

james hilton lost horizon

James Hilton Lost Horizon: An In-Depth Exploration of the Classic Novel and Its Enduring Legacy

Introduction to James Hilton's Lost Horizon

James Hilton Lost Horizon is a literary masterpiece that has captured readers' imaginations since its publication in 1933. This novel is renowned for its evocative storytelling, philosophical themes, and the creation of the legendary utopian realm of Shangri-La. As one of Hilton's most famous works, it has cemented its place in both literary history and popular culture. In this comprehensive article, we will delve into the origins of the novel, its plot, themes, characters, adaptations, and its lasting influence.

The Origins of Lost Horizon

Who Was James Hilton?

James Hilton (1900-1954) was an English author and journalist, best known for his works that blend adventure, philosophy, and humanism. Hilton's career spanned several decades, during which he authored multiple novels, but *Lost Horizon* remains his most celebrated.

The Inspiration Behind the Novel

Hilton was inspired by his travels and interest in Eastern philosophy and mysticism. The idea of a hidden paradise—an idyllic refuge untouched by the chaos of the modern world—resonated deeply with Hilton and became the foundation of *Lost Horizon*.

Publication and Reception

Published in 1933, *Lost Horizon* was an immediate success, captivating readers with its imaginative setting and thought-provoking themes. Its popularity was such that it was adapted into a film just two years later, further cementing its cultural significance.

Plot Overview of Lost Horizon

Setting and Premise

The novel opens with the mysterious disappearance of a British consul, Hugh Conway, and a group of travelers in the Himalayas. They find themselves in a remote valley, Shangri-La, which appears to be a utopian society suspended in time.

Major Plot Points

- Discovery of Shangri-La: The travelers, lost in the mountains, stumble upon a peaceful valley with a harmonious way of life.
- The Philosophy of Shangri-La: The inhabitants of Shangri-La live in

moderation, valuing knowledge, longevity, and inner peace.

- The Return Journey: Some characters seek to leave, while others choose to stay, leading to questions about the nature of paradise and human desire.
- The Fate of the Characters: The novel explores whether Shangri-La is a real place, a utopian illusion, or a metaphor for human longing.

Themes Explored in Lost Horizon

Utopia and Dystopia

Hilton's portrayal of Shangri-La raises questions about the possibility of perfect societies. The novel presents Shangri-La as an ideal, but also invites readers to consider whether such perfection is achievable or desirable.

The Search for Eternal Youth and Wisdom

A recurring motif is the human desire for longevity and wisdom, embodied by the inhabitants of Shangri-La who live for centuries, maintaining their health and mental acuity.

Balance and Moderation

The philosophy of Shangri-La emphasizes moderation in all aspects of life—an antidote to the excesses and chaos of the outside world.

Escape and Reality

The novel examines the human impulse to escape from the stresses of modern life and the question of whether true happiness can be found outside societal constraints.

Cultural and Philosophical Influences

Hilton integrates elements of Tibetan Buddhism, Taoism, and other Eastern philosophies, highlighting the importance of spiritual balance and harmony.

Main Characters in Lost Horizon

Hugh Conway

The protagonist and narrator, Conway is a British diplomat whose curiosity and sense of adventure lead him to discover Shangri-La.

Mallinson

A fellow traveler, Mallinson is skeptical and pragmatic, providing a contrast to the idealism of others.

Miss Brinklow

A resilient and compassionate woman, Miss Brinklow embodies the human desire for connection and understanding.

The High Lama

A wise figure who explains the principles of Shangri-La, acting as a spiritual guide and philosophical mentor.

Other Travelers

The novel features a diverse cast, including an American, a Dutchman, and a Chinese character, representing various cultural perspectives.

The Concept of Shangri-La

Origin of the Name

The term "Shangri-La" has become synonymous with an idyllic paradise. It is derived from Hilton's novel but has since entered popular lexicon to describe any utopian place or ideal society.

The Utopian Society

- Living in Harmony: The inhabitants prioritize peace, knowledge, and moderation.
- Longevity: Many residents live for hundreds of years, maintaining their vitality.
- Cultural Preservation: The society values wisdom, arts, and spiritual growth.

The Symbolism of Shangri-La

The fictional place symbolizes humanity's longing for harmony, spiritual fulfillment, and escape from chaos. It also serves as a critique of modern society's flaws.

Adaptations and Cultural Impact

Film Adaptations

- 1937 Film: Directed by Frank Capra and starring Ronald Colman, this adaptation brought the story to a wider audience and became a classic in its own right.

Other Media and Influences

- Literature and Art: Shangri-La has inspired countless writers, artists, and filmmakers.
- Tourism: The real-world concept of Shangri-La has influenced travel destinations in Tibet and China, often marketed as places of peace and serenity.

The Phrase "Shangri-La"

Today, "Shangri-La" is used to describe any paradise-like place, often in the context of luxury resorts, remote retreats, or utopian visions.

The Philosophical Message of Lost Horizon

Human Nature and the Search for Happiness

Hilton's novel probes whether true happiness is achievable through external surroundings or internal harmony.

The Illusion of Paradise

The story questions whether Shangri-La is an actual place or a metaphor for human aspirations and the ideal society.

The Role of Wisdom and Moderation

Hilton advocates for a balanced life, emphasizing moderation, knowledge, and spiritual growth as key to fulfillment.

Legacy and Relevance of Lost Horizon

Influencing Literature and Popular Culture

Hilton's depiction of Shangri-La has influenced a wide range of works, from science fiction to fantasy, inspiring themes of utopia and escapism.

Symbol of Hope and Escape

The novel continues to resonate as a symbol of hope for a better world—an oasis amidst chaos.

Contemporary Interpretations

Modern readers interpret *Lost Horizon* through various lenses, including environmentalism, spirituality, and political philosophy.

Why Read *Lost Horizon* Today?

Timeless Themes

The novel addresses universal questions about happiness, balance, and the human condition.

Philosophical Depth

Hilton's integration of Eastern philosophy offers a contemplative reading experience.

Cultural Significance

Understanding the novel enriches one's appreciation of the concept of utopia and its role in society.

Conclusion

James Hilton Lost Horizon remains a captivating and thought-provoking novel that explores the eternal human quest for harmony, wisdom, and happiness. Its

vivid depiction of Shangri-La as a utopian refuge continues to inspire readers and creators alike, symbolizing the enduring hope for a peaceful paradise. Whether as a literary classic, a philosophical allegory, or a cultural icon, Lost Horizon's legacy endures, inviting us to reflect on what it truly means to find our own Shangri-La in life.

References

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- Adaptations of Lost Horizon. Film History Journal, 2019.
- The Philosophy of Utopian Societies. Modern Thinkers, 2021.

This comprehensive overview offers a detailed look into James Hilton's Lost Horizon, emphasizing its rich themes, characters, and lasting influence. Whether you are a new reader or revisiting the novel, understanding its depth enhances appreciation for this timeless classic.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the main theme of James Hilton's 'Lost Horizon'?

The main theme of 'Lost Horizon' revolves around the search for utopia, exploring themes of harmony, spirituality, and the pursuit of perfection in a secluded paradise called Shangri-La.

How does 'Lost Horizon' compare to other utopian novels?

'Lost Horizon' is often compared to other utopian works like Thomas More's 'Utopia' and Aldous Huxley's 'Island,' but it stands out for its mystical and philosophical approach to creating an ideal society in the hidden valley of Shangri-La.

What is the significance of the location 'Shangri-La' in Hilton's novel?

Shangri-La symbolizes an idyllic, harmonious refuge away from the chaos of the modern world, representing a utopian haven where timeless wisdom and peace coexist.

Has 'Lost Horizon' influenced popular culture or tourism?

Yes, the concept of Shangri-La from Hilton's novel has inspired numerous cultural references, films, and the naming of real-world places, most notably the Chinese region now officially called Shangri-La, which promotes tourism based on the novel's mystical image.

What are the key messages James Hilton intended to convey with 'Lost Horizon'?

Hilton aimed to explore the possibility of a perfect society rooted in spiritual and philosophical values, encouraging readers to reflect on the importance of inner peace, wisdom, and harmony in a chaotic world.

Additional Resources

Lost Horizon: An In-Depth Exploration of James Hilton's Classic Novel

Introduction

When discussing timeless works of fiction that blend adventure, philosophy, and mysticism, *Lost Horizon* by James Hilton stands out as a quintessential masterpiece. Published in 1933, this novel has captivated readers for generations, offering a compelling vision of utopia, spirituality, and the enduring human quest for meaning. In this review, we will explore the novel's themes, characters, setting, and its enduring cultural impact, providing an extensive analysis for enthusiasts and newcomers alike.

Overview of James Hilton and the Context of *Lost Horizon*

Who Was James Hilton?

James Hilton (1900–1954) was a British novelist renowned for his ability to craft compelling stories that blend adventure with philosophical reflections. His works often explore human aspirations, moral dilemmas, and the search for happiness. Besides *Lost Horizon*, Hilton authored acclaimed novels such as *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* and *Random Harvest*, each demonstrating his skill in character development and narrative depth.

The Historical and Literary Context

Published during the interwar period, *Lost Horizon* emerges in a time of social upheaval, economic uncertainty, and global instability. Hilton's novel offers both an escapist fantasy and a thoughtful meditation on societal ideals, reflecting contemporary hopes for peace and harmony amid chaos.

Plot Summary: A Journey into Shangri-La

The Premise

The novel begins with a plane crash in the Himalayan mountains, leading to the rescue of a diverse group of characters—including British diplomat Hugh Conway, American missionary Miss Brinklow, and a wealthy industrialist, Gilbert Murry. Their journey takes an unexpected turn as they discover a hidden valley—Shangri-La—that seems to exist outside time.

The Discovery of Shangri-La

Shangri-La is depicted as a mystical, harmonious valley nestled in the mountains, protected from the outside world. It is characterized by:

- Perpetual youth and health: Its inhabitants enjoy longevity and vitality.
- Intellectual and spiritual enlightenment: The community values education, arts, and spiritual pursuits.
- Simple yet sophisticated living: A blend of rustic charm and cultural refinement.

The Central Conflict

Confronted with the allure of Shangri-La, the characters grapple with questions about leaving their old lives behind versus the promise of eternal peace. The novel explores themes of temptation, the nature of happiness, and the possibility of creating a perfect society.

Themes and Symbolism in Lost Horizon

The Utopian Vision

At its core, *Lost Horizon* presents Shangri-La as a utopian ideal—a society where harmony, wisdom, and longevity prevail. Hilton's depiction raises critical questions:

- Is such perfection attainable or merely an ideal?
- Can a society truly balance material well-being with spiritual growth?

The Pursuit of Happiness and Longevity

The novel examines the human desire to transcend suffering and mortality. Shangri-La embodies this aspiration, offering a space where the pursuit of knowledge and inner peace coexist.

Cultural and Spiritual Diversity

Hilton emphasizes the importance of cultural appreciation and spiritual diversity, portraying Shangri-La as a melting pot of philosophies and traditions, fostering tolerance and understanding.

The Myth of Shangri-La as a Symbol

Over time, "Shangri-La" has become a symbol for:

- An idyllic, hidden paradise
- An escapist fantasy
- A metaphor for spiritual enlightenment

Hilton's use of this myth encourages readers to reflect on the nature of paradise and the human yearning for transcendence.

Character Analysis

Hugh Conway

The protagonist and narrator, Conway is a pragmatic and introspective figure.

His journey is both literal and philosophical, embodying Hilton's exploration of human nature and idealism.

Miss Brinklow

A devout missionary, she represents faith and moral conviction. Her interactions with other characters highlight conflicts between spiritual pursuits and worldly desires.

Gilbert Murry

A wealthy industrialist, Murry symbolizes materialism and the pursuit of wealth. His fascination with Shangri-La prompts reflection on the costs of such pursuits.

The Elder

A wise and venerable inhabitant of Shangri-La, he embodies the spiritual wisdom of the community and serves as Hilton's voice of philosophical insight.

Setting: The Mystical Himalayan Valley

Geographical and Cultural Descriptions

Hilton paints a vivid picture of the Himalayan landscape, emphasizing its remoteness and mystical aura. The valley's natural beauty—mountains, forests, and serene lakes—contributes to its idyllic reputation.

Architectural and Societal Features

Shangri-La's architecture combines rustic simplicity with cultural elegance, reflecting a society that values harmony with nature and intellectual pursuits. Its governance is based on wisdom, consensus, and spiritual harmony.

Literary Style and Narrative Technique

Style and Tone

Hilton employs a straightforward, narrative style that balances descriptive richness with philosophical reflection. The tone is contemplative, inviting readers to ponder profound questions.

Use of Symbolism

The novel is rich in symbolism—Shangri-La as a symbol of utopia, the mountain as a barrier to the outside world, and the eternal youth as a metaphor for spiritual awakening.

Narrative Perspective

The first-person narration by Conway allows readers to experience the story through a lens of curiosity and introspection, fostering a personal connection to the themes.

Cultural Impact and Legacy

Influence on Popular Culture

Lost Horizon has inspired countless adaptations, including:

- Films (notably the 1937 adaptation starring Ronald Colman)
- Television series
- Literary references

The term "Shangri-La" has entered popular vocabulary as a synonym for an idyllic paradise or hidden retreat.

Philosophical and Literary Significance

Hilton's novel is considered a precursor to later utopian and dystopian literature. Its exploration of societal ideals continues to resonate, prompting debates about the feasibility of perfect societies.

Criticisms and Controversies

Some critics argue that Hilton's depiction of Shangri-La oversimplifies cultural diversity or romanticizes escapism. Others view it as a nuanced exploration of human longing for harmony.

Modern Relevance and Lessons

The Search for Utopia in Contemporary Society

In an era marked by environmental challenges and social upheavals, Hilton's portrayal of Shangri-La prompts reflection on:

- Sustainable living
- Cultural tolerance
- Spiritual well-being

The Limits of Idealism

While inspiring, the novel also cautions about the dangers of escapism and the importance of confronting reality. Hilton suggests that the pursuit of inner harmony is as vital as external peace.

Conclusion

Lost Horizon by James Hilton remains a timeless exploration of human aspirations, spiritual longing, and societal ideals. Its vivid portrayal of Shangri-La continues to inspire readers and thinkers, serving as both a literary masterpiece and a philosophical mirror. Whether viewed as a symbol of hope or a cautionary tale about escapism, Hilton's novel challenges us to consider the possibilities of creating our own "horizons"—whether in the physical world or within ourselves.

For anyone interested in utopian visions, cultural symbolism, or profound

philosophical inquiry, *Lost Horizon* offers a rich, rewarding experience that endures long after the last page.

James Hilton Lost Horizon

james hilton lost horizon: Lost Horizon James Hilton, 1960 Two Englishmen, a woman missionary, and an American fleeing the consequences of shady financial deals are traveling companions.

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james hilton lost horizon: *Lost Horizon* James Hilton, 2012-05-01 In this “engagingly written” international bestseller, survivors of a plane crash discover a peaceful paradise hidden in the Himalayas called Shangri-La (The New York Times). Hugh Conway saw humanity at its worst while fighting in the trenches of the First World War. Now, more than a decade later, Conway is a British diplomat serving in Afghanistan and facing war yet again—this time, a civil conflict forces him to flee the country by plane. When his plane crashes high in the Himalayas, Conway and the other survivors are found by a mysterious guide and led to a breathtaking discovery: the hidden valley of Shangri-La. Kept secret from the world for more than two hundred years, Shangri-La is like paradise—a place whose inhabitants live for centuries amid the peace and harmony of the fertile valley. But when the leader of the Shangri-La monastery falls ill, Conway and the others must face the daunting prospect of returning home to a world about to be torn open by war. Thrilling and timeless, *Lost Horizon* is a masterpiece of modern fiction, and one of the most enduring classics of the twentieth century.

james hilton lost horizon: LOST HORIZON - The Legend of Shangri-La James Hilton, 2024-01-11 James Hilton's *Lost Horizon* intricately weaves a narrative that blends adventure, philosophy, and a touch of the mystical. Set against the backdrop of the tumultuous geopolitical landscape of the 1930s, the story follows Hugh Conway, a weary British diplomat who stumbles upon the enigmatic utopia of Shangri-La while escaping the chaos of the modern world. Hilton's lyrical prose invites readers to ponder the themes of isolation, enlightenment, and the pursuit of happiness, all while challenging the conventions of society and civilization. This novel, celebrated for its dreamy aesthetic and profound reflections, stands as an iconic work in the genre of philosophical fiction, a timeless exploration of humanity's quest for harmony amidst unrest. James Hilton, an English novelist and screenwriter, found inspiration for *Lost Horizon* in the travels and philosophical ideas of the early 20th century, infused with his own fascination for exploring human nature and existentialism. His experiences during the interwar period, coupled with the growing disillusionment of society, shaped the idyllic yet poignant portrayal of Shangri-La - serving as both a refuge and a critique of modernity. This novel is recommended for readers seeking a thought-provoking journey into a forgotten world that offers solace and wisdom. Hilton's exploration of a mythical paradise serves as a mirror reflecting our own struggles for meaning and peace. As you delve into the enchanting world of Shangri-La, you will find not just an escape, but also a deeper understanding of the human condition and our incessant longing for a sanctuary.

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james hilton lost horizon: *Lost Horizon [Trilogy Edition]* James Hilton, 2016-11-11 First published in 1933, this novel by award-winning author James Hilton tells the story of Hugh Conway,

a veteran member of the British diplomatic service who finds inner peace, love, and a sense of purpose in Shangri-La, an Eden-like valley high in the Himalayas in Tibet. Said to have been inspired by reading the National Geographic Magazine articles of a botanist and ethnologist who explored the southwestern Chinese provinces and Tibetan borderlands, the name “Shangri-La” has become a by-word for a mythical utopia, a permanently happy land, isolated from the world, and one that captivated the world’s imagination—from Roosevelt naming his Maryland presidential retreat “Shangri-La” to the Zhongdian mountain region of Southwest China being renamed Shangri-La (Xianggelila). The novel won James Hilton the Hawthornden Prize in 1934 and was also immortalized in a movie version in 1937 by influential director Frank Capra. “Hilton’s premise strikes a deep chord in today’s ‘everything is relative’ society. His utopia retains all its charm and, in his creation of Shangri-La, he added something permanently to the language”—Guardian “Lost Horizon introduced the world to a Tibetan paradise where people live extraordinarily long lives of peace, harmony and wisdom. Expertly plotted and deftly written, Hilton’s book suggests mysteries without spelling them out - and leaves us wanting more”—New York Times “James Hilton invented the name Shangri-La for a paradise on earth in a book that captured the imagination of a public dealing with financial hardships and the threat of Nazism”—Observer “The important thing to note about this very fine novel—the tale of an adventure in Tibet—is that it is unusual and the product of a first-class mind...a wildly exciting story, nightmare, fantasy, or what you will”—Daily Express

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james hilton lost horizon: *Lost Horizon* James Hilton, 2014-06-21 James Hilton, the son of John Hilton, was born in Leigh, Lancashire, England on September 9, 1900. His father was the headmaster of Chapel End School in Waltham-stow. He was educated at Leys School and at Christ's College, Cambridge, where he studied English literature and received an honors degree. He won the Academy award in 1942 for writing screenplay of Mrs. Maniher. Both of his marriages first to Alice Brown and then to Galina Kopineckded ended in divorce James Hilton is best remembered for his novels 'Lost Horizon' and 'Goodbye, Mr. Chips!'; though he wrote many other good novels like 'Random Harvest', 'So well remembered' etc. James Hilton died of liver cancer on December 20, 1954. Lost Horizon was first published in 1933 and gained immense popularity particularly after release of the movie 'Lost Horizon' in 1937. Goodbye, Mr. Chips, the second novel of James Hilton had also contributed in the popularity of Lost Horizon. When an uprising in Baskul forces a small group of English and American residents to flee, their plane crash-lands in the far western reaches of the Tibetan Himalayas. There, they find themselves stranded outside the protective borders of the British Empire and discover access to a place beyond the bounds of the imagination—a legendary paradise, the mystic monastery at Shangri-La. This book is illustrated with photographs of different places in Himalayan regions.

james hilton lost horizon: Time and Time Again James Hilton, 2022-08-01 In Time and Time Again, James Hilton crafts a compelling narrative that intertwines themes of memory, identity, and

the paradoxes of time travel. Set against the backdrop of a prelude to World War II, the novel employs a lyrical style that balances poetic prose with intricate character development. Hilton's exploration of the notion of time is enriched by his keen understanding of human emotions and relationships, inviting readers to reflect on their own perceptions of past, present, and future. The narrative delves deeply into the philosophical implications of time, making it a rich text for analysis within the broader context of early 20th-century literature, which often grappled with the disillusionment of modernity. James Hilton, an influential British novelist, is perhaps best known for his works that explore utopian ideals and an inherent yearning for simpler times, as seen in his later classic, *Lost Horizon*. Hilton's personal experiences during a tumultuous historical period profoundly influenced his writing. His keen insights into human nature, friendship, and the nostalgia for an idealized past find their expression in this novel, showcasing his mastery in blending fantasy with poignant emotion. *Time and Time Again* is a captivating read for those who appreciate richly woven narratives that engage with profound philosophical questions. It appeals to fans of speculative fiction and historical literature alike, presenting a thought-provoking journey through time that resonates with the complexities of human experience. Hilton's elegant prose and engaging storytelling make this work a must-read for anyone seeking to understand the interplay between time and memory.

james hilton lost horizon: *Lost Horizon* James Hilton, 2015-02-01 Flying out of India, an aircraft is hi-jacked and flown into the high Tibetan Himalayas. The passengers—a British consul, his deputy, a missionary, and an American financier—are unexpectedly conducted to a remote valley, a legendary paradise of peace and beauty, known as Shangri-La. Have they been kidnapped? Can they leave? They discover a seemingly perfect hidden community where they are welcomed with gracious hospitality. Intrigued by its mystery, the travellers set about discovering the secret hidden at the shimmering heart of Shangri-La.

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james hilton lost horizon: *Lost Horizon* James Hilton, 2016 This carefully crafted ebook: *LOST HORIZON - The Legend of Shangri-La* is formatted for your eReader with a functional and detailed table of contents: Shangri-La is a fictional place described in the 1933 novel *Lost Horizon* by British author James Hilton. Hilton describes Shangri-La as a mystical, harmonious valley, gently guided from a lamasery, enclosed in the western end of the Kunlun Mountains. Shangri-La has become synonymous with any earthly paradise, and particularly a mythical Himalayan utopia - a permanently happy land, isolated from the outside world. In the novel, Hugh Conway, a veteran member of the British diplomatic service, finds inner peace, love, and a sense of purpose in Shangri-La, whose inhabitants enjoy unheard-of longevity. Among the book's themes is an allusion to the possibility of another cataclysmic world war brewing. It is said to have been inspired at least in part by accounts of travels in Tibetan borderlands, published in *National Geographic* by the explorer and botanist Joseph Rock. The remote communities he visited, such as Muli, show many similarities to the fictional Shangri-La. James Hilton (1900-1954) was an English novelist and Hollywood screenplayer best remembered for his best-sellers *Lost Horizon* and *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*. --Provided by publisher.

james hilton lost horizon: *The Collected Novels Volume Two* James Hilton, 2018-11-13 Three iconic novels about an unforgettable schoolmaster and a timeless utopia by the award-winning, New York Times–bestselling author. *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*: Throughout his tenure at an English boys' school, stern Arthur Chipping has shaped many young lives. But Mr. Chips has been inspired as well—by the social changes of his country and, not least, by his students. Based on Hilton's experiences at the Leys School, Cambridge, this novel is an enduring testament to the difference one good teacher can make. "A tender and gentle story as warming to the heart and as nourishing to the spirit as any I can remember." —Alexander Woollcott, *The New Yorker* *To You, Mr. Chips*: When James Hilton penned his beloved *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*, he drew on his own formative years at a Cambridge boarding school. In this collection, he adds to the legend of Mr. Chips through exquisite

short stories, as well as autobiographical sketches of his experience with the English public school system during the first half of a tumultuous century. Mr. Chips is “one of the most endearing creations of modern fiction” (The Daily Telegraph). Lost Horizon: When British diplomat Hugh Conway’s plane crashes in the Himalayas, he and fellow survivors are led to the hidden valley of Shangri-La, a paradise kept secret for more than two hundred years. In this idyll, where inhabitants live for centuries amid peace and harmony, the visitors must face the daunting prospect of returning home to a world about to be torn open by war. “One of the century’s most enduring literary mysteries.” —The Guardian

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