margaret's life. Margaret, who had been sitting in the back of the plane, was able to crawl off the plane with burns and cuts.

Margaret was the only woman to survive the plane crash for more than a few hours. Margaret moved down to a small clearing with the two male survivors of the crash and was cared for by two medics who parachuted into the valley at great risk to their own lives, saving her legs from the gangrenous infection that would have required amputation if the two medics had not arrived when they did. A month later, Margaret walked out of the clearing and into the same valley she had been going to see on that fateful Sunday afternoon. Margaret met a woman in the native village nearby and became friends with her, changing her opinion of the smelly, frightening natives who had surrounded her and the other survivors since their arrival in the clearing. A few weeks after entering Shangri-La, Margaret was flown out of the valley in a glider during one of the most amazing rescues during World War II.

Lieutenant John McCollom

Lieutenant John McCollom was a twin. McCollom and his brother were inseparable, doing everything together. That included a sightseeing trip over Shangri-La on May 13, 1945. However, the two brothers were unable to find two seats together. Robert, McCollom's brother, took a seat toward the front of the plane while McCollom chose a seat at the back next to Margaret Hastings. McCollom, a trained pilot, saw the mountain ridge coming at the Gremlin Special and yelled a warning to the copilot to turn the plane around. However, the plane was too large to turn quickly in the narrow valley. Instead, the copilot attempted to pull the plane up over the ridge. Unfortunately, pilot error or a downdraft caused the plane to fail to gain altitude quickly enough and the plane crashed into the ridge.

McCollom crawled off the plane without a single injury. However, McCollom received minor burns on his hands when he went back onto the plane to rescue first Laura Besley and later Eleanor Hanna. McCollom took charge of the small band of survivors that included McCollom, Besley, Hanna, Margaret, and Tech Sergeant Ken Decker. After the deaths of Besley and Hanna, McCollom decided that his small group needed to make their way to a clearing down below the crash site where they might have a better



chance of being spotted by search planes overhead. The hike was difficult, but they arrived after a day and a half. McCollom and his group were spotted almost immediately.

Over the next few days, McCollom kept Decker and Margaret fed and their wounds clean until two medics parachuted into the clearing. McCollom then took a backseat to the paratroopers who had come to help them, going along for the ride like the others. However, McCollom would be forced to show his courage one more time when a parachute became stuck to a wheel on the glider that was flying him and his fellow survivors out of Shangri-La. McCollom reached down through torn canvas at the bottom of the glider and pulled the parachute into the glider to prevent further damage to the glider.

Tech Sergeant Kenneth Decker

Tech Sergeant Kenneth Decker boarded the Gremlin Special and was more than likely unhappy to see Margaret Hastings sitting in the back. Decker had asked Margaret out a few weeks earlier and she had turned him down. However, Decker had no memory of the flight or the crash because he sustained several head injuries, including a gash to the side of his head deep enough to reveal skull underneath. Decker walked off the plane, but no one was ever sure from where he had come, if he had walked out of a gash on the side of the fuselage or if he was thrown clear somehow.

Decker suffered a great many injuries from the crash. Besides his head injuries, Decker also had a broken elbow and severe burns on his legs and buttocks that would become gangrenous after the first few days in the bacteria lush jungle. However, Decker would suffer the cleaning and care of his wounds without complaint. In time, Decker would spend several weeks in the hospital recovering from his wounds, but would live a full life after his rescue from Shangri-La.

Captain C. Earl Walter Jr.

Captain C. Earl Walter Jr. grew up in the Philippines where his father was an executive with a lumber company. At fourteen, Walter's father sent him back to the states where he attended multiple schools, including a military school in Los Angeles where he was eventually expelled for poor behavior. Walter would join the military and become a paratrooper and later convinced his commanding officers to allow him to build a unit of paratroopers that consisted of Filipino soldiers.

Walter was stationed in Hollandia where he was impatiently awaiting an assignment for him and his men but afraid his father had spread word among the brass to keep him out of combat. Therefore, when the opportunity came for Walter and his men to parachute into Shangri-La to save three plane crash survivors, Walter jumped at it and was proud to find his men unafraid of the dangerous mission. Walter would prove himself heroic in the mission, as well as a strong, confident, and unselfish leader.



Benjamin 'Doc' Bulatao and Camilo 'Rammy' Ramirez

Doc and Rammy were the two medics Walter chose from his unit to send directly into the clearing where the three survivors had built their camp. Rammy had already survived the Bataan Death March and an escape from a prisoner of war camp. Together Doc and Rammy made the dangerous, low altitude jump into the jungle near the survivors' camp, making it with only a minor injury on Rammy's part. Doc, the more experienced medic, debrided and cleaned Decker and Margaret's burns every day, more than likely saving both their legs and their lives.

Colonel Peter J. Prossen

Colonel Peter J. Prossen was the maintenance commander of Fee-Ask at Hollandia. Prossen, a caring man who was also a career soldier, worried that his subordinates were suffering from a lack of morale. For this reason, Prossen, an experienced pilot, began arranging sightseeing flights for his people. On Mother's Day, May 13, 1945, Prossen wrote a letter to his wife and discussed the flight he planned to take with a group of his subordinates that day to see the newly discovered valley dubbed Shangri-La. During the flight, for unknown reasons, Prossen left the pilot's seat and joined his subordinates in the back of the plane. During the flight, the copilot dipped the plane into a narrow valley and was unable to gain enough altitude to avoid running into a mountain ridge at the end of the valley. Prossen was killed.

Major George H. Nicholson

Major George H. Nicholson was the copilot on board the Gremlin Special. Nicholson had only learned to fly three years prior to this flight. Nicholson was a teacher and he enjoyed writing, often writing his wife long narratives on the war. During the flight, Nicholson lowered the plane in a narrow valley so that the passengers might see a native village below. However, Nicholson missed the mountain ridge in front of him due to cloud cover. Nicholson attempted to pull the plane up, but either his inexperience or a downdraft prevented the plane from gaining altitude quickly enough. The plane crashed into the ridge and Nicholson was killed along with seventeen others on the plane and three who escaped the plane after the crash.

Colonel Ray T. Elsmore

Colonel Ray T. Elsmore was a pilot during World War II who was credited with getting MacArthur, his family and staff, off of Corregidor. In May of 1944, Elsmore was flying over New Guinea trying to find a suitable place in the middle of the island to build a runway to make flying supplies to and from Hollandia to a Allied base on the other side of the island easier. Elsmore's copilot pointed out a valley that he had discovered on a previous reconnaissance mission. Elsmore was so fascinated with the valley that he



wrote about it in a report to his commanding officer. Elsmore also talked about the valley and flew multiple trips over it to investigate it and its inhabitants more closely.

In time the press became aware of Elsmore's find and began requesting flights over it. Two reporters dubbed the valley Shangri-La after James Hilton's *Lost Horizon*. In time, Elsmore and his unit began flying sightseers over the valley, giving them mock certificates of their trip. After the crash of the *Gremlin Special*, Elsmore led the rescue of the three survivors.

Richard Archbold

Richard Archbold, the son of a wealthy man, was a biological researcher who funded multiple expeditions on New Guinea. Archbold discovered the valley dubbed Shangri-La six years before Elsmore first set eyes on it while flying an amphibious plane over the area. Due to the amphibious nature of his plane, Archbold was able to fly two groups of Dutch soldiers into the valley who walked it from end to end. The soldiers engaged with the natives, a situation that ended in tragedy for one of the groups when a young soldier shot a native out of fear for his life. This was unknown to the survivors of the crash of the *Gremlin Special*.

Sergeant Laura Besley and Private Eleanor Hanna

Sergeant Laura Besley was a friend of Margaret Hastings who often went on double dates with her. Laura sat directly across from Margaret on board the *Gremlin Special*. Eleanor Hanna was a bright, beautiful girl who could often be heard singing and who wore bracelets made of Chinese coins with her uniform. Eleanor sat next to Laura on the *Gremlin Special*. After the crash, McCollom heard Laura calling from inside the plane. He went inside and pulled her out. Laura appeared to have few injuries, just a few minor burns. However, when she died within twenty-four hours of the crash it was thought she might have had internal injuries. Eleanor was pulled from the plane by McCollom after Laura. Eleanor suffered such extensive burns that her clothes were completely missing. Eleanor died within hours of the crash.



Objects/Places

Pocket Knife

The only weapon the three survivors had was a pocketknife that McCollom always carried with him.

K-rations

K-rations were food in freeze-dried packs that soldiers could easily carry with them while on missions or maneuvers. The Gremlin Special survivors received some of these from the supply planes while awaiting rescue.

Charms

Charms are candies made of sugar and corn syrup that military personnel are often provided on missions and maneuvers. The Gremlin Special survivors found some Charms in the tail section of the plane, the only source of food they had for more than five days.

Parachutes

The Army used parachutes to send supply crates down to where they might be needed on the ground. Parachutes were also used by paratroopers to safely reach the ground from a flying aircraft. The natives thought they were rope lowering spirits onto the ground. The survivors of the Gremlin Special used some of these parachutes as cover and to create a runway in Shangri-La for the glider.

Gliders

Gliders are motorless flying machines that are made of lightweight material. The Wacos used by the Americans were made of steel, wood, and canvas. The glider that rescued the three survivors of the Gremlin Special was piloted by Henry Palmer and nicknamed the Fearless Faggot due to its resemblance to a pile of sticks.

WAC

Women's Army Corps, or WAC, was a division of the military that enlisted females to act as support for the Army. These women were often stationed at bases all over the world and acted as secretaries and in other clerical duties.



Fee-Ask

Fee-Ask is an acronym for the Far East Air Service Command. All the men and women aboard the Gremlin Special worked for the Fee-Ask maintenance division.

C-47

A C-47 is a military airplane used to transport soldiers and supplies. In civilian life a C-47 is known as a DC-3.

Leaking Louise

Leaking Louise is the nickname given to the C-46 that was piloted by Samuels and used to snatch the glider out of Shangri-La.

Gremlin Special

Gremlin Special is the nickname given to Prossen's C-47 airplane. The name was chosen from the story Gremlins by Roald Dahl.

Lost Horizon

Lost Horizon is the name of a novel written by James Hilton. In the novel a group of people are taken to a utopia called Shangri-La and then forced to choose between returning to the real world and never seeing Shangri-La again, or remaining in Shangri-La for the rest of their lives. Two reporters gave the valley discovered by Archbold, Elsmore, and Grimes the name Shangri-La.

Shangri-La

Shangri-La is the name some reporters gave to the mysterious valley Elsmore, Archbold, and Grimes found in the center of New Guinea. The valley was also dubbed Hidden Valley by Elsmore and Grimes and Grand Valley by Archbold.



Themes

Survival

The major theme of this book is survival. The book is about a group of people who survive a devastating plane crash only to find themselves lost in a dense jungle. Other planes that had crashed before this one on the same island suffered horrible fates, including the survivors of the Flying Dutchmen who died when eight of their number walked out of the jungle but were unable to take rescuers back to the crash site.

After losing two of their number, the survivors of the Gremlin Special plane crash relied on the only uninjured member of their group, a lieutenant who had lost his twin brother in the crash. McCollom made the decision to walk his group down to a clearing below the crash rather than remain with the crash site in the hopes that a rescue plane might have a better chance of spotting them in the clearing than the dense jungle. This decision more than likely saved the lives of Margaret Hastings and Ken Decker because the burns on their bodies from the crash were quickly infected and became gangrenous in the few short days it took them to reach the clearing.

Once the crash survivors were spotted by the rescue planes, their fate became someone else's responsibility. However, McCollom continued to look out for his companions, making sure they ate and keeping their wounds clean until the medics arrived a few days later. The survivors still had several long weeks ahead of them, however, as they recovered from their wounds and waited for their superiors to find a way to get them out of the valley known as Shangri-La. McCollom would prove his bravery one final time as the survivors were lifted out of the valley on a glider snatched on a hook attached to a C-46. McCollom would have to pull a parachute up through the torn canvas on the bottom of the glider to keep it from damaging the glider more. McCollom was a brave and incredible leader, ensuring the rescue of himself and his two companions, Margaret Hastings and Ken Decker.

Ambition

C. Earl Walter Jr. was a troubled teenager who was rebellious as a student. However, when he joined the Army, Walter became focused on his career and was filled with a driving ambition. Walter formed a paratroop unit that consisted completely of Filipino soldiers in the hopes of joining the fight in the Philippines. However, Walter's father, a leader of a group of guerilla fighters in the Philippines, possibly blocked Walter's desire to be placed in the midst of battle. For this reason, Walter found himself stationed on Hollandia on New Guinea. Walter spent a great deal of his time attempting to come up with missions he and his men could execute, presenting them to his superiors and sometimes their superiors. However, none of these men would take him up on his offers.



When the men at Hollandia learned there were survivors of the Gremlin Special crash, they began trying to find a way to rescue them. Elsmore wanted paratroopers who could jump into the area and move the survivors into Shangri-La to make retrieval easier, but thought none were available. An old teacher of Walter's, however, suggested Walter and his group. Walter picked ten men to go with him into the jungle, sending two medics into the tiny clearing with the survivors and the rest into Shangri-La with himself. Walter saw this mission as a way of getting the brass's attention and furthering his career. However, by the end of the ordeal, Walter realized it was more important that his men get the glory.

Interference

The author of the book spends a great deal of time early in the book trying to build suspense by telling the reader how Elsmore helped spread rumors that the natives in Shangri-La were headhunters and cannibals. As the natives reached the survivors in the clearing, the author takes the time to tell the reader how an expedition in Shangri-La by Archbald led to the murder of a native man by a Dutch soldier. All of this leads the reader to see the natives as dangerous, violent people.

The natives lived a simple life in which they tended their farms and raised their pigs. The natives had a strong tradition of war, often mortal enemies with the village next door to their own. War was a way of life to these natives and it impacted every part of their lives, from the number of wives each man had to the play in which their children engaged. They had odd customs that modern people might not understand, but they were a gentle, curious people who never hurt anyone. However, by releasing details of Shangri-La to the press, the American military opened a door into the valley that could not be closed. The crash of the Gremlin Special was a last straw that changed the way of life in Shangri-La irreparably.

Style

Perspective

The author of this book was researching something completely different when he came across an article about the crash of the Gremlin Special in New Guinea during World War II. Over time, the author came across other articles and soon began to collect what he called a string, pieces of information on the crash. Soon the author became fascinated with the crash and decided it was a story that had been overlooked for too long and needed to be told.

The author, a professor of journalism at Boston University, came to this story as a journalist. However, the story is filled with so much human drama and emotion that any writer would find it impossible not to become involved in his story. At the end of the book, the author admits to a personal connection to the story by describing his interviews with C. Earl Walter, the paratrooper who jumped into Shangri-La to lead the survivors to safety, as well as surviving natives who could still remember the survivors of the Gremlin Special and their rescuers.

Tone

The book is told with both a subjective and objective tone. The author presents his story in a novel format, telling the story from the point of view of the people while providing his reader background that is necessary to understand the complete impact of the situation on the people living through the horrific crash and its aftermath, as well as the natives whose whole world was disrupted by the appearance of these strange creatures. Most of the bulk of the book is told with a journalist's eye toward facts, but by bringing the reader close to the people who lived this adventure, the author also brings a biased, subjective tone to the story.

The tone of the novel is important because it allows the reader to feel a connection to people who lived and suffered through the events of the book more than fifty years ago. The author also allows the reader to see the humor in some of the actions of the people as well as the tragic results of some of those actions. In the end, the author discusses his personal connection to some of the surviving people who were a part of these events and gives the reader a description of the impact these events still has on these people. By doing this, the author takes away any sense of objectiveness, bringing home the true human tragedy of the crash of the Gremlin Special, the devastating impact the crash and its long aftermath has had on the Shangri-La valley and its people, and the strength of the human spirit that saw all these people through tragedy and helped them survive.

Structure

The book is divided into twenty-five chapters and an epilogue. Each chapter has a title that is relevant to the story that is told within its pages. The story is told in a linear fashion with occasional moves into the past in order to help the reader understand relevant information about the people in the book or the setting of the plane crash and subsequent rescue efforts. The author uses many resources to tell his story, but he does not include any footnotes in the body of his story, instead providing notes and a list of characters at the end of the book as well as an index.

The story follows the discovery of the valley called Shangri-La at the end of World War II and the crash of the Gremlin Special, a plane that was on a sightseeing trip to the valley in May of 1945. The author tells the reader about the natives who lived in the valley at the time of the crash and their reaction to the invasion of their homeland by strange creatures from the sky. The author also tells the story of the rescue efforts and that brave unit of Filipino paratroops led by a cowboy Captain who came into the valley to save the survivors of the crash.



Quotes

"Directly before him, proudly displayed in a front window, hung a small white banner with a red banner and a blue star at its center. Similar banners hung in windows all through the village, each one to honor a young man, or in a few cases a young woman, gone to war." Chapter 1, pg. 9

"Margaret was one of several hundred WACs assigned to the Far East Air Service Command, an essential if unglamorous supply, logistics, and maintenance outfit known as 'Fee-Ask.' Just as in civilian life, Margaret was a secretary." Chapter 2, pgs, 22-23

"The Gremlin Special was full. On board were twenty-four members of the U.S. military, most of them from the Fee-Ask maintenance division. Nine were officers, nine were WACs, and six were enlisted men." Chapter 4, pg. 44

"As they cruised toward the valley, Colonel Prossen made a fateful decision: he unbuckled his seat belt and walked back into the cabin." Chapter 5, pg. 45

"The distance between the C-47 and the unforgiving terrain closed to zero. To the ear-splitting din of metal twisting, glass shattering, engines groaning, branches snapping, fuel igniting, bodies tumbling, lives ending, the Gremlin Special plunged through the trees and slammed into the jungle-covered mountainside." Chapter 5, pg. 50

"The death toll had reached twenty-one. The survivors of the Gremlin Special were down to three: John McCollom, a stoic twenty-six-year-old first lieutenant from the Midwest who'd just lost his twin brother; Kenneth Decker, a tech sergeant from the Northwest with awful head wounds who'd just celebrated his thirty-fourth birthday; and Margaret Hastings, an adventure-seeking thirty-year-old WAC corporal from the Northeast who'd missed her date for an ocean swim on the New Guinea coast." Chapter 6, pg. 65

"But Grand Valley and Shangri-La were one and the same. And the first known contact between its natives and the outside world had been marked by blood." Chapter 8, pg. 83

"The fact that the missing crew and passengers were colleagues, friends, and subordinates of the Fee-Ask brass made it doubly certain the search organizers would have whatever they needed. Raising the ante further were the nine special circumstances: the WACs on board." Chapter 9, pg. 87

"As she stared at the natives and the natives stared back, Margaret felt relief. Soon it spread into affection." Chapter 12, pg. 121



"The survivors watched as two small figures left the plane and their parachutes mushroomed in the sky. A single thought crossed Decker's mind: 'God bless you.'" Chapter 16, pg. 153

"Walter marched buoyantly toward the campsite, swinging his bolo knife to clear the trail and singing the Andrew Sisters' recent hit, 'Shoo, Shoo Baby.'" Chapter 19, pg. 176

"After covering the graves, Walter and his men pounded the crosses and the Star of David into the damp earth, draping each one with a dog tag." Chapter 19,pg. 182

"Even with a two-foot-wide hole in the glider floor, Margaret, McCollom, and Decker couldn't spot the crash site. But they knew that under the jungle canopy, pressed into the moist soil, there stood twenty white wooden crosses and one Star of David, silently marking the loss of friends, comrades, and family, left behind in Shangri-La." Chapter 25, pg. 247



Topics for Discussion

Who is Margaret Hastings? Why does the author focus the beginning of his story on Margaret? How does Margaret find herself in New Guinea during World War II? What is Margaret's job there? What is her life like there? What are the hardships that Margaret faces on New Guinea? How does Margaret find herself on board the Gremlin Special? What were her plans for that night?

Who is John McCollom? How did he find himself on the Gremlin Special? What was special about McCollom's relationship with his brother Robert? How did the two brothers find themselves separated on the plane? What was ironic about this? How did McCollom find himself in charge after the Gremlin Special crashed? What did McCollom do to help the other survivors? What was difficult about McCollom's decision to leave the crash area? What could have been the result? What was the result?

Who was C. Earl Walter? What role did he play in the war? What was unusual about the unit of paratroopers he headed? Why did he choose this unusual unit? Why did Walter continuously try to come up with missions for him and his men to execute? Who did Walter think was stopping him? Why did Walter volunteer to go into Shangri-La to help rescue the survivors of the Gremlin Special? What were the dangers of the mission that Walter identified ?

Who were the natives the survivors of the Gremlin Special ran into when they moved to a clearing below the crash site? What happened when the natives came upon them? What could have happened? How did they communicate with one another? How did McCollom and his companions know that the natives were not a threat? What was the life of a native like before the crash of the Gremlin Special? How did that compare to the lives of the survivors of the plane crash?

What caused the crash of the Gremlin Special? What did the military decide the cause was? What does the author of this book imply could have been a cause of the crash? How could this crash have been avoided? How did the copilot's actions possibly save those passengers sitting in the back of the plane, such as Margaret and McCollom? What happened to McCollom's brother? Why was it impossible to bury most of the eighteen passengers who remained inside the plane?

Why did it take nearly two months for the survivors of the Gremlin Special to be rescued from Shangri-La? Why was it so difficult for the military to find a way to get into the valley to rescue these people? What is surprising about the method the military finally chose to save the survivors and their rescuers? Had this method been utilized before? If so, in what way?

Who discovered Shangri-La? Who took credit for it? Why was it called Shangri-La? Who were the people living in the valley? What were their lives like? What did they think of the strangers who landed in their valley during the rescue attempt? Were they hostile? What happened to the people of Shangri-La after the survivors and their rescuers left



Shangri-La? What does the author say about these changes? What might have prevented these changes?