

(3 hour) Tour of Duty

To my shame, I must admit that when I received word of the great man's demise, my first reaction was relief. A decade of secrecy has taxed me, like a constant, unrelenting flexing of my stomach. When the manacle of my oath was removed, it had shackled me so long that I hadn't realized the magnitude of its burden, and so surprising was my respite that all thoughts of his grieving family, all regard for his abandoned compatriots, all consideration of his influence on history, was a thin echo, drowned by unexpected succor.

Perhaps 30 years have elapsed since activities under his influence had captured public attention, but that was simply a testimony of his efficiency. Good agents are invisible, their sway unknown even to those aware of the crusades raging to stay civilization from spinning into an abyss. Yet I could see – or at least I *wanted* to see – his hand subtly diverting the flow of world endeavor, even as recently as this year. And at *that* realization, I despair for our future, for unless he was able to persuade others to accept his burden, the forces of darkness may hold sway, for they are legion and although he was gargantuan, he was only one man.

I can tell the story now, because my bond of silence was with him, not with any milquetoast organization or mealy political group with which practicality dictated he ally himself. He ignored their opinions as a workman would ignore the

entreaties of his tools, and I can disregard their outrage as I would the howling of a caged dog. I can tell the story because most who read it will disbelieve it anyway, because to give it credence would obliterate their worldview. Those who *know* are familiar with the story already, but I hope that verification from someone who heard the tale in full directly from the man's own lips will give them comfort, and reward them for their own discretion and loyalty.

Meeting The Man

He was christened G Robert Deutschendorf, but the nature of his profession caused him to long abandon that appellation, and even when I met him in his twilight, he eschewed returning to his birthright and instead held to an invented surname, following his younger brother Henry's example of claiming allegiance to a cherished locale. That their chosen city was my own home town was the coincidence that caused him to seek me out, to *summon* me, and choose me to relate his history. He had stumbled across some of my web noodling and decided that my worldview and writing style would be appropriate for his needs, and so he contacted me and offered me audience.

I agreed to meet with him, and once he presented his fascinating history, I was eager to act as scribe for him, and perfectly willing to

abide by his prerequisites. I was allowed to interview him and take notes, but none of his story could be shared, indeed the words shouldn't even be written, until the conclusion of his adventure. He didn't want to see drafts or outlines, resisting (for once) direct interference and instead trusting my meager abilities. He wanted an objective relation, and though I fear I will fail that standard, I'll try to honor his resolve with an honest account.

So, when I heard the news, I reexamined my notes and replayed my tapes, wept briefly, and girded myself for the task long assigned and now due.

Growing Up G-Man

It was with the Company in the South Pacific in the 1960s where G's most important work would be done, but his earlier domestic service is also notable, and serves to impart better understanding of his later heroism.

He was drawn to service at a young age, but from the start had a decidedly mature outlook as to what service could mean. Rejecting fealty to any specific person or organization, he instead allied himself with a cause, to what he felt was the unrealized greatness of his country, to the ridiculous concept that all men are created equal, and are endowed by the simple fact of their existence to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Difficult stuff, he would discover, to serve an ideal when all around would have you compromise in favor of the practical, the convenient, the expedient.

The FBI made use of him while he was in his teens, offering him education in exchange for his youth and guile. Disguised in the visage and mannerisms of the counter-culture, his stated mission was to discover subversives among his peers, to gather evidence of their traitorous activity and assist in their lawful incarceration and reform. He soon found that by that, his

superiors meant for him to report the names of those who sold and imbibed marijuana and various pharmaceuticals commonly used for benign recreation. Unhappily, he complied, although he concentrated mostly on those he felt most culpable: profiteers and those who supported their vices with thievery, violence, or deception. He gained a reputation for the detail and veracity of his information, as well his persuasive courtroom demeanor. Local police learned to respect and fear him; no officer on the take or involved in a sideline of illegal trafficking was safe from his dogged scrutiny.

As expected, he was resented by those closest to him. Untarnished warriors are inevitably outcast by their fellow soldiers, who in jealousy and inadequacy conspire to destroy the perfection they themselves cannot achieve. It was probably a relief to his FBI handlers, then, when none other than J Edgar Hoover requested he be loaned to a remote field office of the CIA for a special assignment.

Daddy-o-ville

At first blush, it seemed to be a routine drug assignment, one arising from typical bureaucratic misconception. In a modest mid-western town, local agents were frustrated with a fruitless investigation of one Dobie Gillis, a youth they were convinced was an influential drug trafficker, possibly with connections in Mexico. Suspicion was directed toward the boy for nothing more convincing than his puzzling popularity with his peers, and that his name appeared to be a pun on a common euphemism for marijuana joints ("doobies"). This probably wouldn't have been enough to gain the attention of the national office, but for the entreaties of one Esmerelda Wentworth Menninger, an influential socialite and mother of Thalia Menninger, a 17 year-old perplexingly enamored with the low-born grocer's son.

Exasperated that her daughter refused to comply with her insistence to find a more suitable beau, Esmerelda used her connections to escalate the matter. Such was her sway that the petition found its way to Hoover's desk.

It's doubtful that Hoover was initially eager to accommodate the request. International drug trafficking was a gray area of responsibility. The relatively new Central Intelligence Agency claimed jurisdiction as soon as there was any indication of foreign involvement, but the FBI insisted that a crime committed in the United States was their province, no matter the native tongue of the suspects. Since the CIA already had an investigation in progress, it would be impossible for the FBI to start its own without being accused of poaching. The Wentworth family was insistent, however, and their influence couldn't be ignored. Hoover relented when the head of a Southwest field office suggested he had a young agent, a man of peerless skill and reputation, who he was willing to loan to the investigation. Hoover realized that it would be a coup of sorts if it was an FBI loaner who broke the case, and so approved the assignment.

It was obvious almost immediately to G—now sporting the odd new name Maynard Krebs (a forged birth certificate gave his middle name as Walter, but he used "G" when introducing himself, in homage to his roots) and disguised behind a beatnik goatee—that his target was an innocent victim of rampaging paranoia by local officials and a scornful gentry. Knowing that such a revelation would only increase the resentment targeted toward him, and add another whole federal bureaucracy to his enemies' list, he again adapted to his fate. While seemingly pressing his official assignment, he began gathering evidence of suspicious activities elsewhere within the community, at the seats of power in Central City.

His first success was the exposure of abuse to draftees at an Army boot camp. After cajoling his ersatz best buddy to join him, he enlisted,

and proceeded to catalogue the sadistic assaults used to prepare conscripts for their roles as fodder for the Vietnam war machine. As usual, his research was impeccable, his evidence indisputable. His aggravated handlers, unable to dispute his accusations and unwilling to prosecute those he indicted, were again forced to compromise, quietly dismissing the culpable, releasing the mistreated, and rectifying the illegal practices. The agent's reward was that to which he was accustomed: the scorn of his contemporaries and their reluctant recognition of his success.

He chose his next case with even greater ambition. Again manipulating his pal—this time into enrolling at S Peter Prior Junior College to provide cover for his own presence on campus—he began the careful accumulation of evidence of covert unconventional weapon development by the school's science department.

His ultimate target was the military contractor funding the research: Howelliburton, a wholly-owned subsidiary of the monolithic Howell Industries. The company thought it had found an institute nondescript and malleable enough that it could bypass encumbering and expensive processes required for human safety and environmental responsibility without fear of public scrutiny, and thus quickly and profitably deliver the nasty implements of conquest to their voracious employers.

The Professor

It was the presence of Professor Roy Hinkley Jr. to the SPPJC campus that first set Maynard's spidey senses tingling. Routine research found him listed with the faculty of the Cal Tech Physics Department, a pioneer of what would come to be known as string theory. How then, did he end up exiled to Podunk-academia, teaching high school science in the sticks and finagling a begrudged research chair at the local junior college?

The Professor's CIA file—purloined through a combination of charm and deceit—offered a genesis to the enigma. There was little about the man's childhood or adolescence, indeed nothing prior to his Cal Tech years except for a vague reference to some bit-part movie work under the moniker Jonathan Russell, and a single grainy black and white photograph absent of supporting documentation. The photo—labeled "AZSR 52.3.14.159"—showed a rag tag group in the high desert, perplexingly cringing from the sun on the horizon. One of the men in the photo—which could be Hinkley as easily as not—was encircled in blue ink.

His contemporaries would be too preoccupied by Camus, cannabis, and coitus to notice, but G's sophisticated deductive capabilities—in concert with his willingness to burn the necessary shoe leather—readily lead him to a plausible answer. He started with convincing his pal to join him on a Route 66 tour of Arizona, with side trips to small towns like Sun Ridge, Shady Rest, Sierra Rouge, San Raul, and Sand Rock. In each town, while Dobie was preoccupied charming the local sorority, Krebs would find the office of the newspaper of record and charm the clerk into loaning him copies of issues published on and around March 14, 1952.

In Sand Rock, he found what he knew he eventually would. Articles in the *Sand Rock Star* cited reports of unexplained explosions and strange moving lights in the night sky of the surrounding desert. One article, headlined "Star Gazer Sees Martians", dismissed the speculations of local astronomer John Putnam as to the extraterrestrial origin of the activity. Another, headlined "It Came From Outer Space?", included a photograph of a pair of county line workers, the first in the proximity of the explosion. The junior of the pair, identified as George Hindley, matched in clothing and hairstyle the encircled man in the CIA photograph, and was easily recognized to be the same Roy Hinkley,

now exiled to SPPJC.

None of the principles mentioned in the newspaper articles were available for interview, a fact that Krebs found telling. The *Star's* editors directed him to a local folklorist, long reduced to grizzled cootdom, who recalled the winsome details, although the sepia haze of nostalgia may have influenced his recollection. In short, Sand Rock went flying saucer loony. UFO speculation dominated tavern talk for weeks, until James Dean was busted for speeding in nearby Cascade.

A trip out to the site of the CIA photograph revealed that little had changed in the intervening decade. The same broken mining equipment was scattered about a shallow cave, buttressed by charred wooden braces. The scraggly tumbleweed was scattered, but the cacti pattern remained. Krebs stood in the same spot that the CIA photographer must have stood, and pondered the man's motivation for taking the picture, and what exactly the subjects of the snapshot were reacting to. It took a moment for him to realize, and another to confirm, that he was facing north, as the photographer must have been. The overwhelming light in the photo was neither dawn nor sunset; it wasn't the sun at all.

The road trip went from Sand Rock to Pasadena, and the campus of the California Institute of Technology. A higher class of women to strike out with for the Dobie, and more file digging for his friend. The faculty archives revealed that Professor Hinkley started at Cal Tech in the fall of 1952, to occupy a new Physics chair endowed by Thurston Howell III. He taught a light load of Freshman Physics, and spent the majority of his time overseeing research, apparently acquiring a Masters degree and leaving the UFO flap behind with a simple name change. For eight years, he methodically climbed the administrative ladder, publishing enough to maintain a modest academic celebrity and apparently keeping his Howelliburton

handlers happy, based on his regular funding continuances.

Hinkley's Cal Tech egress remained perplexing. The faculty record and CIA file were both resolutely mute. Any reference to the Professor post-1960 in those records was expunged, if it ever existed. Clearly, the move was somehow tied to his Howelliburton research, but the nature of that research was vague, hidden in layers of CIA security that G's meager field-agent influence was unable to penetrate. The closest he could get was a project code name: Monarch, a deliciously mysterious title that could mean almost anything.

Unsuccessful but resolute, the duo returned to Central City, the fair-haired youth to continue pursuit of the SPPJC coeds, and his goateed partner to discern what picture the scattered jigsaw pieces in his possession might reveal.

Krebs decided to put Hinkley aside for a bit, hoping that a circuitous route would lead him to his destination. Scrutiny of other Howelliburton-funded research revealed legally tenuous activity. As usual, the clues were first obscure. Several students sported nasty rashes on their trunks and arms. The campus cafeteria workers took to wearing bandanas and long-sleeved shirts in the steamy dish room. Bit by bit, evidence of chemical weapons research—outlawed by state and university charter—became apparent. Methodically he gathered the facts, and arranged them so they pointed unequivocally to the culpable.

Monarch

Still, he hesitated to press that inquiry to its conclusion, for fear of driving his principal prey into an inaccessible lair. It was a chance event that gave that primary inspection new momentum. He was attending an on-campus career fair as part of his "best buddy" cover, as his pal had eyes for one of the conference's organizers. A

meteorologist made reference to the "butterfly effect"—which postulates that the flap of a butterfly's wings in South America can influence weather patterns sufficiently to cause a hurricane off Japan. Suddenly the Monarch project had a new possible meaning.

A revisitation of Pasadena newspaper archives—this time concentrating on the weather pages—confirmed his conjecture. In the months before Hinkley's departure from Cal Tech, several freakishly violent storms visited the area, the last causing mudslides that resulted in the destruction of a dozen homes, and the death of three people. Deeper scrutiny of the FBI and CIA files still left Monarch behind in California, but Krebs was convinced that Hinkley's weather control research continued.

His conjecture was strengthened by perusal of newspapers in and around Central City for the prior two years. Tornadoes, thunderstorms, and other violent weather had never been unknown in the region, but of late their occurrence was less predictable, and more violent. Telling was that over half the storms classified as excessive and without common precursors in counties within 300 miles – some with fatal consequences – were recorded on the weekend. Krebs saw the hand of man – an ambivalent, worm-minded man – in the evidence.

Krebs returned to direct observation of his prey. He followed Hinkley during one of his customary weekend drives to the country, as he had done before, this time with a new agenda. As usual, Hinkley drove – sometimes for many hours—to an isolated and seemingly random spot, parked for short while, then turned around to drive home. Instead of following as he had done before, Krebs lingered. It wasn't long before his diligence was rewarded. A tiny dust-devil swirled up from Hinkley's tires, and floated slowly across a pasture with unusual persistence. It grew, and within minutes was a small tornado, tossing flora and small fauna about

before dissipating.

So Hinkley's research was still about weather control, although perhaps "weather consolidation" or "weather intensification" would be a more accurate term. Additionally, he was becoming bold again, experimenting in the open and with little regard for collateral damage. One wondered how soon it would be before another unwitting farm boy would be cutting across the wrong field at an inopportune time and become another victim to the apathy of science.

Krebs was confident he could tie the current experiments with the disaster in California, and possibly other freakish weather incidents in the Midwest. This would be an exposure too sensational for the power elite—no matter the reach of their influence—to suppress. The paper trail was too extensive, the physical evidence too dramatic. Exposed to the sunlight of public ire, the vampiric corporation Howelliburton would shrivel, and justice would pierce it like a stake, obliterating it. And with this victory, G Robert Deutschendorf himself could step out of the shadows and be acknowledged for his service.

A Millionaire

His prey wasn't as oblivious to his pursuit as he imagined, however. Thurston Howell III — the beady-eyed, cobra-minded head of Howelliburton—didn't parlay a fourth-generation machine parts company into the country's third largest military industrial supplier by being unaware of his adversaries. The same instincts that allowed him to dodge six antitrust suits and enabled him to defy an annual tax evasion investigation warned him of impending capture, and with honed reflexes he contrived his escape before the noose had even identified its intended neck.

Howell realized his current pursuer was made of more substantial stuff than the IRS

gumshoes or Treasury Department career cops he was used to dismissing. This investigator was used to the dangerous shadows of narcocrime; neither bribes nor threats would suffice to dissuade this menace. Diversion over confrontation was a Howell tradition, so it was a simple decision to seek respite from pursuit rather than gird for battle. A long, perhaps permanent, exile to South America seemed judicious.

Howell had others reasons for desiring a languid life in warmer climes over his familiar Wall Street battlefields. Four decades of competition—through the giddy gold rush of his indoctrination, the hardscrabble survival of the Depression, and the pillage of the post-war pastures—had left their scars. The cold stares of the betas in his pack were more daring, defying his dominance, and the intoxication he felt as he rose to the challenge was losing its titillation. To brace against an impending two-sided attack was more than he was prepared to do, especially since his marriage had yielded no progeny, diminishing his interest in the long-range destiny of Howell Industries. Then there was Ginger.

A Movie Star

She was born Louise Christine on whatever army base in whatever country her dad was stationed at the time. Like many mil-brats, the gangly redhead was self-sufficient and ambivalent to the steady alternation of classmates and neighbor kids she encountered. The hell-hammer of divorce, and her subsequent dispatch to a boarding school for the duration of her adolescence, served to strengthen her independence. She developed a knack for mimicry and song in high school, which lead to an interest in theater. A skinny teenager, she gravitated toward sidekick comedic roles in school performances, but still the chance to transform into someone not Louise Christine excited her. In her early twenties, she bloomed magnificently, a late summer

rose. She learned quickly how to use the unaccustomed attention of unfamiliar men to her advantage, and soon was New York bound, under the tutelage of an agent, who conjured for her an alliterative stage name.

Ginger Grant was a rising off-Broadway star when Thurston and Lovey Howell first saw her in a performance of "Belly Dancers From Bali-Bali". It was a time in their long marriage when the advantages of being connected to the influential Wentworth family had become too familiar for Thurston to appreciate, and the aforementioned barrenness of womb strained their otherwise genteel relationship. Lovey was enchanted with the prospect of supporting the arts by befriending an emerging talent, and Thurston agreed that investing in the girl's career might prove rewarding. Privately, he was intrigued with the prospect of ready access to some choice Hollywood trim.

They financed a film version of "Belly Dancers", moving Ginger to California and establishing her in a medium that was more forgiving of her need for several chances at anything more than the most elementary lines. Even after Lovey's interest wandered to other diversions—a scant month after the premiere of "Belly Dancers", with the new equestrian season—Ginger enjoyed special consideration. For a decade her career was nurtured with Howell funds, funneled from obscure shelter businesses with no apparent connection to the industrialist. She undulated through a series of modestly budgeted productions, drive-in fare that usually turned a profit. Her only obligation was to discreetly entertain Howell on his infrequent forays to the West Coast, and she found that his lascivious appetite was easily appeased.

But a decade of B-movie stardom and sexagenarian fellatio was taxing Ginger Grant's ambition. Being a kept woman didn't deter her from honing her talent. Two recent musical productions, "Sing a Song of Sing-Sing" and

"Singing in the Clouds", received the usual criticism for hackneyed plot and dialogue, but in both instances Grant's singing was commended. Thoughts of a return to Broadway began to form. When she heard that a new Harold Heckubah musical production, "Pyramid for Two", was looking for a controversial new talent to play the lead of Cleopatra, she was convinced it was the role destined to secure her star in the firmament of the Immortals.

Thurston Howell was lukewarm to the idea. It served his financial and carnal interests to keep his mistress on the west coast and out of the glare of celebrity. He thought he could sidetrack Ginger's ambition as he had to similar projects in the past: vague promises, procedural delays, and clandestine sabotage. But Ginger had found new resolve in her maturity, and resolved to get Heckubah's attention, with or without the assistance of her benefactor. Heckubah was no stranger to scandal; he considered the yellow press the best publicity money couldn't buy. Ginger determined that rumor of a long-running affair with a major, elder industrialist—with corroboration furnished in titillating morsels just before curtain—would convince the producer to choose her over more nubile or vocally accomplished starlets.

Her scheme started and ended with a clandestine communiqué to Lovey Howell. A photograph—carefully cropped to conceal the identity of the entwined female—arrived at the offices of the Wentworth Foundation. It was a miscalculation. Eunice Wentworth Howell wasn't a naïve socialite prone to irrational reaction. Similar accusations had hounded her relationship with Thurston since their flapper-era courtship, and she remained resolute in her commitment to him, regardless of their veracity. She understood the temptations that accompanied prestige, and was willing to forgive her husband any non-communicable or swaddled indiscretion, as long as his professed fealty remained with her.

Instead of retaining counsel, she contacted her most discreet courier and sent the offending photograph to Thurston, suggesting he procure its negative and resolve the conflict it implied.

Grand Master Howell studied the chess board and determined his next move.

Strategies

He confided enough of his plan to Miss Grant to secure her cooperation. He offered an alternative headline, one equally compelling, but featuring her more favorably than a sex scandal. A shipwreck, the lamented loss of a socially prominent couple, and a heroic rescue just as public interest was waning, and coincidentally just before the casting decision for "Pyramid for Two". Ginger agreed to take a singing job Howell arranged for her in Waikiki, there to be summoned to Honolulu at an appropriate time. She left the details of the plot to the reptilian Howell medulla.

A lesser strategist would have been overwhelmed by the plethora of assaults against him, but Thurston Howell was accustomed to the duplicitous scheming his situation required. Instead of a handful of challenges, he saw his predicament as a whole. An indiscreet mistress, a careless researcher, and a resolute federal investigator were all odd notes that he, a maestro of human foibles, could assemble into a triumphant symphony.

Stormbringer

Project Monarch remained a sinkhole of subsidy without commercially-exploitable results. Hinkley's claim of weather control remained as elusive as the day the industrialist agreed to finance the experiments of a desert rat with a mysterious device that could turn gentle spring rains into torrential downpours. No farmer would pay to have his barren dust bowl

land turned into an unworkable flooded plain, but the Pentagon was delighted to fund Project Stormbringer—research into weather intensification for military use—and insisted (encouraged by Howell's cloakroom diplomacy) that a test in a remote location was the logical next step. They offered Howell a battle cruiser from the Pacific Operating Theater for transport, but the millionaire suggested a more unassuming vessel, knowing that it would be the stoutheartedness of the pilot, not the seaworthiness of the ship, that would be essential. Howell knew who he wanted as that pilot.

The Skipper, Too

Jonas Grumby Jr. was an old school patriot, and loyal to a fault. He came by his personality honestly; in the 1930s daddy Jo was second-in-command to the famed gun-runner Rick Blaine, a modern Little John helping his captain defy the Fascist blockade in Ethiopia. Father and son were both hale, burly, confident men, with friendly faces that defied the thunderous savagery of which they were capable if the situation required. Grumby the senior never left the Horn of Africa, falling in battle while protecting of his compatriots and leaving a legacy his teenaged son would strive to emulate.

Knowing that American involvement in the war was inevitable, Grumby finessed a couple years to his age and enlisted in the Navy. He proved a resourceful and capable seaman, and by 1941 was promoted to ensign and assigned to the battleship *Arizona*.

He was spared eternal rest at the bottom of Pearl Harbor with his shipmates by volunteering for a special mission, and on that fateful December morning was far north of Hawaii on the tiny schooner *Minnow*, en route to a clandestine negotiation. He was serving as escort Major General (Ret) William J Donovan, who was to discretely meet with Admiral Chuichi Nagumo to

discuss a possible Japanese-USA alliance against the Soviet Union. Just miles from the rendezvous, the Empire's true intent was revealed and Grumby watched with horror as his ship's radar screens filled with fireflies; Japanese Zeroes swarming to destiny. Grumby's ingenuity saved Donovan and the rest of the *Minnnow's* crew that day, as he rewired the ship's radio to scramble the transmissions of the sons of Nippon, affording a furtive retreat. "Wild Bill" would remember Grumby's resourcefulness and call him to service several times in the future.

Grumby's South Pacific service would have been remarkable, had it not been shrouded in the necessary mystery of national security. A careful comparison of ship manifests and role call logs would have found frequent discrepancies for Ensign Jonas Grumby, as he was often called upon to perform duties where a singularly quick mind, discrete manner, and ruthless comportment would win the day. It was during this time that he acquired the nickname "Skipper", earned through the admiration of his peers despite being continually passed over for promotion.

The Skipper took that slight with the same good humor that allowed him to survive in a climate of dangerous paranoia. Despite the white-knuckle peril of his daily life—solitary eruptions of terrible savagery within the relentless drone of resolute annihilation—he maintained a courageous nonchalance that sustained him. He would fulfill any inhuman task the feral imaginations of his superiors would assign him with efficiency and grace, and remained seemingly unaffected by the dark horrors that were his stock in trade. Until, that is, he was assigned to kill Jack Kennedy.

PT 109

He wasn't naïve. Previous assignments had political aspects, and American officers had been

targets before. He had abandoned angst over the ambiguous nature of his craft long before, but the Kennedy task was something altogether different. Never before was an assignment so blatantly rapacious; an OSS attempt to use the fog of war to eliminate a political rival. Grumby wasn't surprised that the agency would have such ruthless foresight; he knew Wild Bill Donovan's penchant for calculated precaution and brutal opportunism was a hallmark of the organization he created. He knew, too, that to refuse the job would mean the end of his career as a reliable operative, and would do nothing to secure Kennedy's safety. So, with bile rising, he accepted the assignment and in the deadly dark of August 2, 1943 found himself aboard his faithful *Minnnow* in the opaque brine of Blackett Strait between Kolombangara and Arundel in the Solomon Islands, obfuscating the radar signals of both *PT-109* and the Japanese destroyer *Amagiri*.

His plan was adequate, if imperfectly executed, given the time allowed. Conventionally, the *Amagiri* would have rammed the boat head-on, demolishing it utterly and grinding what remained in its propellers, and Kennedy would have sported 60 grains of distorted lead behind his left ear for good measure. As it was, the PT boat was maneuvered to be at right angles to her intended course, and the battleship sliced the tiny craft in half, like an ax head through a crusty wedge of crumbling cheese. Two men were killed in the crash, but Kennedy and 14 of the crew survived, little Yankee wontons bobbing in a lukewarm Polynesian stew. The Skipper acted with Swiss-watch precision. As soon as the destroyer cleared the wreckage and trundled indifferently on its way, the *Minnnow* glided into place, to the far side of the ruined craft from where the desperate crew was gathered, clinging to flotsam and each other. Relying on dark, distraction, and delirium to mask his activity, he grappled enough of the debris to drag along the men, and chugged steadily to a

predetermined rendezvous. By the time the dawn arrived, rosy fingered, Jack Kennedy and his boys were drying out on the beach, pale raisins dotting Plum Pudding Island.

They got Joe a year later, when his bomber exploded over the English Channel. But after the miraculous *PT-109* survival, it was determined that another attempt against the younger Kennedy would call too much attention to the shadow operation trying to sway the events of the war, and so Jonas Grumby's canny resolution to a seemingly impossible predicament gave Jack two more decades to influence history before a patsy and a magic bullet would shatter the prospect of a new Camelot.

Kennedy's salvation was the beginning of Grumby's professional and corporeal decline. Assignments became infrequent and inconsequential, as the miasma of apparent failure was inexpugnable. Immersing himself into his overt military duty proved faint compensation, he was surprised to discover. The visceral thrill of espionage was intoxicating to the point of addiction, and the longer he was without an important assignment the greater his agitation and desperation. Since he couldn't rely on dirk and garrote for endorphinic gratification, he eventually reached to another equally effective conveyance: an opium pipe.

Junky

The next 16 months were a fog of alternating ethereal rapture and searing desperation. Other sailors who succumbed to the lure of the pipe would be quietly rehabilitated and transferred, but Grumby's shadowy overseers assured that he was not collected in standard protocol, preferring to retain him in familiar territory should the need arise to utilize his talents, or eradicate the evidence of their manipulation he represented. That's how Thurston Howell III found him, below decks and dreamily incoher-

ent, when he came to the South Pacific looking for someone with Grumby's portfolio.

At the time, Howell Industries was a minor subcontractor to General Dynamics, providing precision-milled widgets for its various military projects. It paid well, once the nuances of contract gouging were discerned, and made the eager nuevo-industrialist privy to information that could be leveraged to the advantage of one with the cunning, resources, ruthlessness, and immorality to use it. One such tidbit had come his way, and after months of calculation and clandestine negotiation, Howell was ready to execute his scheme and harvest his reward, if he could keep his opportunity secret from the other hyenas of his clan, and obtain the assistance of a capable man with knowledge of the Pacific Operating Theater.

The man Howell encountered was less than hoped for, and certainly less than his friend Wild Bill Donovan had portrayed. He found it improbable that the bloated, pasty, palsied wretch before him was once a thunderbolt-quick Spartan whose nerve and wit outmatched a flotilla of bloodthirsty Japanese prowlers. He was dismayed to consider that the fate of months of planning and manipulation might rely on the ruin lolling uncomprehending before him. But, due to the immediacy and confidentiality of the situation, his options were severely limited. Howell did what he did well; he improvised.

By necessity, Thurston Howell III was a better student of human nature than the OSS overseers who had preceded him in pondering the psyche of Jonas Grumby Jr. After only a couple days attending to Grumby's convalescence, he detected an unreported subtlety to the sailor's persona, one he determined to leverage for his purposes. Without explanation or fanfare, Ensign Jonas Grumby and a young, slender orderly, Seaman Gilligan Davis, were assigned to the *USS Indianapolis*, with unspecified duties.

With Gilligan

The duo made themselves useful on the ship, eager to assist in even the most mundane or tedious chores. Grumby's despair waned, now that he had a little buddy to distract him from the lack of consequential tasks, and Pacific warfare served to be adequate substitute for his vice, adrenaline weaning him from the more potent opiates he had been abusing. He performed honorably in the Battle of Okinawa, controlling the damage from a Kamikaze hit and rescuing the inexperienced Seaman Davis when the addled youth wandered toward the line of fire at an inopportune moment. In short order, he regained his "Skipper" honorarium with his new crew.

VE Day was a bittersweet celebration for all combatants in the Pacific Theater, and especially so for the crew of the *Indianapolis* as it limped into San Francisco Bay for underwater damage repair. The consolation that the Axis was crumbling completely was offset by the grim realization of the impending, destructive struggle ahead, before victory was assured. Every American waging war in the East faced with dread the duty ahead.

Howell was at the Navy Yard on Mare Island to greet the pair, and assured them that a significant assignment was forthcoming. Grumby faced the future with renewed resolve and an odd, fatalistic optimism. He used the eight weeks in dry dock training his ward, and Gilligan responded to the attention with enthusiasm. By the time the ship departed for its next mission, among its crew were a pair of blooded wolves, eager for an exposed throat.

Little Boy

The *Indianapolis*'s next mission was its infamous last. Cradled in a hold capable of carrying much more was the nuclear fission bomb nick-

named "Little Boy", destined for the island Tinian of the Marianas group, the bomb bay of the *Enola Gay*, and eventually to ground zero, Hiroshima. Attending the device was a small cadre of technicians who stayed below decks, minimizing contact with the Navy crew. Had the crew been allowed to observe the civilians in the hold, they may have remarked that one of them seemed out of place: a dapper man somewhat older than the rest – but still the only one *sans* spectacles—clumsily trying to stay out of the way as the others swarmed around their precious weapon. In a brief stopover in Oahu, an equally unusual cargo was added to the hold; a small schooner emblazoned with the deceptively benign name "Minnow".

Encounters

Said *Minnow* offloaded four days and 2500 miles later, plunked into the isolation of the Pacific Ocean under cover of a cloud-shrouded night. The *Indianapolis* churned nonchalantly away, and soon the schooner was bobbing alone in the dark, the only sound interrupting the amiable pat of waves on wood was the gentle chirp of a radio transmitter, casting out an encoded mating call for its mysterious suitors.

The *Minnow*'s allure was irresistible. Soon a plump paramour from the briny deep broke surface less than 10 yards to stern. If Howell wasn't expecting it, he wouldn't have been able to tell the ship's allegiance, but Grumby's trained eye discerned a Japanese submarine by the shape of the dark silhouette it cast against the sea's mottled gray. Since Howell wasn't startled by its appearance, the Skipper resisted his first impulse on encountering an enemy craft in the middle of the ocean in the middle of the night. In short order, three Japanese officers were on the deck of the schooner.

The ensuing conversation was bizarre. Grumby was needed to provide translation

between Howell and his Nipponese clients, but both parties spoke obliquely, hoping to conceal the true nature of the conversation from their interpreter, while still trying to make their point across languages that failed to share even a common alphabet. With growing irritation, Grumby discerned that Howell's earlier, sketchy outline of the mission was largely fiction. Instead of an American POW or secret of national security, it appeared that the Japanese were offering only paper: Swiss currency that was destined not to the safety of the free world but only to the interior of the Howell coffers. By the time he and his partner Davis were dispatched below decks to produce the crate that was the apparent reason for the sinister rendezvous, he was determined to ruin the bitter transaction.

His sense of betrayal justified the breach of security of opening the top of the crate to determine what evil cargo Howell was selling to America's enemy. He was only mildly shocked to discover a hitherto-unknown third atomic bomb, dubbed "Baby Sister" by its developers. As opposed to its siblings Fat Man and Little Boy, it was tiny enough for two men to easily carry, a deceptively trim package that masked its lethal force. Grumby resolved that the weapon wouldn't leave the *Minnow* in the possession of any of freedom's enemies, be they Occidental-eyed soldiers or devious native-born industrialists turned cynical opportunists.

The simple plan he formed while hauling the crate up to the deck – kill everyone, sink everything – was foiled before he could initiate it. At the same second that the crate thumped to the deck and Grumby crouched to attack the nearest Japanese, the boat was rocked by a nearby explosion. Everyone turned to see the dark submarine burst into fiery splinters and pirouette in bubbling shards down toward the distant sea bed. Through the smoke they saw another surfaced submarine – this one bearing a proud red Hammer and Sickle of the Soviet fleet. Howell

shared Grumby's shock at the appearance of another suitor for the *Minnow*, and his actions showed that he doubted the good intentions of their ostensible American allies. Grumby hastily instructed Gilligan to help him stow the crate in a corner of the *Minnow's* steerage housing, then joined Howell and his Eastern conspirators on the foredeck, demonstrating to the 50-caliber machine guns in the turrets of the Communist boat that they intended no resistance.

The time necessary for the Russian contingent to launch a craft and board his boat gave Grumby all the time he needed to formulate a new plan – kill almost everyone, sink almost everything. He watched with patience and the cool calculation of an experienced assassin while the tools of his plan – four armed seamen and a substantial officer—ventured across choppy waters to him. The months of dry dock training and instruction bore fruit in the next 30 seconds. With a glance, Gilligan Davis received his orders and positioned himself to assist. The Russians boarded the *Minnow* and barked orders that were clear in their intent, if indiscernible by their language. The Skipper translated for the Japanese, instructing them to step forward to surrender and be taken into custody. They complied, hesitating only slightly when the Russians' guns raised against them as they advanced.

A stopwatch wouldn't have cleared 15 seconds timing the ensuing battle. Propelled by Gilligan's kick, one of the Japanese officers stumbled into a hail of Communist bullets. Before the other two servants of Hirohito could join him, two of their assailants fell, their eternal spirits separated from their mortal chalices before they settled to the deck. Jonas Grumby was unleashed, and it was appalling and terrific to witness. A third Soviet seaman surrendered his weapon unwillingly into his superior's care. The fourth, in a well-trained reaction to protect his commander, stepped conveniently into the

rifle's sights and was propelled overboard by an efficient, staccato barrage of metal forged from the same ground to which he claimed allegiance. Grumby knew that peril still existed in the form of the Soviet turret guns, but his plan readily accounted for them. A hand gesture instructed Davis to secure Howell below deck; traitors would be dispatched more leisurely than current circumstances allowed. A quick chop to the solar plexus evaporated any thought of resistance by the remaining Soviet officer. With haste made deceptive by his demeanor, Grumby hauled the only living Russian on the boat at gunpoint into the clear sight of anyone manning the submarine guns, and the message was clear. Any aggression toward the small schooner and Mother Russia would lose another son.

Grumby knew of only one conclusion to the predicament presented to him. Although he could hold off an attack in the immediate future, his small schooner wasn't up to the task of dispatching or eluding a pursuing submarine for long. Neither fight nor flight was an available option, so he adopted an alternative that in nature only lemmings seemed capable; triumph through self destruction. Gilligan replaced him at the pistol, and Grumby quick set about affecting his plan before his foes on the other ship could deduce it. Tearing open the crate, the master of ballistics and bombast set about determining how to trigger the Nuclear Age weeks before its planned debut, and in so doing evaporating both Japan's and Russia's desire to attain the power of the proton.

There's no doubt he would have been able to succeed, had he been giving a few more moments, but unexpected events again interceded, in the same fashion as before. This time it was the Communist submarine that exploded into dark shards, and Grumby thrilled in the hope that it was a red, white, and blue torpedo that dispatched it to Messr. David Jones. It wasn't so, as he was aghast to witness. From the tortured sea

rose the ruin of the Japanese craft, impossibly surfacing and spewing gallons of briny bile from jagged holes. The shabby submarine continued to rise, a mechanical Kraken clearing the ocean completely and wobbling into the South Pacific night. It glowed from within, neon-sharp light spewing from every gap in its masticated hull. Not for the first time and certainly not for the last, the dispassionate extraterrestrial visitors that George Hindley would encounter a decade later in the dry Arizona desolation were poking around in human affairs, curious about its fledgling attempts at harnessing a humble hydrogen atom.

Not since the lurching nightmares of his rehabilitation did Grumby feel so helpless, impaled like a Luna Moth on lances of impossibly bright light. Years of training and experience were supplanted in an instant by the surreal attack on his senses. He felt mesmerized by the cutting lights slicing staccato across the deck of the *Minnow*, a warm glow of surrender starting bullseye in his forehead and rippling throughout his body. He was pleasantly compelled toward the below hatch, for what purpose he couldn't discern, or care.

His pleasant reverie of compliance was interrupted as he reached the below-decks hatch, when he encountered the traitor Howell, his smug, self-controlled rictus behind a pair of dark glasses, revealing that the extent of his betrayal transcended even to the otherworldly. Gilligan stood unsteadily behind the grinning tycoon, wrapped in the same web of control that ensnared the Skipper. Through the fog of alien control, Grumby realized that everything that had transpired to that moment had been meticulously choreographed by the Bob Fosse of malice, Thurston Howell III.

Gilligan was fully entranced. The bright light from the alien craft enveloped his placid face, and it was obvious that his always-compliant personality was completely overwhelmed by the aliens' influence. Howell maintained his distinctive grin,

his eyes shielded from the worst of the Machiavellian glare by the glasses. Grumby knew that only because his back was turned to the light was he able to offer any resistance to its influence; even the reflected light was powerful enough to control him should he break concentration.

Grumby knew that when wit couldn't win day, his mighty right arm might suffice, so he engaged that powerful weapon yet again in the cause of justice. In a single motion, he relieved Howell of his protective glasses and grabbed the traitor by his ascot, lifting him in the air. A strangled cry of pain emanated from the industrialist as his eyes were plunged into the excruciating laser lights. Grumby hurled the man toward the hovering ship. Gilligan was tumbled none-too-delicately to the hold by a calculated hip check, and Grumby—clad in protective lenses and righteous fury – turned to face his confused *ersatz* captors.

Discretion was apparently an important word in the alien dictionary, because the mangled ship was a full kilometer in the air and rising by the time Grumby – again the full-fledged Skipper of his craft – reached the *Minnow's* foredeck and stood over the curled and spastic Howell. Within seconds the alien craft was gone, and the only evidence of the confrontation not hidden by the blackness of space or the equally-dark sea were a few shards of floating debris.

The Wreck of the Indianapolis

It was days later before the *Minnow* was reunited with her parent ship near Guam, during the *Indianapolis's* return from Tinian Island, where she had delivered her terrible cargo. Howell's conspirators in the crew were shaken to see their leader – his eyes covered with grimy gauze – reduced to blind, babbling incoherence. A single steely glare from Jonas Grumby sufficed to prevent them from resisting his instructions.

Howell was to be left under military guard on Guam, and Grumby and Davis – still in a zombified state of benign compliance—would return to American soil, there to get the medical care the seaman required. After seeing to his partner, Grumby would initiate treason proceedings against the tycoon, if he could ever find someone who would believe his incredible story.

It was another miscalculation on the Skipper's part, one he realized two days later when he was awakened by the shudder of Japanese torpedoes slamming into the hull of the *Indianapolis*. Grumby lead his ward into the South Pacific waters, away from the wreckage of the ill-fated ship, bobbing with a thousand shipmates, tempting *GI hors d'oeuvres* for the South Pacific sharks. Not for an instant did he doubt that the Nippon missiles that sank the proud ship had been guided by the far-reaching hand of Thurston Howell III. As he waited for rescue in the indifferent ocean, he swore to himself and his pagan gods to rectify his error by ridding the mortal realm of the cunning scoundrel.

His resolve was no less dire, although obscured by heat stroke, waterlogged exhaustion, and desperate thirst, 60 hours later, still floating amid the wreckage and increasing gore, waiting for rescue. He hung suspended above fate in his sagging life jacket, supporting Gilligan's limp head against briny surrender. Each moment in the water was torturous anticipation, waiting for the sound of salvation or the sensation of a shark's jagged surgery. In the 62nd hour of his watery purgatory, he felt a gentle tug from his partner. A flash of hope was obliterated instantly as he witnessed aghast a sharp-snouted shark pull Gilligan Davis from his feeble grasp, drain the seaman's waning life with a single snap of its jaws, and discard the ragged corpse in search for more tender fare. Grumby knew he'd never forget the look of placid, gentle surrender on Gilligan's face as his lifeless body floated into the arms of Triton.

Jonas Grumby was one of the 316 men out of a crew of 1,199 who survived to be rescued, after four more days of helpless floating, waiting to be the next delicacy on the Davy Jones buffet.

Return To Darkness

Thurston Howell proved himself more wary than his foe, refusing to underestimate the righteous resolve that Grumby might possess even after such an ordeal. Three days into his convalescence, the Skipper was awakened by soft footsteps retreating from his bedside. In the gloaming dawn he saw an unexpected addition to the medications at his side table: a thumb-sized ball of opium.

Two decades later, Grumby was in Hawaii, still navigating normally benign waters in the schooner *Minnow*, having transferred his indulgence in recreational opiates to more-accessible rum, running sight-seeing charters and occasionally smuggling cargo of unknown but undoubtedly sinister content between the islands and Costa Rica for an unidentified but nevertheless familiar client. Little was left of the physical and cerebral powerhouse that ruled the shadows of the WWII South Pacific. Twenty years of indolence and indulgence had molded him into an affable, roly-poly seadog, slow-witted but friendly, the perfect guide for mainland tourists. Never the one to needlessly waste a resource, Howell had anchored his talons securely and used the Skipper as it suited his whims or needs, keeping him sufficiently sotted and destitute to make him a pliable and reliable, if somewhat inefficient, tool.

Gilligan II

Bob Deuschendorf was somewhat familiar with Grumby's history when he found himself on the rickety dock in Honolulu where the rag-tag *Minnow* was moored, lead there by an

unusual advertisement in a Central City newspaper. Although exotic vacations weren't completely unknown to the city elite, the *Herald Star's* hoi polloi clientele were as likely to use a coupon for 20% off airfare and a free 3-hour tour in Honolulu as they were to book passage on a Titanic recreation cruise. He knew a Howell feint when he read one on black and white – this coupon was an excuse to get Hinkley to Hawaii with plausible cause. Access to the CIA archive had revealed the Howell-Grumby connection, although the official record was exceedingly spotty as to events after their reunion on the deck of the *Indianapolis*. His own deductive ability and familiarity with the frailty of human nature served to prepare him to confront the skipper and extract from him what he knew about Howell's plans.

He had followed a series of archival notes, trans-Pacific cables and courier messages to the spot, and he had come prepared as befitting an agent of his capability. In place of the ruddy, disheveled beatnik stood a man seemingly taller and more fit. Clean-shaven, neatly groomed, with a lighter complexion, dressed in bright colors, he approached the schooner and her captain with a confidence that belied his caution. Having no fares for the day, the Skipper was deep in his cups, allowing the rum to overtake him and soften the knives of memory that assailed him. The younger agent greeted the Skipper with noncommittal regard, hoping the older man would set the tone for a conversation that he could react to. The Skipper looked up at the strapping youth standing over him, the sharp edges of light from the brutal afternoon Hawaiian sun adding to the day's rum-fog in obscuring his view. The bright figure in the center of the dark fog recalled a memory from a more vital time, and with the hope of delusion, the Skipper beseeched the character before him to fulfill his waking dream. With a voice cracked by years of resigned defeat, he blearily croaked a

one-word question: "Gilligan?"

The youth was ready, and reacted, although he had misheard. "Yes, it's me. Willy". Thus was born his new identity which he would retain for the ensuing years. After discovering his error in the days that followed, he acquired the scant documentation necessary to work without interference in Hawaii as Willy Gilligan, although the Skipper occasionally slipped into nostalgia and referred to him as Gilligan Davis. G encouraged the use of a one-word name, and those associating with him accommodated him readily. Within a few days it was as if Gilligan and the Skipper had been a team for all the long years since VJ Day, their full Christian names obscured by familiarity.

Even Howell, distracted by his own machinations and Gilligan's apparent goofy ineptitude, accepted the addition to the crew with little regard. It had been several years since he had personal contact with the Skipper, and if the man had adopted a stray in the intervening time, it was of no consequence. Indeed, the Skipper's confusion between the two Gilligans might be useful, and he hoped the youth would serve as the same stabilizing and sobering influence in the heat of action as his earlier namesake had been. It certainly seemed that he would be as easy to dispose of as the sailor had been.

Face To Face with Howell

G fought to maintain his composure on his first face-to-face confrontation with his prey, on the dock in Honolulu. He was wary of the lupine instinct of the apparently benign elder, camouflaged in flowered island garb and a dapper straw hat. He was careful to act attentive to his superior, without calling attention to his vigilant scrutiny of the man's words and mannerisms. He was fearful that Howell would recognize him as a fraud, taking the name of

Grumby's old colleague for some unrevealed opportunity. He needn't have worried. Howell's dismissal of the servant class was second nature to him, as it was to all blue-blooded children of the landed gentry.

There was also the oddness of the man's eyes. G knew the official version of the incident in the Pacific and Howell's injuries, and he also recalled references in Howell's dossier to a trait of often-humorous misidentification, but neither had prepared him for what he saw in the man's gaze. When he looked at something, Howell seemed to focus a few millimeters in front of them, as if all physical objects had a thick, gauzy aura that only he could see. Apparently, others had regarded the mannerism as simple myopia spiced with early-onset senile delusion, but the insightful sleuth concluded that it wasn't that Howell had poor eyesight, but that he saw objects somehow ... differently, other-worldly, extra-dimensionally. Combined with his disregard of any person or thing that he couldn't somehow use to his benefit, the vagueness of his personal presence impressed G as a poignant reinforcement of the Howell *mystique*.

Five Passengers

The *ersatz* Gilligan discerned Howell's general plan rather easily, as players began to arrive. First was Roy Hinkley, introduced as 'the Professor' with deliberation by Howell to distract from the notoriety the man's adopted name might attract. He was quickly dispatched below decks with his equipment, there to prepare his experiment. A day later Lovey Howell joined her husband, accompanied by a full dozen trunks of clothing, cash, and keepsakes. That she would bring so much for a relatively short Hawaiian vacation was vaguely accredited to the eccentricities of the wealthy by the few who would care. Lovey showed only minor annoyance to the appearance of Ginger Grant,

with her own clutch of trunks, which confirmed to Gilligan the depth and completeness of the Howell scheme. As they assembled on the pier on the morning of the fateful three-hour tour, he knew that without his intervention Howell, with the Professor in tow, would be safely away, most likely with a weapon of terrible power to serve as passport to a life of comfort in a country with ambitions of global supremacy. Gilligan didn't know which of Howell's women would survive to accompany him to his South American refuge, but he was certain that the other would meet an untimely death, drowned in a freak storm. Quite possibly, Howell had calculated a way to dispatch the Skipper as well, and his crewmate was certainly spare baggage best checked to the Hotel Briny Deep. To the outside world it would appear that all hands were lost, affording Howell the scant time he would need to disappear beyond the reach of his Federal pursuers.

The predicament before him, then, would be how to bring Howell to the justice he deserved. Adding to his dilemma was his fundamental mistrust of all governments, even his homeland, which could certainly be ranked among the countries with ambitions of global supremacy. Should he resign himself with simply preventing the *Minnow* from departing and deliver Howell to any government authority, he was sure the wily Werewolf of Wall Street would finagle a pardon, using the Stormbringer as his Monopoly card to freedom. Better that the device join the Midas stone, the water engine, and the perpetual motion machine in the lore of lost man-made miracles. The Professor would have to join the controller at the bottom of the sea, because although it was obvious the man lacked the insight to have invented the weapon, he might have studied it thoroughly enough to describe its essential mechanism to heads eggier than his own. Jonas Grumby, although harmless outside the Howell sphere of influence, could

find ablution for the decades of CIA-tainted blood on his hands through a final atonement. Gilligan regretted the extreme penance Lovey and Ginger were to pay to their relatively benign sins, but theirs would be a sacrifice trumped by his own, because he decided he would join them on the seabed, to be humbled before the immortal magistrate.

He made his arrangements in the days before the *Minnow* was to begin its final excursion, and it likely would have been the final episode in the sleazy Howell saga, if not for the appearance of a petite brunette, bearing a valise of tight clothing and a coupon for a free cruise.

And Mary Ann

Had she been born a generation earlier, or to a household more destitute, Mary Ann Summers may have grown into an entirely different woman. Kansas farm life remained hard-scrabble during her childhood, but not nearly the relentless toil of her mother's time. She had an attentive father and three faithful brothers, affording her the privilege of avoiding the baking, back-wrenching, field labor of her homestead, spending the long days at the less arduous toil of the barnyard and kitchen. She retained an innocent loveliness beyond her pubescence, and her stern male protectors kept human predators at bay, keeping her free of corruption as she matured into a Kansas sunflower; her superficial delicacy belying a resolute inner strength.

Her parents and siblings doted on the lovely girl, so much so that it was surprising how relatively unspoiled she remained. It was difficult for the envy of her female contemporaries to sustain in the wake of her fundamental sweetness. Potential suitors were encouraged by her beatific smile, if daunted to strict chivalry by the intimidation of four strong men, farmhand strong and blood kin loyal. Her childhood was one of happy virtue, restrained privilege, and

pleasant occupation. She was the youngest cheerleader in Cowley County to have pierced ears, but even the bible-belted dowagers of the community excused the indulgence when they saw how innocently delighted she was with the adornments. A mid-summer visit to relatives in Nevada fetched her a beauty contest trophy, but she remained refreshingly self-effacing with her peers. Mary Ann Summers was everyone's sweetheart, everyone's confidant, an amber jewel of the Kansas plain.

In her 16th year, personal tragedy tested her fiber. The tornado was a fluke in that its precursors were unusually short or absent. One moment it was a typical bright Sunday afternoon on the small patch of green half-way between Winfield and Horners Corners, if perhaps the air was drier and more still than usual. Next, in the time it took her to draw a half-dozen panicked breaths, Mary Ann watched aghast as a fierce, dark corkscrew hurdled from the heavens with eerie accuracy, plucking brother Zeke from his tractor and sweeping the twins Hunk and Hickory out of the field. All three were slammed into the sturdy farmhouse, their broken carcasses shuffled like misfortunate knaves of hearts into the devil's deck of debris. Her parents were at the base of that ruin, Mary Ann realized in horror, pierced and crushed by the shattered bones of their lifelong habitat. The barn in which she was sheltered, still holding the milk bucket she had just finished filling, was untouched by the devastation scant yards in front of her; the chickens scurrying at her feet remained calm, feathers unruffled. And just as suddenly the twister was gone, off to ruin other lives.

With aplomb that did Kansas proud, Mary Ann survived the heartbreak of that horrible summer day with a stoic cheer that belied her despair. Her father's brother George, with help from her spinster aunt Martha, attended to her care, appending her inherited farmland to George's own. She lacked the will to continue

the farmer's vocation, so found employment at the Winfield General Store, where she displayed an aptitude for bookkeeping. Within a year of the calamity, the nervous folk of Cowley County could breathe a sigh of relief; their favored flower wouldn't wither in despair, although her bloom would long be tainted from tragedy.

But her family catastrophe had changed her, perhaps more than her community could tell. Gone was any faith in stability of family or home. With the winds of that freak twister went her aspirations for a traditional Kansas life: early marriage, flocks of progeny, regular devotion to husband and God – all seemed too transient, too ordinary, too unreliable to her. A darker desire, a lust for adventure and unseemly pleasure, dawned and welled within her.

She was on stage at the Cowley County Fair, accepting a blue ribbon for her coconut cream pie, when she noticed an apparition in dazzling white that seemed to levitate out of the dusky farmboy crowd. It was Horace Higgenbotham, home on leave from Navy training in North Carolina, bound for an aircraft carrier docked in the exotic climes of Hawaii. Horace had left the basketball court of Horners Corners High School in his junior year, apparently overwhelmed by the call of the sea, Ishmael's spiritual progeny. They had noticed each other before, he in HCHS gold and blue, she pom-pomed and pretty in purple and white, pride of the Winfield HS pep squad. Innocent flirtations across the waxed floors of rival high school gymnasiums didn't have time to blossom into anything more substantial, but both remembered deep, serious eyes and disarming, dazzling smiles and lithe, enticing bodies. He held her gaze throughout the brief award ceremony, and was delighted when he saw her descend from her summit, glide toward him, and accept his offered arm.

It was likely the panache of piracy in his uniform, and the allure of adventure embodied

in a man who had recently bathed in one ocean and was destined for another, that distinguished Seaman Higgenbotham from the phalanx of hayseed suitors orbiting the Venus of the plains. Mary Ann graced her gallant attendant with singular consideration that was the envy of the 14-to-80 year old male population of Eastern Kansas. Horace was grateful that the intimidation of the Summers males was absent, no matter how distressing the circumstances. Equally fortunate was a subtle, new ... *aggression* he detected in the doe-eyed girl, a rarity in the Kansas belles of her generation. And especially delightful was her acquiescence – even her eagerness – in accepting an invitation for a moonlight stroll.

It's no mystery why weddings were popular about 90 days after the Cowley County Fair, and why birth rates spiked about six months after that. At no other time, in no other place, did opportunity and enthusiasm coalesce so efficiently, and otherwise unimaginable carnality seemed not only feasible, not only acceptable, but *necessary*. Frothy maids, damp from the energetic frenzy of the milking competition, wondered how to flex their newfound muscle memory now that all the udders were empty. Bleating lambs and calves in the livestock pens, lovingly groomed and charmingly civil, deceived visitors into considering the joys of parenthood, which lead to the consideration of the delicious rewards of the attendant journey. Strapping boys, brandishing fat brown corn dogs sizzling from the fryer and spiked on foot-long sticks, offered tittering girls a sample, and the generous young women, nibbling cumulus collections of cotton candy that left an endearing gooey mess on face and fingers, dimpled in appreciation. Through the heady humidity of such primordial pheromones did Mary Ann Summers and Horace Higgenbotham stroll hand in hand, a portrait in gingham and linen, dizzy with the possibility of the evening.

The Winfield guardians of virtue were preoccupied with quilting competitions and baked good assessments, but even the distracting cacophony of the fair couldn't completely camouflage the mischievous machinations on its boundaries. Aunt Martha especially, still weighted with the recent responsibility of shepherding her ward into virtuous womanhood, was sensitive to the call of the wild resounding from the dim edge of the fair. There was no corporeal reason why she selected a particular time to put down her needle and go search for her niece, but her instincts were as perfect as a stalking horned owl. In the dappled shadows of an agreeable cottonwood tree, Mary Ann was attending her sailor, clumsily navigating the 13 buttons of his broadfall bellbottoms. Lucky 13, lucky Horace, lucky Mary Ann. Martha called out just as lucky button seven fell to a determined assault, and faster than Horace could have croaked "down periscope", the fair was closed for the season. Thus did Mary Ann Summers reluctantly retain her chastity for another day.

Hasty, urgent promises were exchanged the next day, as Horace boarded the Santa Fe Railroad Cornhusker Express, bound for El Paso, Denver, and points west. The girl had already dedicated herself toward contriving a way to continue her thwarted mission, the virtue of patience be damned. The long days at the General Store became a dirge. Her senior year of school, once anticipated as a springboard adventure to career or college, now was a mundane barrier to her heart's desire. Hawaii was a half-world distant, a lifetime different, and only with her fiercest determination could she hold it in the realm of imaginable possibility. She slogged through the days, writing copious letters to her sailor boy, receiving infrequent, short, but enticing replies. Graduation came, which only left her with more fretful hours to be preoccupied with unfeasible plans for spanning the continent and ocean separating her from her para-

mour. A beauty pageant scholarship to S Peter Prior Junior College was accepted with distracted grace, but in her heart Mary Ann hoped to be far away from the Midwest before the fall. In late July, her desperation grew. A letter from Horace – the first in six weeks – told of his imminent shipping out; his vessel was finally ready for a tour of the Indo-China waters off Viet Nam.

One of Mary Ann's first innovations when she started at the General Store was to import an eclectic assortment of newspapers from neighboring regions, so to expand the horizons of her patrons and give the store a cosmopolitan élan. They were a success, once she determined it was better to rent out a single dog-eared copy for a penny, for in-store perusal over coffee, than to try to wrest a whole nickel for a take-home issue. One day a tiny B&W ad in the *Herald Star* presented her with a solution to her ennui: a coupon for 20% off airfare and a free 3-hour tour in Honolulu from a Central City travel agency. Mary Ann determined that her college savings were enough to cover the discounted airfare that would propel her to the fullness of womanhood. As to the aftermath of the journey, the usually-practical girl was willing to leave to fate.

So it was that in August she found herself in Honolulu with a single suitcase of clothing, some it more daring that she would have worn on the farm, wandering across the Pearl Harbor Naval Base, looking for someone who was interested in her plight. The long trip added to her frustration with not knowing how to proceed. The base was a maze of unfamiliar habitations and protocol. The girl was singularly unprepared; nothing in her 18 years of human experience was of any use, she felt. She set down her suitcase on a boardwalk, sat on its edge, and gazed over the somber waters of the harbor, hoping for inspiration. It wasn't long before she realized she did have experience and abilities that could assist her cause; a pretty and sincere young lady surrounded by young men far from home and eager for the suc-

cor of her smile. One such strapping lad directed her to the office of housing, and assured her that should Seaman Higgenbotham turn up deployed, discharged, or lost at sea, he would be a willing surrogate. The ensign at the desk was equally charming and sympathetic as he informed her he couldn't find her sailor on the roster of barracks assignments. The perplexed girl turned away from the desk, desperately considering her next move, when the ensign called out that he had found a matching name – a name too unique for even the expansive USN ranks to have more than one stationed at the Pearl – on the married personnel housing list.

She saw the pert blonde from a distance. She could imagine the woman's honeysuckle drawl, as enchanting in its own way as her own sweet Midwestern lilt. She could see what attracted Horace to the girl, a strawberries and cream rival to her cherry pie a' la mode. It was the energetic tow-headed toddler that broke her heart, testimony to Horace's marital status during their night together less than a year before. She didn't wait for a confrontation with the cad, and didn't see any use in shattering his wife's tranquility. If their county fair encounter was anything more than impulsive opportunism, he would be exposed soon enough. She silently wished the family well and turned away, to return to Kansas as soon as she could arrange passage, there to face self-humiliation with the same strength that had served her well the other time her life had been shattered by preternatural forces.

The soonest she could obtain an airline seat back to the mainland was a dozen hours away, so Mary Ann Summers – already healing herself with self-confidence and resolute optimism – decided that a three-hour boat tour was as good a way as any to distract her disheveled cerebellum from darker dwelling. So there she was, a pretty as a Kansas sunflower, cheerily inquiring if she could cash in her coupon for the morning excursion.

A 3-Hour Tour

Gilligan offered ineffectual opposition to the Skipper's and Howell's acceptance of the extra fare. The Skipper, in full jolly-tour guide mode, didn't think twice about imperiling an innocent within the plot. He had hardly considered how the next 180 minutes would turn out, so his besotted libido considered the Kansas cutie as simply another in a line of damsels that would make his day's duty a bit more pleasant than usual. Howell was delighted that his coupon subterfuge had netted such a lovely bonus. Gilligan wondered if, should he be able to coerce cooperation for the lass in the next few hours, Howell might change his plans, dispatching both Ginger and Lovey to the eternal preservation of Neptune's vacation spa, and building a new life of tanned babies and transplanted Midwestern values in Costa Rica with Mary Ann.

Gilligan was walloped with a double thunderbolt no less powerful than if it had come from the Stormbringer device. He was struck by the fresh beauty of the girl, so much more wholesome than the decade older and infinitely more world-weary beauty of Ginger Grant. Smitten as never before, he realized that he couldn't execute his plan for justice and risk Mary Ann. Acceptance of collateral damage be damned, this innocent wouldn't be a final victim charged to Howell's ledger. His mind raced for an acceptable compromise as the *Minnow* cast off and sailed to her clear blue Pacific destiny.

The sight-seeing cruise was well past the 150 minute mark before there was any sight other than the frothy mottle-gray ocean to see, but only the Kansas farm girl paid any attention to the pod of dolphins performing majestic *grand jetés* over the sharp crests of the deep waves. Gilligan had eyes only for the Kansas farm girl, hoping for divine intervention to his complex dilemma. After four hours at sea, Mary Ann asked the Skipper how soon they would be

returning to port, appreciative of the extended tour but concerned about her return flight. Grumby assured her that their island was just over the horizon; that he had circled around an hour before and they were headed home. She wasn't nautical, but Mary Ann knew that the sun moved the same over ocean blue and golden plains. It was in their faces in the morning when they cast off, and now in the afternoon it was directly behind them; they hadn't changed direction since they left the bay. A palpable concern began to seep through the schooner, as even those who imagined they knew their destiny began to harbor doubt.

Thurston Howell III was the first to notice the tiny nub on the eastern horizon, a dark dot against the gloaming. On his instructions, the Skipper adjusted the *Minnow's* course to an interception route. The Professor broke out of his affected reverie and climbed below decks to begin his electronic incantation. By the time the Costa Rican cruiser was a discernable shape, the Southeastern Pacific sky was overrun by angry gray clouds, dark and thunderous as a stampede of dusty sheep on the New Zealand plains. Gilligan's moment of truth was approaching, and for the first time in his professional career, he wasn't sure what he was going to do.

The weather started getting rough. The tiny ship was tossed. The cruiser wobbled toward its goal with drunken-sailor intent, and the *Minnow* danced coyly toward her suitor. The Skipper took full command, ordering his mate to dispatch the passengers below deck. Gilligan was surprised that it was *Mrs.* Howell who resisted his direction. She lingered at the boat's railing as he guided the others below, gazing off to a middle distance between the boats. Even with his natural suspicion and limber imagination, he was surprised at what she did next. Had the Skipper not been preoccupied with keeping his craft afloat, he may have deduced the significance of the act. In the lashing rain, under an

angry, boiling sky, in the gauzy dusk, she pulled an elaborate pair of dark sunglasses out of her deep purse, and donned them with deliberation.

And His Wife

In its time, the disappearance of Eunice Wentworth was as sensational as the abduction of young Charlie Lindbergh Jr. would be three decades later. That it ended happily and with relatively little scandal is one possible reason why it is all but forgotten. The Wentworth family was old money, part of the gentry that learned over the generations that privacy and civil public behavior were key to maintaining the wealth that their cunning robber baron ancestry had ravaged from a disadvantaged hoi polloi. If he were the type to adopt mottos, Winston Wentworth's would have been "keep a low profile". Evidence of that philosophy was that there was exactly one photograph of his daughter he could share with the police when the girl went missing: a formal family, with his nattily-coiffed toddler at stage center, a serious girl sitting formally in her mother's lap. Her father doted on her, nicknaming her "Lovely" as an indication of his devotion. Siblings shortened it to "Lovey", and it was that moniker that she adopted, even before she went missing.

The extended Wentworth and Menninger families were picnicking in Martha's Vineyard in the late summer of 1905, a seasonal ritual. Dozens of children, the next generation of indolence and privilege, were playing hide-and-seek in the lengthening evening shadows of the woods. As they gathered for role call at the end of the day, they were initially more exasperated than worried that young Lovey turned up missing. The girl was more clever and mischievous than her peers, possibly due to the relative lack of inbreeding along the immediate branch of her family tree. She would often petulantly remain in her ingenious hiding places long after

the olly-olly-all-hands-free if she felt the seekers were remiss in their duty. Only after the adults joined the search for the missing girl an hour later did real concern begin to set in, and by the time the harvest moon rose above the tree tops, her parents were absolutely frantic. By Monday, the police, park rangers, hounds, and press were all part of the search, but there was no sign of where a five-year-old dressed for a summer picnic may have gone. Her siblings and cousins could only report that they last saw her scampering into a stand of trees. Reports from a few that they witnessed a brilliant flash of light, like a silent firework mortar, were attributed to excessive dramatization to placate the encouragement of the yellow journalists.

The drama ended within the week, when the girl appeared, light-hearted and none the worse for wear, on the doorstep of the Wentworth summer home, several miles from the picnic grounds. No ransom note or any other communication from her presumed abductors had ever been received, and Eunice was vague in her recollection of her adventure. To hear her tell it, she'd had a pleasant nap, woke up on the cool grass of her front lawn, and came inside to use the privy. At the encouragement of Winston Wentworth, the police let the matter drop, especially after he dispensed monetary and libational rewards of gratitude to everyone in the search party. The man was gratified that his most precious prize was safe and happily back to her mother's bosom, and preferred to allow her mysterious disappearance remain a dramatic chapter of his family's lore. The only difference he could detect in his daughter's personality was that her bemused otherness—a distance from the mundane uncommon in someone her age – seemed even more extreme.

It was her eyes that struck her parents the most. Although anyone who hadn't known the girl intimately prior to the incident would be

hard-pressed to attribute any odd about them, both her parents noticed something vaguely different about their shading and shape. Maybe it was how Eunice used them; she seemed to focus a few inches ahead of the objects of her gaze. As she grew up, her parents would often have her vision checked, but doctors insisted it was perfect.

The incident was reduced to an interesting anecdote by the time the girl was debutantable. Lovey was a singular beauty; bright, witty, and charming. She seemed young and timeless at the same time, possessing both the jubilation of youth and an ancient wisdom. Her quirkiness was refreshing to many of her suitors, too used to the tedium of the usual pre-finished herd of socialites that was their usual selection. How she chose Thurston Howell III from the herd of available mates was inexplicable at the time. There was little distinguish him; his nose was too big to call him handsome, and his background was indistinctive from any other man who inherited a rickety family business from a second generation of inept management. It was unclear at the time she met him whether Thurston would allow the law of momentum to dispatch Howell Industries to the dustbin of entrepreneurial obscurity, or if he could transform the business to meet the demands of time and culture. It's simple from hindsight to see that hitching her wagon to his rising star was the perfect move, but credit should be given that she could see the man's feral potential before opportunity would make it manifest.

Their courtship was quick and efficient, but not absent of joy and passion. Granted that the union was convenient to both of them, but there was also evidence of true love and perfect compatibility, something both sets of parents had despaired long before. Although Howell's pedigree was less than stellar, Lovey's parent's made sure the young man was welcomed to the bosom of the combined Wentworth and Menninger clans. The wedding was quiet, in

keeping with the Wentworth obsession with discretion, but was still considered a significant social event. Besides the east coast coterie of wealth, the guest list included several of the police officers who had participated in her hide-and-seek adventure the long years before, and the freshly-appointed head of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the dapper John Edgar Hoover. Hoover, a family friend of the Menninger's, had at one time been listed among Lovey's suitors, but although they maintained a familial affection, neither was particularly interested in fanning those embers. Lovey knew her friend Edgar well enough, though, to be non-plussed with his wedding gift: a nickel-plated two-shot derringer with *fleur-de-lis* engraving.

Lovey settled into a comfortable marriage, enjoying her husband's financial success and allowing him his peccadilloes so long as the Wentworth discretion was maintained. If she influenced his personal or professional activities more than the average society wife, it was so subtle as to escape the attention of any observer. Any theory that she was assigned to him by extramarital forces—otherworldly or federal—so she could guide him toward an unsavory destiny in the fullness of time, was patently ridiculous; there was no evidence of anything more than spousal support over the four decades between their wedding day and the moment of truth on the violent Pacific waves.

Encounters

The moment of truth on the violent Pacific waves came when the two sea craft were within a league of each other. On the wave-lashed deck, the Skipper was recipient of a *déjà vu* moment, when a crab-like aerial craft, by all appearances only moments escaped from its WWII encounter, dissected the distance between himself and his Costa Rican cohorts. It somehow came from above and below, to and fro, all at

the same time, in a mushroom of brightness that transcended light. The hulking leviathan hung in the sky scant feet above the roiling waves, dripping with sea foam and malice.

The Skipper had borne witness to several sinkings in his career, and every one had its own gristly schedule. Never, though, did he see a craft the size of the Costa Rican cruiser dispatched beneath the sea so instantaneously. Except for the whirlpool in its wake, the Skipper would have been unsure which direction the ship had gone. But the scant seconds of its submersion were all he needed. Two decades of purposelessness were shrugged from his shoulders like an unneeded polar coat, and Jonas Grumby Jr., the terror of South Pacific, stood at the helm of his worthy craft, and woe to any creature, terrestrial or otherwise, who he would regard as an enemy. The eerie light that swept across the *Minnow* presented him to his adversaries in full glory.

Gilligan returned to the upper deck to a scene even more fantastic than his capable imagination had conjured. A decade of considering the implausible had served him well, though, and he readily adapted. He assessed that Grumby was in control of the confrontation, so elected to hang back and observe, ready to respond to command or circumstance.

Lovey Howell gave him opportunity. As the Skipper was squinting and snarling at the approaching alien craft, beckoning them toward his eager grasp, she steadied herself on the rolling deck and pointed at his back with what appeared to Gilligan to be an extraneous metal finger. He didn't wait to consciously register the woman's motion before he acted. Before she could tighten her fist, he lunged the width of the schooner and deflected her aim. The genteel pop of the gun's discharge was lost in the din of the storm, and it wasn't until days later, when he found a neat, round, pinky-sized hole in the boat canopy as he was using it to make a hammock, did Gilligan confirm that indeed a shot

had been fired. Lovey wrestled violently against him, but Gilligan was able to prevent her from firing again by jamming the webbing between his thumb and forefinger against the gun's hammer. Lovey slumped in defeat to the deck, and Gilligan studied his prize: a nickel-plated two-shot derringer with *fleur-de-lis* engraving.

The alien craft had apparently observed this background confrontation, and their memories were long enough that they knew that without covert assistance, Grumby's will surpassed the strength of their lightshow prestidigitation. Lovey Howell, disarmed but still safely spectacted, watched aghast as her alien confidants reversed their approach and began to float warily away from their prey.

They weren't retreating, however, merely adjusting tactics. With a sudden lurch the *Minnow* rose half out of the water and began to tow along behind the alien craft, as if steel cable attached them defiantly together. The *Minnow* became a flying fish, skimming across the violent waves, drawing less water than a rowboat, a thrashing hooked marlin.

Grumby ordered Gilligan below as he snatched the startled Mrs. Howell and carried her with him. He presented the woman to her startled husband, and the two familiars regarded each other with a new recognition. Ginger and Mary Ann were cringing, terrified, in one corner. With a glance and a nod of old-world courtesy, the Skipper assuaged their concern, and somehow they were assured that as long as he held the breath of life, they would be safe. Two steps across the tiny hold brought the Skipper to the Professor, still twiddling with more superstition than skill on the device that looked like little else than a white transistor radio one could buy in any nautical supply store. With quiet authority, the Skipper wrested the device from the Professor, assuring him that the time wasn't appropriate for weather reports, and they should save battery life for when the

storm passed.

He found Gilligan in the starboard aft, and smiled with bemusement as the youth tried to hide the torpedo he had secreted below a few days before. The device was aimed to propel itself through the hull of the *Minnow* just above the water line, tearing a hole large enough to sink her, and leaving the explosive warhead for the Costa Rican cruiser.

Gilligan acquiesced to his commander's stern insistence. The Skipper helped him aim the weapon, angling it to shoot several yards above the water, sighting by eye through a tiny porthole with a seasoned accuracy. The Skipper allowed his sidekick to make the final adjustments that armed the weapon, then slapped the rocket on the ass. With a deafening roar the torpedo smashed through the hull of his craft and flew unerringly into the guts of the alien juggernaut, exploding and spewing green-tinged flame into the boiling sky.

The craft was barely scratched by the attack, but its crew knew enough than to further challenge the resolve of this perplexing mortal. The tractor beam of light was extinguished, and once again the crablike vessel quit the curious blue marble without fulfilling its goal, whatever that may have been.

Castaways

Even before the *Minnow* had dropped heavily into the water, the Skipper was bounding onto the deck and was at the helm before his craft could be swamped. With a skill that was half seamanship, half brute will, he balanced his ship on the tightrope of calamity, leaning heavily to port, keeping her pierced wound well above the waterline. For long hours he kept his ship poised on a knife's edge, limping unsteadily through the stormy sea. Finally the unnatural storm was left behind, and the Skipper, with his fearless crewmate assisting, could steady his

ship to a calmer course, and get his bearings. The spacecraft had pulled him further out to sea than he had been in a long while, but as soon as he could see the stars, Grumby could make an assessment. His memory held the locations of more islands – many mere lore, others quite real – than any charted on the most exhaustive nautical maps of the time. In short order, he pinpointed their location, and soon was steering toward the nearest island memory served as plausibly existing. It took three such guesses and 36 grueling hours of sailing – his little buddy ever at his side—before he found habitable land, but in the end he brought the full complement of the *Minnow* safely to shore

Here on Gilligan's Isle

Their years on the island are well documented, as accurate – if with a more comical bent – as this tome relates their arrival. For distinct reasons, each person found it convenient or psychologically necessary to distort certain events of the hours before the shipwreck, preferring to accept each other's thin personas rather than accept the agonizing reality of the types of people they were stranded with. Each found it convenient – the man allowing it to be convenient – to confide in the bumbling inept Gilligan, and much of what has been related here was revealed to him during long tropical nights under the sway of amateurishly distilled rum. Several governments and other interested organizations attempted to covertly attain the secrets the uncharted island held, but the cunning of Jonas Grumby Jr. – who could deduce the tactics of any mortal adversary – and the guile of his little buddy G Robert Deutschendorf – who understood the dark heart of the men who sought his destruction – were too potent a combination to defeat.

So they whiled away the long years that the Howells and Hinkley were a threat to global political stability, until other sinister scientists

developed their own devices that could equal the fury of the Monarch/Stormbringer device in destructiveness, if with less grace. The duo did their best to charm the two young women caught up in the circumstances, whose sins hardly deserved their penance. And, all told, the fifteen years spent on the island were hardly the worst life that could have been forced upon them.

Ginger Grant, free of the external influences of fame and lust, found within herself an inner strength, self reliance, and concern for others that Hollywood would never have allowed her. Mary Ann, free of the embarrassment of her youthful indiscretion, found a new, if oddly-assembled, family that she could nurture and take solace within. The Professor found that his practical knowledge as a craftsman and amateur scientist made him more useful than the affectation of deep scientific knowledge could have. The Howells never knew if the new freedom and deepened affection they felt for each other was the lifting of some alien bondage, but they were content to revel in each other, absent the distractions that wealth and social standing had imposed on them.

Rescue

It was J. Edgar Hoover's demise in 1972 that brought their errant agent back to the attention of the FBI. Among other, somewhat more embarrassing artifacts in his private files, Associate Director Mark Felt found a file concerning a loaner operative who had left a cryptic report about doomsday weapons before disappearing in Hawaii. Minor detective work – assisted by a new era of reluctant CIA cooperation necessitated by Nixon's monkey business –

revealed that there might still be seven ragged fugitives of Cold War shenanigans, stranded on a not-so-deserted island. Felt was quick to take honorable action.

Their rescue was unheralded and carefully negotiated, G's final selfless act. Over the years, important components of the Stormbringer were cast to the sea, scattered across distance and time so that any prospect of recovery and reassembly would be a fool's quest. Secure that Hinkley's limited understanding of the weapon made him useless to anyone with insidious intent, and that the Howells were *humana non grata* with their almond-eyed consorts, G secured salvation by assuring his sentries that his active-duty days were done. The seven left their hospitable exile and adopted discrete lives, satisfied that the few who regarded them at all held for them little more than benign affection for the sillier era they represented.

Ultimately, G. Robert Deuschendorf was not surprised that his last duty was his finest, and that his quest to save the others from themselves and the world from an unknown threat was finer than any assignment entailing destruction and shadowy purpose. Bob Denver – the adopted name of his twilight years—had reconciled himself over the long years that his victory was transitory at best. The most he ever hoped for was that someone else would take up his mantle once he laid it aside, next to the wreckage of the fatally wounded but ever faithful SS *Minnow*.

His passing leaves gigantic but almost indiscernible footprints. I can do no more than this, to present his phenomenal story to the world and hope that some among you will be inspired enough to take up the burden and carry it forward along the dusty trail of destiny.