

The Navigator

One morning a small ship leaves Hawaii with a group of men and women whose aim is to find a single uncharted island lying among the thousands of the vast Polynesian archipelago. The most dynamic figure on board, though not the captain, is Gunnar Thorkild, a man of unusual magnetism – a grandson of the last great Polynesian navigator. His future at the Institute of Pacific Studies in Hawaii depends on discovering the legendary island to which all the navigators are said to go on the eve of their death, for he has, without presenting a shred of real evidence, rashly proclaimed its existence in a scientific paper. Gunnar has secured a ship with the help of a wealthy patron whose friends and crew he supplements with a small band of students – men, women and a boy – whom he has chosen because of their different skills, or simply because he finds them attractive. For some it is purely a routine voyage, for some an escape to a Utopia of white sands and swaying palms, but for others it amounts almost to a quest for a holy grail. The story of their voyage, their discovery, their struggle for survival as a community, gives this novel an epic theme. It is a tale of high adventure, ancient mystery, and modern men and women re-discovering love, comradeship, and tribal life, in the face of primal terrors.

By the same author

HARLEQUIN

THE SALAMANDER

SUMMER OF THE RED WOLF

SCANDAL IN THE ASSEMBLY (with Robert Francis)

THE HERETIC

THE TOWER OF BABEL

THE AMBASSADOR

THE SHOES OF THE FISHERMAN

DAUGHTER OF SILENCE

THE DEVIL'S ADVOCATE

THE SECOND VICTORY

THE CROOKED ROAD

CHILDREN OF THE SUN

The Navigator

MORRIS WEST



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Some island
With the sea's silence on it . . .
Robert Browning
Pippa Passes Part ii

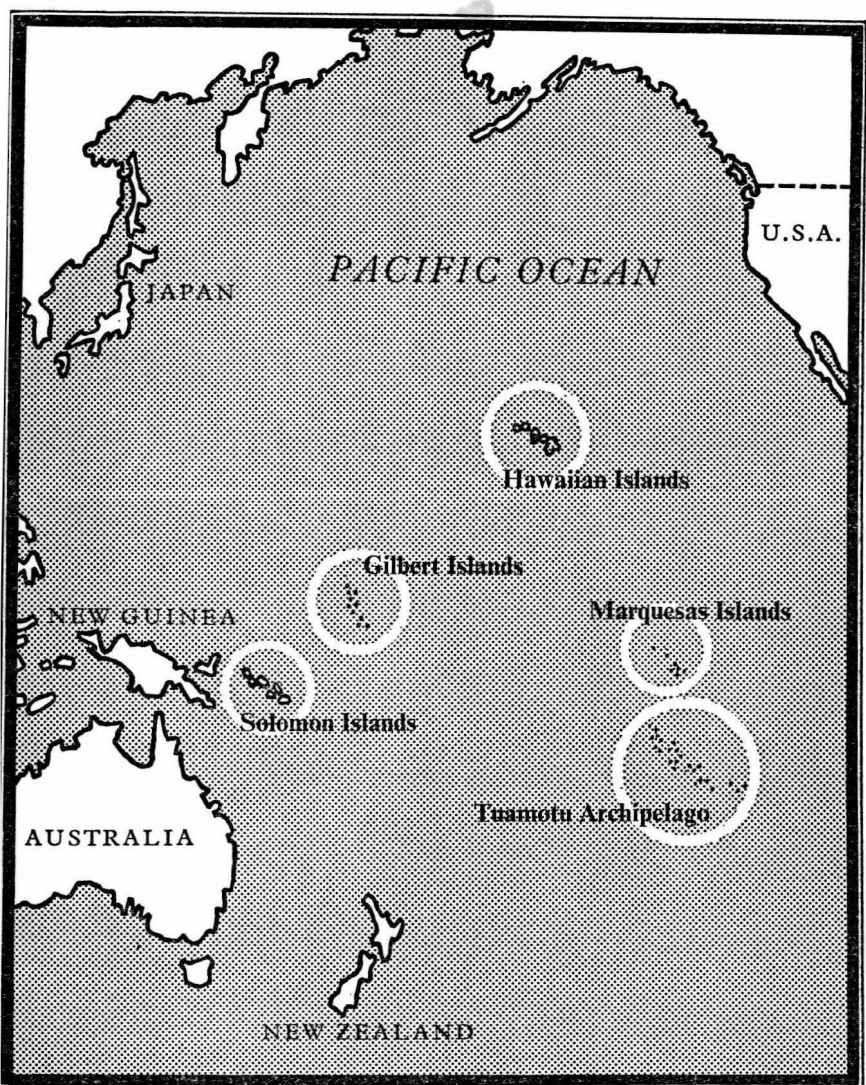
As it was in the beginning
Is now, and ever shall be
Through all ages of ages
Doxology

In 1882 Lloyd's agent at Rarotonga reported that the Haymet Rocks were supposed to exist about 150 miles south-southwestward of Rarotonga . . . This report however would seem to have originated in the lost island of Tuanaki which appears to have existed in this vicinity, but has now disappeared.

A depth of 68 fathoms was found in Lat. 24° 07' S. Long. 158° 33' W. by the *Fabert* when searching for a low island, reported to exist in this vicinity, but of which she saw nothing.

Pacific Islands Pilot; Volume III, Ninth Edition 1969, Page 65, Paragraphs 25 and 30.

**This book is for those of us,
Children still,
Who, even at the gates of midnight,
Dream of sunrise.**





On the white beach of Hiva Oa, which looked towards the moonrise and the breakers on the outer reef, Kaloni Kienga, the navigator, squatted under a palm-tree and drew pictures in the sand. He was an old man and sacred – more sacred even than the chief – because he knew all the secrets of the sea; how the wind whispered before a big blow, how the currents

bent when they passed this atoll or that, how the *te lapa*, the underwater lightning, shone, ten fathoms down, even when the sky was black and starless at midnight.

The pictures which Kaloni drew in the sand were mystic signs like those tattooed on his arms and his breast. Their names were spoken only in the ritual language of the ancestors. The rising tide would wash them away. The wind would jumble their syllables, so that none but the sacred men would ever comprehend them.

For Kaloni Kienga the drawing of the pictures was no mere idleness. It was an act of making, a creation of that which had been destined, dreamed, called to happen long, long before the seed of himself had been planted in his mother's belly. The events which he traced in symbol must be, would be; and he could no more change them than he could lift his finger from the sand until the whole design was complete.

The moon which rose this night would be a dying moon. One day, when it rose new and young, the ship would come with it, ghosting through the channel, sails spread like a sea-bird's wings, running before the night wind. He would hear the clout of her canvas as she came up into the breeze, the rattle of her hawser as she dropped anchor in the lagoon. He would see her, stripped black and bare against the sickle moon, as she lay back on her anchor, her lights yellow on the slack water. He would hear the voices of her crew and the silence afterwards as they settled to rest from the long swing of the ocean. Then, out of the silence, out of the water, sleek as a silver fish, a man would come to him:

the promised one, the fellow-voyager who would lead him on the last seaway, to the last landfall, the home-of-the-tradewinds.

His coming was as certain as the rising of the moon. The landfall was certain too: the haven of all navigators, the homing-place which lay below the orbit of the dog-star, below the shining black path of the God, Kanaloa. Kaloni Kienga drew the last symbol in the sand, the symbol of the guardian spirit who would greet him on his arrival, and hold him forever safe against invasion. Then he bowed his head on his knees and slept until the incoming tide lapped about his footsoles.

On the same night, two thousand five hundred miles to the north-east, James Neal Anderson, Dean of Oceanic Studies at the University of Hawaii, stood in his garden and watched the same dying moon rise over the Wahila ridge. The soft damp air was heavy with the scent of ginger-flowers and jasmine and frangipani. There was a gleam of green and gold and scarlet where the light fell among the leaves and the trailing orchids. Once he had loved this place, the cloying sweetness of it, the profusion and the privacy it afforded from the bustle of the campus, and the politics of a large, polyglot university. Then it had become a lonely place, dangerous to a man suddenly widowed after twenty years of contented marriage. Tonight it would be a place of execution.

It was a mistake to have invited Thorkild here. There were matters best despatched formally, in the Dean's office, close to the merciful distractions of telephones and secretaries, and student visitors. But Gunnar Thorkild merited something better than a curt delivery of the warrant and a swift bloodless killing. He was too big a man to be dismissed with brief regrets and barren courtesies.

True he was thorny, and contentious, too loud in argument, too impatient of the opinions of his elders, too little versed in the diplomacies of a large and sensitive institution of learning at the crossroads between Asia and the West. He had risen too fast and too young. He had too much charm for women students, and faculty wives, and too little thought for their consorts who were less free, less handsome, and less brilliant than himself. None the less, he merited respect and from James Neal Anderson he would have it.

Tanaka the houseman came into the garden with a tray of drinks, and set them down on the wicker table beside the folder in which was recorded the past and the present of Gunnar Thorkild Ph.D. and the publications which bore his name: *Phonic Variables in Polynesian*

Dialects, a Comparative Study of the Myths and Legends of Oceania, a Handbook of Polynesian Navigation with an Appendix on the Cult of the Navigator.

'Shall I pour you a drink Doctor?'

'No thanks Tanaka, I'll wait for our guest.'

'He just telephoned. He'll be a few minutes late.'

'It doesn't matter. I'll wait.'

Waiting for Gunnar Thorkild was no new matter. He was late for lectures, staff meetings, parties, campus ceremonies; and when he did arrive it was always in turmoil and disarray with a lopsided grin and a toss of his blond mane and a booming apology that set everyone's nerves on edge. As the Chancellor had once commented dryly:

'Thorkild always looks as though he's just tumbled out of bed.'

To which his wife had added the tart rejoinder:

'And he generally has, my dear. I wonder whose it was this time?'

They might have been more generous to him, Anderson reflected wryly, had the record been less specific about his origins. He was the son of Thor Thorkild, a Norwegian master mariner and a Marquesan woman called Kawena Kienga who had died giving him birth in the general hospital in Honolulu a week before Pearl Harbour. His father had handed himself and his ship to the United States Navy and his child to the Sisters of St Joseph with a sackful of silver dollars to pay for his Christian upbringing. When neither the father nor his ship returned, the Sisters and the Government of the United States financed the boy's nurture and education. They found to their mutual surprise that they had on their hands a prodigy who devoured learning faster than it could be fed to him.

After the Sisters, the Jesuits took him, and he graduated magna cum laude six months before his eighteenth birthday. The day after graduation he shipped out as a deck-hand on a French freighter bound for the Marquesas, and came back five years later to matriculate to the School of Oceanic Studies. At twenty-eight he was appointed junior lecturer in Pacific Ethnography. At thirty-three he was an assistant professor. Now, he presented himself as one of five candidates for tenure, and the Chair. It was Anderson's job to tell him that his candidacy had been rejected . . .

'Why James? Why?' Gunnar Thorkild sat slumped in his chair, a six-foot hulk of anger and misery, with a glass of whisky clamped in his fist, while Anderson sat a safe distance away with the folder open on his

knees. 'Goddammit man! By what norms do they judge me? If it's academic record, you know mine's twice as good as Holroyd's and ten times better than that bloodless bitch Auerbach's. As for Luton and Samuels, they're good men sure! But their field work is weak. They're theorists, pure and simple. I've been there James – from the Tuamotus to the Gilberts! I've lived what I teach. You, of all people, must know that!'

'I do know it Gunnar. You were my candidate! But you know how these appointments are made – by consensus of the faculty with all the Civil Liberties Groups looking over our shoulders. The sad fact is that the consensus is against you.'

'Who cast the votes?'

'You know I can't tell you that. But I'll give you the words, without the names. Before I do, are you sure you want to hear them?'

'You're damned right I do!'

'Pour yourself another drink. You're going to need it.'

Gunnar Thorkild splashed liquor into his glass. Dean Anderson opened the folder and read in neutral monotone:

'... Mr Gunnar Thorkild is a stimulating lecturer, popular – perhaps a little too popular – with his students and with junior colleagues. His theories are often brilliant; his conclusions, too hastily published, are less than reliable. He is more poet than scholar, an inspired dreamer perhaps, but certainly a flawed scholar.

'He is a passionate collector and a skilful editor of island legends; but when he founds upon these legends a new land, a kind of Polynesian Hy-Brasil, he lapses into bathos and absurdity. What all the great cartographers have missed, what even the satellites have not recorded, Mr Thorkild posits as fact; an undiscovered island, a graveyard for chieftains and navigators, somewhere between Pitcairn and New Zealand.

'He is still young, so there is hope that time and experience may mellow his judgement. We should therefore be prepared to accept him as an associate professor for a trial period of three years. However, we are not prepared to endorse him at this stage as a candidate for tenure in the Chair of Pacific Ethnography ...'

The Dean closed the folder. Gunnar Thorkild sat a long time, staring into the lees of the liquor. Then he asked quietly:

'Is that a majority report?'

'Yes.'

'How many names on it?'

'Seven.'

'No way to fight it then?'

'I'm afraid not. You'd betray me if you even hinted that you'd heard it.'

'I wouldn't do that James. But, Christ! Did they have to be so rough? "Bathos and absurdity . . . a flawed scholar . . ." With that in the record I'm a dead man!'

'Not quite. They still accept you as an associate.'

'The hell they do! They cut my balls off and then ask me to eat them for dinner! No way James! No way in the wide world! You'll have my resignation in the morning.'

'Hear me first!'

'What's to say, for God's sake!'

'Just this. It's only a month to the end of this semester. You can't quit before then, without making a fool of yourself and a scandal for the whole campus. Then there's three-four months of the summer vacation. No appointments will be published until the end of August. That's a breathing space. Use it! To set your thinking straight, add up whether it's worth throwing away your whole career for one first rejection – no matter how roughly it's been phrased . . . No! Sit down! You owe me some courtesies Gunnar. That last monograph of yours on the Polynesian navigators – I read it. It was good. It was clear, logical, beautifully documented. But you fouled it up in the appendix. You lapsed out of scholarship and into speculation. You claimed for fact that a place exists which is only, could only be a theory. You say your colleagues cut your balls off – but you handed them the knife. Why man? Why?'

'Because I know it exists.'

'How?'

'The man who told me is my grandfather, Kaloni Kienga. Everything else in that paper, he taught me.'

'And proved to you?'

'Yes.'

'But he didn't prove this – or if he did, you didn't prove it in publication. You flung it in the face of the scholarly public and said "That's it! Take it or leave it, because I say it!" Once again, why?'

'Because – can't you see? – somewhere, sometime, something has to be taken on faith. Kaloni Kienga is a great man. He has a thousand years of knowledge and tradition locked in his head. I believed him. I still do. Isn't every man entitled to his act of faith?'

'He is. But he can't complain when other people ask for proof and crucify him because he can't or won't produce it. I'm sorry, Gunnar, but I'm a lot older than you are and that's the way I read what's happened to you. Now, what are you going to do? Blaspheme or give witness?'

Gunnar Thorkild set down his glass carefully, wiped his hands and his lips, and gave a long whistle of amusement.

'Oh, James! James Neal Anderson! You're a rough man! Blaspheme or give witness. That's good! That's thunder from the pulpit. Now tell me how you think I should give witness. The truth now! No hedging.'

'And no complaints when you hear it?'

'None, I promise.'

'Two ways, and I'll accept either one. The first: you accept the verdict of your peers, take the appointment they offer and thereby admit a defect – a remediable defect – in your scholarship. The second: ask for six months' study leave, which I'll guarantee will be granted, and go prove your point. Find your island. Bring the bearings, map the contours and photograph the features. Then you'll have your Chair and your tenure – even if we have to subsidize a new one to accommodate you.'

Thorkild sat a long moment, sunk in a brooding silence, then abruptly he heaved himself to his feet.

'One more question James.'

'Yes?'

'Why should you care at all, either way?'

'Because,' said James Neal Anderson, 'I believe you're a sounder scholar than the others; and a bigger man than you've shown yourself so far.'

'Do you mind if I think it over?'

'Not at all. So long as you let me know before the end of June.'

'Thanks James.'

'For nothing. Would you like a dram for the road?'

'Better not,' said Gunnar Thorkild ruefully. 'One more driving offence and I lose my licence.'

He walked away, a shambling puzzled giant, his blond head brushing the plumeria tree, his shoulders flecked with yellow blossoms, leaving James Neal Anderson to finish his drink alone, in the scented garden under a ragged dying moon . . .

For all the disorder of his personal appearance, and the occasional un-