

Extracts from a Diary

(Note: the diary in question is that of Amelia Bourne-Phipps, only daughter of the Great War general Sir Archibald Bourne-Phipps. Amelia seems to have been sent off to the Songmark Aeronautical Boarding School For Young Ladies on Spontoon East Island, at rather short notice. The diary is carefully written in the never-popular Lexarc Shorthand system, which very few people ever became proficient in (certainly, none of her family.) Amelia translated this in the 1970's for the benefit of her granddaughters.)

September 7th, 1934.

Dear Diary – well, it took an age and a half, but I'm finally here ! The last five days on a passenger ship, alas - the Imperial Airways Clipper only went as far as Hawaii, after a stormy crossing from Rain Island. Rain ! I've hardly seen the sun all trip, so much for sun-drenched tropics. Dear old Barseshire looks a veritable Desert next to the Spontoon Archipelago right now.

I am writing on my travelling trunk, surrounded by luggage. Not my own luggage – my roommate Molly, heiress to a well-known Chicago family of wine and spirits importers – she seems to have brought half a boatload of things with her. Still, I heard her complaining to Miss Devinski our tutor, that Customs had seized her Tommy. Not a family pet, I hope !

Speaking of Miss Devinski – she is one of the five “real” members of staff here. Not many, considering the fourteen arrivals this Term, and the two senior years of lady Aviators housed in the other blocks. But there are a dozen other names listed as staff on the mimeographed sheets I am resting you on, dear Diary – so hopefully they will fit us all in.

And so to bed. Molly has taken the bed in the far corner – she seems to have a positive aversion to even sitting with her back to the door. What quaint traditions and beliefs they have in this part of the world !

September 8th, 1934.

Dear Diary: well, our little band is complete. Another American arrived late last night, Helen Ducros. Her people seem to be something in the Texas Oil business, though with her accent it took me half an hour to decide the “wildcats” and “gushers” she spoke of were not the local wildlife. And at lunchtime, a fascinating SIAI-Marchetti SM.66 double-hulled flying boat went right over us before touching down in the harbour. Very strange – its sole passenger was Maria Inconnutia – or something of the sort, I will definitely have to keep a notebook with the spelling ! My commonplace book is quite bulging already, with maps and timetables of the Island and the Academy (“Boarding School” may be more correct, but sounds so utterly *drab* !)

Miss Devinski tells us that each dorm is more than just accommodation – the four of us are teamed together, will be working and learning on projects together, and take responsibility for each other's behaviour (except that we pack our own parachutes. Fortunately I possess that handicraft already, thankfully so. Alas for poor Flying Flea #7, why did our ancestors choose to build that church tower right in my flight path ?)

September 9th, 1934

Hard at work ! I confess that having seen the Boarding School's aircraft constantly in the air yesterday afternoon, I had hoped we might start on flying instruction. No such joy ! From the timetable, we are in for weeks and weeks of instructions before we get near a cockpit. And then, we are to know our machines inside and out before ever we swing a propeller into life. (Helen Ducros seemed very put out at this, and emitted a string of what I *hope* were West Texas dialect words, though I seem to recall sailors using similar language.)

The rain, at least, has abated. Looking out onto the streets below (we first-years are quartered above the Staff areas) one cannot but notice the ... interesting Native costume, or in many cases, lack of it. Certainly, I feel far from dear old Barseshire. A month has passed since my last flight except as a passenger, a month since Father decided to send me here to continue my Education. I do so miss flying ! Had Flying Flea #8 not suffered that unfortunate landing on Father's glasshouses, I might have had it shipped out after me.

Molly is sitting on the windowsill, loudly chewing gum (a vile habit, I feel!) and evidently watching with interest the more ethnically dressed Natives passing. Oh yes, Dear Diary, the gentlemen here must save a Fortune on tailor's bills !

September 10th, 1934

A day of unrelieved classroom work, on basic aerodynamics and air navigation. The aerodynamics class was given by Herr Bussemann, who evidently has far more advanced ideas on aircraft than the biplanes he describes for us. His desk has some very odd-looking model monoplanes, looking more like paper darts than proper aircraft. I trust he will have time to finish them soon, every model is still lacking its propeller.

Miss Devinski tells us we can look forward to a break in classroom work next week, when we are to take a Field Trip. Some healthy exercise would be a welcome relief, after all this theory. (But at least I know now why Flying Flea #2 came to such a premature end. I did suspect even then, that the plywood from tea chests was a little flimsy for the main wing spar...)

September 11th, 1934

Finally, I manage to have a long talk with Maria – Molly and Helen were on the balcony at the far end of the corridor after classes, “watching the Talent go past.” I’m sure I didn’t hear there was a Talent show outside. But as for Maria – my old classmates at St. Winifreds school would be thrilled to learn I’m sharing a room with near-royalty ! More exactly, she is one of the (many) nieces of Il Puce, the Italian “Purple Emperor”, sent here in what she considers Exile. I couldn’t quite follow her story, but it involved rope-ladders, motor-boats, midnight flying and an accidentally released torpedo – released by whom and towards whom, someday I may discover.

September 18th, 1934

Dear Diary: Sorry for the long silence – I am fresh from the first hot, fresh bath in 4 nights! I was told to “Expect The Unexpected” and indeed I got it. The “Field Trip” turned out to be a safari on the main Island, viewing the native villages and great tracts of jungle. Now I can add “Crab cooked in Coconut” to my recipe book, though I doubt Cook at home would appreciate the “kitchen” I prepared it in (an open fire on the beach, with only Boy-Scout knives for cutlery. And the crab was caught with my own hands – though oddly enough, the coconuts we brought with us.)

Miss Devinski was absent from this trip, having handed us over to Mrs. Haiotoroa, a Native lady of enormous proportions and an unceasing flow of conversation, some of which I even understood. (Helen claims she saw Miss Devinski heading towards the Casino Island water taxi, wearing a most daring party frock and a relieved expression.) Our Native guide and chaperone was careful to point out the edible foodstuffs in the jungle, and hinted that we would in a few weeks time need to remember them. I have heard the senior classes mention something about this, usually involving quicksands, mosquitoes and leeches.

I am making real progress, I believe ! In our leisure hours on the beach (the bamboo and woven leaf huts the Natives make on their travels proving not too hard to assemble for someone with my raffia-weaving skills. Hurrah for St. Winifreds formation Raffia team!) Molly taught us an interesting game like lawn-darts, using the Boy-Scout knives we are provided with. At twenty paces, she can turn and hit a five-inch log nine times out of ten. I asked her if this was a Native Custom amongst her people, and she told me her Father’s employees had taught it her. (The family seems an unusually prosperous one, by her accounts, despite only starting in the retail wines and spirits business in 1920.)

Anyway, it has been a thrilling few days – back to class tomorrow, thankful for a bed after four nights in a hammock. If nothing else, a hammock in a gusty sea breeze should accustom one against airsickness ...

September 20th, 1934

Well ! I confess to being quite flabbergasted when we were told that each dorm must choose a spokesperson for the rest of the term – before I could even suggest how to vote for the post, Molly, Helen and Maria instantly elected me!

As Molly put it later, when we were alone in the engine shed, “See, doll, Helen and me ain’t the type to sit and take orders. We’d scratch each other’s eyes out, first time one of us gotten riled. Maria, she don’t take orders nohow, that’s what got her here. But you’re a sweet kid, see, and we none of us reckon you’ll throw your weight around for the hell of it. See ?”

I blush !

September 22nd, 1934

At last, Helen “spills the beans” as she so quaintly puts it, on her family background. It seems the Texas oil wells are most vexingly inflammable things – and once alight, take rather more than the village pump engine to extinguish. Her late Father was “Lucky” Ducros, one of the most famous fire-fighters in the business – alas, a hazardous task involving what sounds like gratuitously large quantities of dynamite to “snuff out” thousands of gallons of blazing oil. His services, when needed, were always wanted urgently, giving him the need (and resources) for his own aeroplane. Helen was trained from a most tender age as a mechanic, and later as a pilot. All this “book-learning” is proving vexing for the poor girl !

Three weeks have passed since we arrived at Songmark, and they have simply flown by ! Alas, that has been all the flying any of us have done. Helen is suggesting we “exercise some Initiative” at the weekend, and slip out to see the sights for a few hours. True, I might welcome a break, but surely after our curfew hour, it will be pitch dark and no scenery visible?

One might think that our Tutors have seen all this before. Only yesterday, I overheard Miss Devinski and Miss Nordlingen in the corridor, discussing bringing some classes forward. According to Miss Nordlingen, my class are “a lively bunch – I’d rather discuss Precautions a week too soon than a night too late.” True, we are scheduled for some basic and advanced First Aid courses this term ... and it is almost a school motto, that graduates of Songmark are trained to look after themselves no matter where they end up...

September 24th, 1934

At last ! Our first close sight of an aircraft, since the week we arrived! Starting this week, after finishing our lessons in the morning, we may work in the hangars. Stripping radial engines down is scarcely glamorous work, and Maria complains the overalls are most Unflattering in cut. She arrived in rather daring red flying leathers, with pistol

holsters on each hip – no wonder this seems to be a poor substitute. But as I took pains to tell her, at the end of this, she will at least be able to spot which bits of an engine are missing...

I am getting quite *good* at ducking things Maria throws at me.

September 26th, 1934

Dear Diary:
Oh My.

September 27th, 1934

Dear Diary: I should explain the brief entry of yesterday – when I wrote it, I was seized with doubt as to whether to even confide in you. But Lexarc Shorthand is as rare a language to see written as the Ancient Assyrian my Uncle Harry studies, and surely safe enough...

Oh My, indeed. We have had the extra classes, and learned some things not exactly listed on the prospectus. Miss Devinski began by pointing out that Songmark Boarding School had an excellent safety record, and (to date) had neither unexpectedly lost nor gained in numbers. An odd way of putting things, I thought at the time.

Briefly – in a morning, we now know what sort of adventures we should NOT write home about, should we choose to make the most of our Opportunities out here. Furthermore, as Miss Devinski put it, "In aircraft, we won't let you fly unless we're happy you'll stay in the air. We'll teach you not to get lost, we'll teach you how far you can expect your fuel to last. Socially, we'll advise you on the same kinds of things. This, basically, is how things work." And in quite sufficient details, she told us.

(Dear Diary – I don't think I'll forget this lesson in a hurry! I know the Matron at St. Winifreds supposedly gave a friendly chat to leavers, with general advice. On scale, that would be a general description of what an aero-engine is for, against a full workshop manual with parts lists. Including what you might call a lot of Preventative Maintenance.)

Helen seemed very little surprised at any of it, but Maria and Molly were taking detailed notes throughout. One suspects that in some respects, Molly has had a sheltered life – from what she tells of her Father, he seems a Quite formidable person.

September 30th, 1934

Hurrah! The four of us have won the month's prize for our studies – the one official gramophone in our block. Maria has obtained a record of "V-Gerat", a fascinating German futurist band, who all play supercharged Koch & Sterzel AG Theramins * - from the record cover, they look a most Severe band – definitely not for ballrooms and teahouses, I fear. Further, she tells me they were last reported as touring the Pacific islands...

(Excuse the ink smudge, Dear Diary. We have just repelled a frontal assault from Missy Kahaloo's bunch in the next dorm. Being awarded our gramophone for the month, is no guarantee that we get to keep it! The sound of mighty Theramins is now triumphantly howling out at full throttle, drowning out the screams for mercy from next door.)

*(Editor's NOTE - The Theramin was THE futurist instrument of the 1930's. Ancestor to all the synthesisers of modern times, it was played by moving one's hands through a magnetic field generated by two aerials on the box. In modern terms, think "Kraftwerk doing the hand-jive". Note that "V-Gerat" probably is "Versuchtes Gerat", meaning "Experimental Device".)

October 1st, 1934:

Dear Diary – what a small world this turns out to be ! Today being Sunday, we scatter to the various churches across the Islands. Quite a trip, with Maria and 5 of her co-religionists (including Miss Devinski) heading out early to South Island. It seems that most of the European missions are on Casino Island, for the tourists – so ten of us pile into a water taxi to the Anglican church there. (Helen and Molly, to use their curious turn of phrase, "don't hold with no preachers", so they are spending the day hard at work painting one of the classrooms, cleanliness being presumably next best thing to godliness).

Anyway – all the way from Barsestshire, who should I find giving the sermon but the Reverend Bingham, who substituted last Easter down in Puddleham when old Rev. Pontephrigt had that accident with the circus lion. I recognised him at once, though I fear he didn't recognise me. (Note – I must describe him to Helen, who I am sure would be Interested. Theology can come later)

On the way out, we encountered a similar-looking group to our own, heading towards the next jetty. It turns out they are from the Other establishment, Spontoon Technical High School on Moon Island. Various words were passed, though I tried to explain that we are a select establishment for the "air-Minded", and not "Air-headed" as they insisted...

Despite being October, the weather continues warm, like a decent English August, should there be such a thing. Our uniforms, though very respectable for Church, are sweltering! I must find out how the senior years at the Academy manage to not wear them in class.

October 4th, 1934:

Dear Diary – there has been nothing to tell you except three days of solid work in the engine sheds. But now at last we are to look around the rest of Eastern Island – Helen has been fuming with what she calls “cabin Fever”, and indeed all of us could do with some respite from getting our fur soaked in engine oil. (The old engines we are practising with, still use Castor oil which is having a most alarming effect on our digestions, though we are assured we will become accustomed to it.) Certainly the morning’s exercise was different, if equally noisy! Miss Blande, one of the part-time Instructors, had booked us into the firing range owned by the local militia. I had handled my Brother’s rook rifle before, but this was a definitely different experience.

I fear I shall have to have words with Molly, who dropped our group’s score down severely by her behaviour. She succeeded in hitting the targets, but blazing away on fully automatic while laughing maniacally, is really not the done thing at the Academy. Molly went off in something of a huff, claiming she was taught better by her Father’s employee, a Mr. “Thompson” Thompson of Detroit.

Miss Blande explains that graduates of Songmark may find themselves having to cope in any sticky situation, and are expected to do so without assistance and with style. Even in a matter of self-defence, such as today’s training. I did however notice some of our Third Year students, wearing uniforms I’m sure they’re not entitled to, returning from the rifle range carrying what I recognise as Lee-Enfields. Presumably there is an advanced class covering self-defence at half-mile ranges, of which I must enquire later.

(Things to remember, Dear Diary – the more impressive pieces of ordnance are less actually useful, unless one has a physique like our local vicar Mr. Bingham. The .30 Beretta that Maria seems quite familiar with, seems to be quite controllable enough. The .45 almost knocked me flying, and nobody except Missy Kahaloa even wanted to try the .57 Webley & Scott. Our “matron” assures her that the sprained wrist should be useable by the end of the week.)

October 6th, 1934

A most unusual day! As usual, after Breakfast our rooms were inspected by Miss Devinski, who tends to be scathing about shoddy housekeeping (I have had to give Maria some tips, the poor girl has never had to fold a sheet in her life before arriving here. Hurrah for St. Winifreds Home Economics classes!). All us First-years were taken over to view the dormitory across the road, where the Senior year live, and where I had noticed local workmen gathered.

Miss Windlesham, who is in charge (one would like to say, in control) of that class, then took us to the far end of the building, where the student kitchen has a large refrigerator. Pushing it aside, we were startled to see a wood-lined tunnel, ducking under the wall and presumably heading towards the thickets behind the buildings!

Miss Windlesham invited us to explore the tunnel, to take careful note of its construction, before the workmen filled it in. This, she explains, the previous year of students must have constructed for their own uses, whatever those may have been. We are to produce an essay by next week, giving our ideas on how it might have been done, and how long it would have taken. (It is most odd, how little annoyed the staff seem to be about this. Indeed, Miss Devinski was quite enthusiastic about the construction, suggesting that anyone who puts such thought and teamwork into a construction should benefit by it. Helen and Molly seemed quite amused by the whole thing, though I’m sure I can’t see the point in the project. The building has doors enough already, quite visible from the building we share with the staff.)

October 8th, 1934

A splendid day indeed, brilliant sunshine as I persuade Helen to come to Church with me! At least, she seems to think it the lesser evil, after last weeks painting (and indeed, both she and Molly fairly reeked of paint fumes half the week) to take the water taxi over to Casino Island. Definitely we look forward to being given Passes to leave Songmark like the senior classes, rather than being escorted there and back. A full-day pass to Casino Island is something to dream of, indeed (and Helen seemed to be dreaming of something in church, though I doubt the sermon made much impression on her.)

I plucked up courage to ask Ethyl, one of the final year girls, about when we might move onto Passes. The news is not encouraging – even after passing various courses, we are going to have to win them, like our gramophone (and everything else at Songmark, it seems.) Certainly, we should be out of our blazers and into more comfortable costume by the end of term, in time for the rainy season.

Helen did ask about the “24-hour pass” she had heard rumoured of, but they seem to be like the fabled hundred-pound notes – in theory they may exist, but nobody we know has one, and the prospect of owning one seems utterly remote.

October 10th, 1934

Off again to the local militia’s firing range, for some more self-defence instruction. A vexingly thorough course, taking through dismantling all parts of a firearm before cleaning and reassembling them. At least, as with our aeronautics work, we should be competent to keep any self-defence equipment in good order in the field, far from convenient workshops.

After a morning getting our fur reeking of grease, we head out to the rifle range for the first time. I can certainly appreciate how this could be useful, in hunting for food - but it is certainly something one needs to practice. My first few shots, alas, could probably have hit the proverbial barn door, but little else.

An interesting local prejudice on good luck charms - Maria pulls out a lucky rabbit foot, which causes a few smiles amongst the instructors but nothing more. Molly, on the other hand, went to great care to file deep crosses in her bullet tips for luck (she says), and was marched away for a Very stern lecture for five minutes. Fascinating!

Molly has been told she will be restricted to the pistol range for the next few weeks, which irritates her no end, especially given the available handguns. She quotes her old mentor, Mr. "Thompson" Thompson, as saying "Two things in life you can't rely on - an automatic pistol and a D.A.'s Promise".

I will either have to puzzle the meaning of that one out of her, or drop it into my scrapbook, "Collected Strange Sayings of Molly, Volume One". Volume two will be well underway by next term, at this rate.

October 11th, 1934

Quite a sight today, watching a large airship stopping here on Eastern Island. The Senior years here had mentioned news of its arrival, and at lunchtime we managed to get away long enough to watch it docking with the airship tower at the South end of the island. Madelene X might do well to listen to advice in future, she was standing directly underneath it on final approach, just where I told her it might drop water ballast.

Watching the airship (the big German zeppelin, called the "Ludendorf" I believe) reminded me of my Uncle Algernon, who had been in the Balloon Corps throughout the Great War. After a few years of crewing observation blimps and other uninspiring duties, he volunteered for the experimental Dirigible Fighter squadron being formed. Their rather powerful engines were cooled by passing the hydrogen around the radiators before returning to the gas bags (nothing gives better lift than hot hydrogen, and the fighters were launched from their carrier ships at 15 tonnes buoyancy, enabling them to climb at an ear-popping 6,000 feet a minute to intercept). Sadly, Uncle Algernon and the project fell from grace and about 25,000 feet when a gas seep ignited. Nothing gets out easier than hot hydrogen, either - though Molly disputes this, saying that a Songmark Third-year after curfew "beats it hollow that-a-way".

Definitely another Strange Saying for the scrapbook.

October 19th, 1934

At long last, we get to sit in an aircraft ! Not a flying one I confess, but an aircraft nonetheless. It appears that the hangar next to the airfield is only rented, and we are moving to a larger one - taking great care of moving the Academy's aircraft, now we have spent such efforts in knowing how to fix them.

After lunch, I fear I made a poor showing in class with Herr Bussemann. We were invited to talk on aircraft we knew best, and he was most scathing about my dear little Flying Fleas. I did my best to defend them, but he seems quite adamant that the design is fatally flawed - and my pointing out that far more expensive planes crash just as hard, cut no ice with him (as Molly would say). Apart from having no lateral control and a tendency towards the picturesquely named "Graveyard Dive", I think my plywood and piano-wire constructions flew quite well, sometimes for days. (Had I managed to find proper aircraft-grade bolts to secure the engine on #4 instead of using those left over from the barn door repairs, it might easily have lived to make a dozen flights).

And now I am to write a twenty-page essay on "Why there is no future in unstable, control by wire designs." Alas!

October 22nd, 1934

A day indeed of two halves, Dear Diary. A wet and cheerless water-taxi to church on Casino Island, which seems to be half shuttered-up, full of workmen renovating the buildings before the Rainy Season arrives. I had thought to talk with our senior Ethyl, but it turned out to be her bad-tempered identical twin Methyl ("Pure Poison" as many folk tell me, and certainly very volatile.). I wonder if their Father is a chemist ?

Well ! Things improved when Maria returned from her Church with momentous news indeed. We are to compete again for our gramophone at the end of the month, against quite furious competition from the dorms led by Missy Kahaloo, Prudence Akroyd, Jasbir Sind and Madelene X. We four intend to have a jolly good try at keeping it, but Maria thought it prudent to get some more records in while we can. Suprisingly, there is a radio and record shop on South Island open on Sunday - and while purchasing the latest offering by "V-Gerat" she noticed a poster announcing their Pacific tour arrives here next month !

The latest album is playing loudly and boldly, while Madelene X is banging protestingly on the door shouting impolite things about our tastes, and Molly is responding with suggestions about her ancestry that I will not be recording. (Madelene's actual name is presumably known to our tutors, but she is not telling it to anyone else. Hence her "nom de guerre" amongst us.)

Maria recounted rather wistfully that she had seen V-Gerat perform once, when travelling in Germany with her Uncle's retinue. The band do look excessively Modern, and according to Maria, are all staunch Party members. I cannot see what Madelene X, Ada Cronstein and some of the others object to about that, I love a good party myself.

No more time to write tonight, dear Diary, we are all "cramming" hard for next week's Air Navigation exams. I am doing my best with Helen, who has learned to fly entirely "by the seat of my pants", as she puts it. If that were the best technique, Missy Kahaloo would win every time, according to her pants size. Molly claims she must have been sent to wear the Songmark uniform (being the only actual "Spontoonie" here) because the sight of her in a grass skirt would scare tourists away! Which is unkind, but Missy K. does claim to be worth any two of us, and her dressmaker certainly needs twice the material.

October 24th, 1934

Alas! Right now we are sitting looking disconsolately at a pile of "V-Gerat" discs, while the gramophone is playing an endless stream of Rudy Vallee from two doors down the hall, as Jasbir Sind and her dorm celebrate loudly. Some people have no concern for their neighbours.

I would have wagered we stood a very fair chance in the Air Navigation exams – Missy Kahaloo admitted as much to us, confessing she had been too hard on our bunch. As an olive branch, she bought us all a large bottle of a local soft drink, which we were very grateful for. (Molly sampled hers with great care, not letting us drink till she had assayed it was quite non-alcoholic. I suppose a family in the Trade, so to speak, would recognise it.)

I fear the local beverage will take some getting used to – our test results were awful, Maria breaking down in a fit of giggling, while I managed to "navigate" on paper half way to Japan before my fuel ran out entirely. I really can't think what went wrong with our concentration, all four of us at once. Still, there was the consolation that Jasbir is a good sport and has promised to loan us the gramophone on Tuesdays in exchange for borrowing our records – while this "Nootnops Blue" Missy Kahaloo introduced us to is really quite a find !

October 26th, 1934

This may be the last entry for awhile – I am writing while "kitted up" in flying overalls, with nothing else than one might expect to have in a cockpit. No, not the long-promised first flight, but our long-threatened "safari" on the main island, thrown on our own resources. Maria is stuffing herself with the last of my tinned fruitcake from Home, expecting a distinctly lean time in the week ahead.

This promises to be a most trying time ! Of course, we shall be no more than a mile or two from habitation, even the Main Island here is hardly bigger than a good-sized parish in Bassetshire. But we will lose marks Quite severely for asking assistance from the Natives, who (I assume) have been warned we are coming.

Helen cheered up considerably when we were issued with firearms – until told there would be no ammunition provided, as hunting the local wildlife is quite taboo (fish, crabs etc. excepted). And yet our sidearms are going to be searchingly inspected at the end of the trip, and woe betide us if they are out of order ! I can only be glad that I paid attention to my Father's military tales, and am packing several small oilskin bags for delicate items. The Rainy Season is fast approaching, and we shall probably be "in for it".

November 4th, 1934

Dear Diary – It's good to be able to write again ! We returned last night from our ordeal, but a very thorough bathing, grooming and "writing up" our experiences took up all our time.

All appeared civilised enough as we approached the Southwest side of the Main Island, passing various Native settlements to arrive at an unbroken stretch of jungle rising like a tangled wall above the beach. I had wondered why our tutors, Miss Devinski and Miss Wildford, were in bathing costumes for such a trip – until they anchored the boat a hundred yards from the beach and told us to swim for it ! Naturally, they would be watching our progress with interest, and after our poor showing at the Air Navigation, I was quite keen to make a good start. If Helen had jumped overboard as fast as Maria and Molly, I would not have needed to push her in the slightest.

(Memo to myself – the Nimitz Sea is really quite chilly in late October, and a flight suit full of water makes an exceedingly cumbersome bathing costume.)

After quite some efforts, we arrived on the deserted beach an hour before sunset. Practicality prevailed over modesty, and our dorm were down to the fur immediately, wringing out the flight suits, and doing our best to groom our fur dry while "dishabille". The others thought this quite amusing, Madelene X speculating loudly that we four would be used to such romps together by now. (Had our Tutors not been watching, I fear Molly would have done her an injury with the driftwood we were collecting. She is, as she puts it, "handy with a pool cue", and not always in peaceful sport.)

We had the last laugh, as it turned out. Soaked flight suits make poor bathing costumes, and even worse bedding ! Before sundown we had a snug leaf-shelter erected, dug for fresh water above the tide line, washed the salt water off our firearms and lit a fairly cheerful fire. The rain arrived an hour after dark (as expected) and the shelter leaked (as expected.) But not too badly, unlike Madelene X's rather ramshackle structure – we at least had a half-decent nights sleep, packed in as snug as possible. Missy Kahaloo built a rather better shelter, but I pity the rest of the group, it would be like sharing a swimming pool with a whale ...

The next days were distinctly hard work, spotting edible plants and gathering shellfish etc from the beach. Miss Devinski and Miss Wildford were loosely watching over us, making sure none of the plants we gathered were too poisonous. They let Prudence Akroyd's group sample a rather succulent gourd-like plant, only commenting that it has uses in Native medicine.

(Memo to myself – should I ever be in need of a violent combined laxative and purgative in these Islands, I now know Exactly what to look for.)

By the sixth day we were all distinctly hungry, especially Prudence and co., who recovered their appetite in a day or so. Prudence spent a long time searching for coconuts, but returned empty-handed, much to the amusement of Missy K. Possibly as a Native, she knows something we don't – and asking Miss Devinski and Miss Wildford about it would be a sure way of losing points until the safari was over. (I must ask discreetly about Miss Wildford's fur pattern, it is definitely – Different. Helen suspects fur dye, and Molly suspects Unusual Ancestry.)

Apart from in the sleeping-shelters, we found out that trying to keep clothing dry in the jungle is simply a losing battle, Jasbir Sind having burned holes in most of hers trying to get an improvised drier working. There are

leeches too, which are simply TOO beastly for description ... they have a positive genius for finding their way in through hems and vents, and even lace-holes in boots.

Anyway, following Helen's suggestion we did our best to improvise Native costume from leaves and grasses. An untidy effort at first, but surprisingly effective – no protection from the daily downpours, but we get no wetter than in the flight suits, and dry out far faster. Jasbir Sind's team followed "suit" as soon as they noticed the results, though she managed a more practised, and recognisably Indian effect. Quite a sight we looked ! Missy Kahaloa was highly amused, saying we looked like "a bunch of refugees from the Gunboat Wars", whatever that may mean. She refused to switch to the local costume herself, which seemed odd, unless Molly's claim about her scaring away the tourists had more truth in it than she cares to admit.

Maria, alas, is developing a definite phobia about the jungle wildlife. I did point out that a combination of our scavenged diet and the local leeches, would soon give anyone a slender, tulip figure (as opposed to Missy K's turnip one.) She somewhat lost her temper, fortunately in Italian. Molly speaks the language tolerably well, thanks to her family's Business connections, and assures me what Maria said is utterly physically impossible.

At last, the week came to an end, and we hastily made ourselves respectable for the trip back to the Academy. I confess it was rather odd, wearing the Native "costume", even our first attempts at it. After awhile, it feels little different from a bathing-suit, and can be made as modest, or otherwise, as one wishes. Definitely, we are a long way from Barsestshire!

November 6th, 1934

After a somewhat lengthy "de-briefing" on our jungle trip, and a thorough ridding ourselves from various small specimens of wildlife in our clothes and fur, it seems almost relaxing to get back into the lecture rooms and workshops. Still, the fresh air and hard work has some lasting effects beyond giving us keen appetites. Helen suggests (again) that we exercise some Initiative at the weekend and take an unescorted look at the Island, and for once I feel inclined to agree with her.

Molly suggests we disguise ourselves in Native costume, but the rest of us shout her down – at least, till we have more practice. By all accounts, the actual Natives can spot an impostor on sight, and though we might be taken for over-eager tourists in Season, the tour boats do not arrive till May.

In class, we are now doing repairs on the actual aircraft we shall be flying ! It is more like "hide-and-peek" than anything – the technicians will loosen a control wire or put the magneto out of order, and we have to find the fault. At least we are sitting in a real aircraft, the Tiger Moths which are in fairly constant use by the Second and Third years. Having a dozen actual new aircraft for the Academy is a definite treat, and explains the somewhat steep fees that Songmark demand. I feel fortunate indeed that Father was willing to send me here – and indeed, he did say he would pay twice as much if necessary to send me such a distance.

Molly refuses, as always, to attend Church on Sunday, and so misses out on some interesting trips. She does get time to read, though, and pointed out an article in the "Daily 'Elele" regretting hopes are fading for the pioneering Christian Scientist crossing of the Pacific. The pilot was last seen taking off from Formosa, shivering with malaria and with an engine that any casual ear could tell was in severe trouble. He refused medical and mechanical aid, claiming that Faith would do more than all the doctors and mechanics in the world.

(Maria has a different slant on this, claiming more Faith would have done the job. But I am glad to note she stays as vigilant as ever when packing her parachute in Class.)

November 7th, 1934

Hurrah ! We might not have our gramophone back as yet, but the marks have been worked out for our Jungle trip, and our dorm seems to have won by a mile. The reward for all that discomfort seems quite appropriate – no longer do we have to wear our blazers and the full uniform to classes. (Church, and other such Official trips, is of course another matter.) Miss Devinski has had another talk with us, suggesting suitable wear – we have no complaints, except for Maria. I had suggested before that her red flying-leathers with the pistol holsters was a little inappropriate for the classroom, but she WILL try and push things ...

At last, our Allowances have been officially processed, just in time for us to do some shopping. The island currency seems to be in Shells (\$) and Cowries (c), 100 Cowries to the shell. I fear that having a decimal currency will lead to loose and sloppy thinking, and have worked out a neat formula that converts cowries into farthings (960 to the Pound Sterling.)

Various things that were deemed Inappropriate for us to make use of at first, have been returned to us. Maria's cheque-book is one of them – I discover that describing her as "near-Royalty" was small exaggeration, if she really wishes an aircraft she can practically buy one ! Miss Devinski made her promise to be moderate when she handed it over, though I fear Maria has her own idea of "moderate".

November 10th, 1934

Preparations are underway for the weekend – the weather forecast is good, the moon full, and we four are exercising all the ingenuity we can put together between us. Leaving the dorm without going past the staff areas is the first hurdle – but a rope-ladder is easily constructed from parachute cord braced with bamboo, and the drop from the first storey window to the ground is scarcely fifteen feet. (Molly and Helen insist the ground floor is the "first floor", but this is silly. Where do they suppose the ground floor is ?)

Covering our departure has been arranged with Jasbir, who has agreed to split her forces and play our records in our room for an hour or so. Next week we shall return the complement if all goes well – and if all goes

badly, at least they will have more ideas of the pitfalls ahead. In two more weeks V-Gerat arrive for their concert in the park on Casino Island – getting there illicitly might not be quite as hard as Uncle Cedric's escape to Sweden from Germany in the Great War, but unlike him, we also have to get back undetected.

The place seems definitely quiet, with the second-years out on Gunboat Island for a safari of their own – a more serious business, as the island is wholly uninhabited and the Staff will only drop by every other day and check on them. One might think their tutors Miss Pelton and Miss Cardroy would be sick with worry imagining what might be happening out there – but they are putting a brave face on it. Molly says she was in the bathroom at six this morning and saw Miss Pelton quietly arriving from the direction of the jetties, carrying an overnight bag – I imagine she had been unable to sleep and gone for an early swim - certainly she looks tired in class.

November 12th, 1934

Well ! Things went swimmingly on our first little excursion – the rope ladder held up adequately, and within twenty seconds of our opening the window we were twenty yards round the corner and heading into cover with the ladder rolled up behind us and stowed. Failing an acquaintance with Jasbir's national Rope Trick, we arranged with her for our window to be manned for a minute on the hour, every hour till our return.

Clothing had been a thorny problem, as the Academy blazers, though of a suitable dark colour for night manoeuvres, are instantly recognisable. However, an afternoon with the Singer sewing machine sufficed to turn out some costumes from the fabric of a discarded parachute – we looked vaguely like visiting mechanics from some air force with exotic fashion tastes. Not a bad effect, though I say it myself.

It was a fine, clear night indeed, with the lights of the runway close at hand – though the surrounding streets are unlit, we are familiar with most of Eastern Island by now. For the past three weeks, we have been doing what one might term “Low-level Reconnaissance”, one or two of us breaking away from our class on the way to our lectures, making rapid dashes to map out byways and alleyways before rejoining the party. Between us, I doubt there is a building on the island we don't know!

Helen led this expedition, by common consent (Molly offered to throw dice for the privilege, but the dice are a Family Inheritance from some of her Fathers' Business Associates, and Helen declined to risk it.) Primary target for our little raid was Mahanish's, a well-spoken of dining establishment for pilots just South of the aerodrome control tower. Trusting in our disguises, we managed to enter, get a table and get served. Thrilling!

All went swimmingly at first, as I noticed several of the (genuine) pilots are little older than ourselves – and Helen was delighted to see they serve something called “Foxtrot Oscar” Chilli – which she translates for me as “Fine Old”, and assures me it is a Texan regional speciality. Four bowls were soon in front of us, which seemed to excite some interest from the tables around us, who seemed to be suddenly taking bets.

Sampling the dish was what one might call a Broadening Experience. Certainly one cannot fault the description, as Chilli seemed to be a major ingredient! Molly and Maria seemed to be in some discomfort, and all eyes then seemed to be watching my progress with interest.

Hurrah, again, for St. Winifreds Home Economics class! I fear anyone taking bets against me finishing the dish, would have been better for knowing our Senior cook was dear Mrs. Indira Chaunapal, from Goa, giving us all long years of acclimatisation to her most excellent “Phall” and “Tindaloo” strength curries. A most excellent dish, and one that I must note down for a future visit. (Molly seems to be of a different opinion, and requested a gallon of iced water.)

It fell to Helen and I to strike up conversations with the other customers, our other friends being robbed of the power of speech for some time. Quite a mix, as one might hope – airline pilots and some visiting military crews, notably that of a French “Arc en ciel” (Rainbow) experimental craft passing through. Even at the far end of the runway, we noted its distinctive “banana” silhouette immediately.

Time positively flew past, and with some difficulty I got us out, ready for the cautious return trip. The Staff at Songmark keep quite a sharp eye on us – getting past them takes all the resourcefulness one can muster. But all went well, and at eleven sharp Jasbir and her chum Li Han (from New China) dropped the rope ladder as per spec. Twelve seconds for all four of us to swarm up, clean traces off the windowsill and close the window quietly. Thirty seconds more to get out of our disguises, hide them in the hollow chair back (parachute silk packs very neatly) and dive to our beds, expecting a spot check by our Tutors any second. Quite an exciting evening, all told.

November 17th, 1934

After our adventures, naturally we slept like tops – barely waking in time for Breakfast call. Fortunately, being Sunday, we had a little extra time before the various Church expeditions assemble at the water taxi jetties. Molly has amended her student details, changing Religion on the form from “None” to “Agnostic Fundamentalist”, in the hope it will gain her some concessions. (Much good may it do her! Trying to “pull a fast one” as she would say, on our Tutors, would be like trying it on old MacCardle, Father's butler and retired Regimental Sergeant-Major of seven campaigns' experience.)

Maria objects to this levity with Religion, and hinted darkly that Ill Would Come Of It. She seemed to be immediately vindicated when Molly started yelling for the Matron from the bathroom – that or for ice-packs. But Five minutes later, Maria was in much the same case herself, though happily I could reassure them that far from being a Burning Issue, the Matron was hardly needed.

(Memo to myself – the “Fine Old Chilli” at Mahanish's, has just the same effect as dear old Mrs. Chaunapal's Tindaloo curry. Suffice it to say that one gets a strong Reminder of its effects, just when one least expects it.)

Suitably chastened, we breakfasted and headed out for the various Churches. An interesting trip ! In our water-taxi, we shared the voyage out with five young Native gentlemen, dressed in their ethnic best, and wearing

distinctive white shirts for Church. Considering they are fellow church-goers, I thought it perfectly proper to strike up a polite conversation (Helen was too busy going “bug-eyed” as she puts it, looking them up and down like a schoolboy outside a sweet shop.) The next-to-youngest brother, Jerry Hoele'toemi, seems a most charming young gentleman indeed, and happy to answer all my questions.

It appears that some of the Spontoonian families are of considerable age, four or five generations by now, but despite being outwardly “Native”, may keep various traditions alive and well. Hence the Hoele'toemi family trace their Great-Great Grandparents not to some native settlement on a lost isle but to darkest Herefordshire!

By the time we arrived at the Church, I fear Helen seemed to have lost her interest in the Rev. Bingham, a man of the cloth. Jonni Hoele'toemi, the eldest of the five brothers, is a man of quite similar physique with far less cloth to cover it. The family had been “working Customs” on South Island at one of the tourist Villages, and only now returned to their winter quarters. I must ask sometime, just why so many natives seem to earn their wages in Customs – surely smuggling is not so huge a problem?

The sermon seemed to drag somewhat, then we managed to “fall in” again with the Hoele'toemi family on the way back to the dock. I mentioned the Concert in a fortnight, and to our delight found they had tickets already! This promises to be interesting. Though unhappily Miss Devinski was already on an almost-full water taxi and waved only us Songmark students aboard, I did manage to let Jerry know that we hope to attend. A further attraction, as if one were needed !

November 20th, 1934

Off to Moon Island, for our first “flying” experience since we arrived all those weeks ago. Sadly, the altitude gained was about three feet, as we climbed into the Link Trainer, an ingenious little fairground-ride aeroplane, which nevertheless is wired to move as a real one with full sized stick, rudder and throttle. Miss Devinski brushed aside various loud claims (Helen's amongst them) that people had scores of hours in their logbooks already – it seems that at Songmark, folk with bad flying habits are worse off than complete novices, having much to unlearn. I confess that having ailerons to think about, put me off my stride considerably, the Flying Flea having no such complications. (True, this prevents banking in a turn, but I always managed perfectly well except when the landscape unexpectedly got in the way).

A suprisingly fine little device, the Link Trainer – this one owned by the Rain Island Naval Syndicate, who have the seaplane base here. Madelene X managed to put hers in a spin – simulated or not, she was looking distinctly green and giddy by the time she hit the simulated ground. Bottom of the class for her dorm, I think. I had little trouble myself, except getting used to ailerons – an unnecessary refinement, in my view, which will never catch on. *

Again, we met the Spontoon Island Technical High School crowd, who live and work on this island (“within torpedo range”, as Maria would say.) They were quite impatiently awaiting us to finish, to use the Link trainer themselves – and Madelene X's crash put them in fine spirits. In fact, some of the girls there were most – Provoking. I realise Songmark is a Select place, but the SITHS seem to be making too much of a point in being – Unfussy about who they admit!

- (Editor's note: the “Flying Flea” Amelia was so fond of, was a French attempt at the “Every citizen can build their own Aircraft in their garage” idea. An unconventional design, it featured a highly staggered biplane wing layout, and was rather deficient in power and stability. In fact, the only time it was 100% stable was in its characteristic “Graveyard dive”, which was totally unrecoverable. Fortunately, most backyard builders of the Flying Flea built theirs too heavy and underpowered to leave the ground, so the problem rarely arose.)

November 22nd, 1934

A strenuous afternoon, Dear Diary – after a morning in the classroom and an unexpectedly light lunch, our “sports day” turned out to be a somewhat radical self-defence course, which I see from the timetable we will be carrying on with all through the term.

Our instructors, Mr. and Mrs. Fairburn-Sykes, are on Eastern Island for some months on some form of military liaison mission from His Majesty's Forces (237th London Glaswegian Regt.) – heavens knows how the Academy persuaded them to train us. But train us they did – the gymnasium floor was covered in thick mats, where we first learned to fall without getting the wind (quite) knocked out of us. Then two hours of dodging rushes, throwing each other and suchlike. Rather unladylike perhaps, but fairly – exhilarating!

To finish with, the Fairburn-Sykes gave us a demonstration of how far one can advance in such skills – I confess it looked somewhat like a circus tumbling act, except that every attack (though neatly blocked) would send one immediately to hospital if it connected. Maria was wondering how Domestic Harmony is affected by both sides having such skills – personally, I feel it would at least encourage Politeness.

One hopes that this is leading towards our cherished Passes – when the Tutors can feel happy about letting us out of their sight. I did suggest to Miss Devinski, that we are having more Training than some of the troops in the Great War received before heading to the Front – and that Casino Island is surely not that dangerous ? Miss Devinski did point out that Songmark has avoided any fatal casualties so far, and intends to keep it that way – and I take her point.

As arranged last week, we crewed Jasbir's room while she and her band (Li Han, Ada Cronstein and Sophie D'Artagnan) slipped out for the evening. Alas, to keep up the illusion we had to play various crooner records – Jasbir might not have every record Mr. Thornton Throbby has ever pressed, but she cannot be far off the mark.

Maria at least managed last week to get a review of V-Gerat's most recent concert, over on Tillamook (My ship called there on the way here, making it an awfully roundabout trip from Hawaii.) The reviewer seems to have something of a "down" on the band's politics, for some reason – but was impressed by the music. It seems that the band have something special for this Pacific "Fire and Ice" tour – one wonders exactly what a "Terpsephone" might be. All being well, in eight days time we should find out!

November 23rd, 1934

Hurrah! An early start, waking at dawn and then out to Church – Helen having spent rather a long time grooming, we just made it in time (I confess that I spent rather longer than usual myself with the combs today). As we hoped, the entire Hoele'toemi family turned up, and we had a Very lively conversation. It seems that Jirry works in the Tourist season escorting visitors around the islands, showing them the various festivals, dances and such that feature on the postcards. (Alas, we've seen far more of the insides of engine cowlings than the insides of native cultures so far!)

Whatever the job may involve (and Jirry mentions that it involves a lot of fishing and diving, plus long treks carrying baggage) it definitely seems to be a Healthy one, to look at the family physique. I recall Miss Wildford mentioning hula dances going on for hours, and by all appearances the Hoele'toemi family are qualified to last the course.

I did ask about their Summer home on South Island – it seems a rather basic thatched affair, with old-fashioned matting doors and shutters, and no modern conveniences. A poor place to spend the rainy season, and indeed every year it needs an extensive overhaul to make ready for the first visitors. But it sounds fascinating to live in, given some decent weather!

From hints that Jirry dropped, I gained the impression that our Academy is fairly famous throughout the islands – at least, he said it had a definite Reputation. I'll do my very best to live up to it, when I find out just what it is!

Molly was awaiting our return – now perfumed quite strongly of varnish, having been drafted in to repaint and repair the Staff kitchens. She has things to tell us about the Customs here – having more time to read between watching paint dry, she has been "Genning up" on local interest books. It seems that many of the "Traditions" around here are less than Ancient – indeed, it is rumoured that one year's wholly invented film costumes of a particular style are next year's Ancient Traditions.

(Molly also repeats the rumour that some of the Native Guides, hired to show some of their clients the delights of the Islands, may be persuaded to show their customers some other local Experiences as well, ones that don't feature in the guidebook. Of course, we think it's sheer slander on fine upstanding Natives, but I confess that having met some, I can quite understand how these rumours start in wishful thinking)

November 24th, 1934

A fitting addition to our timetables! After receiving various bumps and bruises in the self-defence class on Saturday, we commence our training in First Aid. The course, it seems, is one that even the Third Years are still learning till the week they leave. There is a copy of the "Daily 'Elele" on the wall from two years back, with one of Songmark's first graduates having saved her companions' lives after a crash landing with nothing but her pocket kit and improvised dressings and materials from the jungles around. (All the more remarkable since we have been warned how much attention one must pay to wound treatment in the jungle – old Peterson the gardener at home lost his arm in the Leeward Isles after a very minor-looking cut went bad.)

Our "Matron", Mrs. Oeloabe, is a most formidable personage – it seems she served as a nurse on Spontoon during the Gunboat Wars, and has been patching up Eastern Islanders ever since. It seems to be one of her principles to be firm but strict – we are sure that somewhere she has a heart of gold (though Madelene X claims she pawned it years ago). Madelene made the mistake of trying to bluff an afternoon off claiming a stomach complaint – a trick she won't be trying again. Mrs. Oeloabe's default treatment for malingersers seems to be based on castor oil, quinine and a large dose of "Jallup's Rouser Salts" which have a drastic, and perhaps even therapeutic effect. It might not cure much sickness, but it is a strong encouragement to stay out of the Sick Bay!

Prudence did ask our Matron about the Gunboat Wars, of which we have heard much and little – nobody seems to discuss any details, but memorials and such seem to be all over the islands in unexpected places. Mrs. Oeloabe was no exception, and "clammed up" completely about the subject. Most odd, as most of my relatives who have been in military action (Great Uncle George "Kill all the blighters, let God sort 'em out!" Grytpipe-Thynne springs to mind) talk of it unceasingly.

During the first afternoon, we learned some basics, in terms of not moving casualties except out of urgent danger (leaking fuel tanks etc.) and how to use compresses and tourniquets for all parts (necks excepted.) On the other wall is a map of the Archipelago, with various facilities marked – it adds urgency to our lessons, spotting how far from a doctor a flyer can get in an hour.

Molly was sent out to the shops to buy some extra medical supplies – and came back with some extra supplies of her own, a pound of permanganate of potash as temporary fur dye for the weekend. Her fur pattern is rather distinctive, and she can use all the disguise she can get.

November 26th, 1934

Quite a day! We have moved on to electrical work in the engineering shed, and the less cautious ones among us are smelling of scorched fur already. (Now we know which parts of a live magneto NOT to stick ones paw into, a valuable lesson.)

November 27th, 1934

Prudence Akroyd has stolen a lead on us, her dorm having won the Gramophone for the month. But we are hard at work in our spare time, Maria having quietly bought batteries, crystals and such from the radio shop on South Island - we might not be guaranteed a gramophone, but we have the plans and materials for "cat's whisker" radios now. Looking around our room for suitable aerial sites, I discovered a fine wire leading out to vanish in a crack between the roof beams. Evidently, we are not the first Songmark class to have the idea.

November 29th, 1934

Disaster ! All had gone splendidly in preparation for our "excursion" tomorrow evening - the costumes made, the tickets purchased and all our plans laid - when at the end of our self-defence lesson, Missy Kahaloo threw me clear off the mat. I did my best to break the fall, but turned my ankle as I landed - right now (lunchtime) it is swathed in cold compresses, and our Matron suggests four days strict rest. The best-laid plans of Mice and Cats go oft astray, as the Bard said. It would be difficult enough to get to Casino Island given official sanction - I fear this completely "puts the kibosh" on my plans for the concert. Maybe V-Gerat will return next year.

(Early evening). Helen, Molly and Maria were in a huddle for half an hour, while I was laid up with an ice pack and (I fear) a bad temper. Molly vanished off to confer down the corridor, and returned some little time later, looking pleased. On my enquiry, they claimed they had a surprise for me tomorrow - which is very kind of them, but I doubt it will quite equal the concert I shall be missing.

November 30th, 1934

(Pencilled in, in plain text - "V-Gerat play Casino Island Luakinikia Park, 20:00, tickets 5 shells)

A very different day to the one I had resigned myself to, Dear Diary - very different indeed. To start with, I was quite downhearted, as my comrades leave me to rest my ankle - and dash off at dawn, without telling me where they are going. I thought it bad enough to have to stay behind, let alone to be left out of their plans. The morning passed, with a visit from Mrs. Oeloabe checking on my condition - then I was left to my own devices, with only the sound of a plaintive air from a radio across the street in the second-years block.

After teatime, though - Helen, Maria and Molly crept in, motioning silence - carrying one of the emergency stretchers we have seen in the aircraft Large Kits, and all three of them dressed in the uniforms of the islands Civil Defence force ! Or more accurately, I recognised the costumes we wore two weeks ago, re-dyed and altered, but quite convincingly across the room. And crowding behind them, Jasbir with her own team similarly attired, grinning "fit to bust" as Helen would say.

Well ! I scarcely had time to say a word, before Maria swathes me in rolls of bandages and I find myself strapped firmly in the stretcher, being lowered out of the window with six of them at the top lowering the ropes and Molly and Maria on the ground outside making sure nothing bumps too loudly. Half a minute later we are round the corner at a trot, on a "mercy dash" towards the water taxis. It would take a very suspicious watcher to call our bluff, and Molly's fur is quite transformed by the permanganate dye. (I hope it will wash out, though there is nothing against fur dye in Songmark's rules that I've noticed.)

Even while waiting for the taxi to arrive, we were looking keenly over to Casino Island, where signs of festivities were obvious - the park at the top of the hill was brilliantly lit, with four searchlights playing on the clouds. Maria pointed out a very exotic flying-boat, entirely polished aluminium with German civilian markings, that we recognised from one of the V-Gerat album covers. A thrilling prospect, to know the band had arrived.

Once clear of the jetty, the buildings of Casino Island loomed up around us, most of the hotels seeming to be deserted, with most of the noise coming from the park ahead. Scarcely ten minutes after landing, we were handing over our tickets and finding seats, with barely two minutes to spare.

The stage was a ten yard square block of Cyclopean Masonry on top of the hill, one of the Elder Ruins on the island according to the guidebook. As we arrived, the stage lights and the big searchlights at each corner were put out, leaving the park in darkness under the light of a gibbous moon. The crowd was hushed, as we saw faint signs of movement on stage - and then the concert began.

There was a long, drawn-out note from the darkness, a cold, high, almost austere sound seeming to come down from the stars - swelling into a rushing, pulsing wave of sound like a squadron of railway trains charging towards us. And the lights snapped on - focussed on all four members of the band, strikingly outfitted in absolutely black one-piece overalls, the spotlights brilliantly picking out their silvery fur, hands lit red from the glow of the valves on their Theramins.

What a concert, indeed ! I quite forgot about my ankle and such as I watched and listened, one song after another just seeming to roll over us like surf on a beach. It was an eerie, chilling, but incredibly impressive experience, even in the first half, leaving us feeling quite exhausted by the time the lights snapped off again for the break.

I managed to spot the five Hoele'toemi brothers, and we all met up, Maria and Molly meeting them for the first time (Molly whispering to me that she had been sure I was exaggerating). Having purchased large pitchers of that fine soft drink Nootnops Blue, we had quarter of an hour to chat and compare notes on the concert. Jirry was most concerned about my ankle - but seemed relieved that it would not prevent me getting to Church tomorrow, though I might be still carried in a stretcher in more Official circumstances.

Oddly enough, the Hoele'toemis were drinking a red version of the same Nootnops, and seemed surprised at the quantity of the Blue that we were getting through (though in all fairness it had been a long way to carry me on the stretcher in haste, even with all of us taking turns). Still, they confirmed that it was quite non-alcoholic, so surely there is nothing wrong with it.

The second part of the concert was quite as exciting as the first – the searchlights snapped on, their carbon-arcs sizzling as a background that blended marvellously with the music, great soaring streams of sound and light going up into the night. Song followed song, as the four Direwolves on the stage worked their supercharged Theramins till the valves glowed brilliant orange – and then came the last track.

I had noticed four small platforms on the ground in front of the stage, cordoned off – they looked like shower cubicles with the walls removed, with just a tall aerial rising to above head-height. One after the other, the band (Horst, Florian, Gunter and Ralph) jumped down off the main stage, their instruments idling as they danced with the crowd.

Not until the last one was down amongst the audience dancing, did I realise the music was still going on, as they stood on the platforms – Helen nudged me, realising now what a “Terpsephone” is at last – the full-body version of their instrument, that one plays not just with gesture, but with dance ! Using my stretcher as a discreet battering ram, we managed to get up very close to the band and dance ourselves, a rewarding experience indeed. (At least, most of us danced.)

At last, all was over, the concert climaxing in a great ascending spire of sound and light. Molly swears the lights across the entire island dimmed, but that might just have been in contrast. Pitch darkness and silence fell, before normal light revealed an empty stage. V-Gerat, alas, are famous for NOT doing encores.

Having said a lingering farewell to the Hoele'toemis and promised to look for each other tomorrow, we had a brief fright – leaving the park, we almost bumped into Miss Wildford, accompanied by a tall equine gentleman. Fortunately she seemed too busy to notice us, though Helen swears she spotted us clearly and winked – hardly likely, I should have thought.

The trip back was subdued, all of us reflecting on our evening, and painfully aware that we still had to get past the vigilance of the Staff. But all went well – I was hauled up to our room, the cold compresses restored to my ankle, and by midnight every trace of our little expedition was safely hidden away. Jasbir Sind has turned out to be an absolute brick, and as for Helen, Maria and Molly -Hurrah for such splendid friends !

November 31st, 1934

After our nights' adventures, I confess that all I wanted to do was relax. But being Sunday, I was stretchered out to the water taxi again, this time under the watchful eye of the staff. We were a little worried that word of our evening had leaked out, but the secret seems to be holding. Indeed, we met Miss Wildford on Casino Island, who mentioned what a fine concert it had been, and seemed concerned that we had missed it. (She looked definitely tired, but very pleased with herself. One wonders if the concert had been her only entertainment, but of course one must think well of our hard-working Staff.)

I managed only the briefest conversations with Jirry, but heard some interesting news. Next Saturday, the Casino Island dance and hula school is starting its off-season classes. Some of the second and third-years at Songmark have mentioned attending before, so surely we can apply through our Tutors. Native dress seems to be optional – but then, to the Natives it sometimes appears that dress is quite Optional anyway.

On our return, Miss Devinski called us into her office, and we were sure the game was up – but much to our surprise, she tells us our group is one of the first two to be considered for Passes, for “admirable Teamwork”. A great relief, and we instantly put in our application for joining the dance school next Saturday. Maria seems especially pleased at the idea – it seems she meets nobody of particular Interest on her own Sunday trips to South Island.

Work on the radios proceeds apace, as we try and wind the wire evenly round the ferrite cores. These “Cat's Whisker” receivers are very light and handy, save for lead-acid batteries the size and weight of a brick. We have earthed the system to the water pipes, and hope it never “short-circuits” when somebody downstairs wants to take a shower.

Thinking of which, Molly is regretting having used the permanganate as fur dye, the stuff won't wash off ! Still, as I told her, it seems to have done her no other injury, and indeed she is quite “in the pink” these days - something I could not resist pointing out. (Happily, I can dodge a large dictionary thrown by her even with my ankle strapped up.)

December 2nd, 1934

At last, our timetable includes some scheduled flying. We have been sitting in Link trainers till our tails go numb, and tearing apart engines till castor oil seems to be our usual perfume – at long last, we hope to get off the ground. Excellent ! Today we have a refresher on parachute packing – fortunately, the actual flights are not till Friday, and my ankle is recovering on schedule. After all this time, being invalided out of the first flight would be simply Too galling.

(Evening). Things are simply falling into place this week, it seems. I got my little radio working, and stayed up passing the headphones around as we took turns to listening to Radio LONO, playing news and dance tunes. Of course, the transmitter is in clear sight of us on the hilltop, which helps reception quite a bit. Helen managed to tune in her own receiver before midnight, before we hid the electrical supplies away in my travelling trunk. The

Songmark rules definitely ban taking unofficial radios, gramophones etc into the buildings, but make no mention of assembling them from parts !

Maria mentions having seen components in the Radio shop for transmitters, which might prove useful at some stage. Furthermore, a careful re-reading of the Academy rules makes no mention of them that I can see - happily, I picked up my Morse in the Girl Guides, and have been practising my Morse "fist" till I can hit twenty words a minute in class.

December 4th, 1934

A day of torrential rain - we are looking out at clouds touching the top of the Islands, with all flying totally "socked in" by the weather. All of us are fervently praying for better conditions tomorrow (except for Molly and Helen, who are wishing just as hard, and tuning into our crystal radios for weather reports).

Everyone is in a state of nerves - I fear we are not the best of company right now. Our aeronautics lecture turned into something of a slanging match, when we presented our essays on "The Future Of Flight". Maria championed the cause of the Caproni Transaero, a design that has been flying world-wide now since 1920 - the original model crashed, but they are now making transatlantic flights safe and cheap at 140 passengers a trip. Her vision of the Future was something much bigger, with twice as many wings and engines, making non-stop Pacific flights.

Madelene X came in waving a French aeronautical journal, full of wind-tunnel models and engine testing results from one of her countrymen, a Monsieur Rene LeDuck. Not only do the LeDuck designs have no propeller, they have no moving parts at all ! Alas, even Madelene admitted that their "athodyd" engines only start to work at about four hundred miles an hour, a speed we may (or may not) see achieved in next year's Schneider Trophy flights around Spontoon. Blasting compressed air through a model is hardly a substitute for real flying time, though how a LeDuck is ever going to get off the ground to be tested, is more than any of us can fathom.

The same publication mentions brave efforts in developing the performance of my favourite aircraft, the "Pou en ciel" as the French confusingly title it. One intrepid aviator managed to acquire some solid-fuel cordite rockets, to assist its admittedly underpowered takeoff. While I can only applaud the sentiment, and admire a speed record claimed for the class, I have to agree that speed records should be claimed by a whole aircraft, and not by measuring the fastest moving fragments...

Herr Bussemann seemed to quite enjoy the arguments, having (we discover) some fascinating ideas of his own, which he has been invited back to Europe to discuss at the Volta Aeronautical Conference next year. He has briefly mentioned the models on his desk as being "Arrow wings" - but alas, like Monsieur LeDuck's engines, their advantages will only show up at speeds nobody will ever reach.

Our Passes have come through, and we have been accepted at the Dance school on Casino Island on Saturday. Fine news indeed - my ankle feels quite recovered, and probably the first lessons will be none too strenuous anyway. Miss Devinski has cautioned us on using the Passes given to us - we are "on parole" to go only where and when they are issued for. (The senior years have hinted that they have more freedom, but are obliged to keep an eye on us - and in emergency, to come and get us if we wander too far. In which case, woe to us and farewell Passes!)

Looking at the brochure for the Native Dance classes, the four of us are planning what to wear. For the first lesson, it might look silly turning up in flower garlands and such if all we do is sign in and watch demonstrations. But afterwards - in the shower, we started planning the finished costumes. I have noticed the market here sells coconuts, and that some authentic Native girls use them in halves, in lieu of a brassiere. Presumably, Missy K would need to buy the big "Coco de Mer" shells, making it a dear fashion for her to follow.

One consolation, is that any mistakes we make are going to be short-lived, as the most "natural" costumes need replacing in a few days, by which time we will have had more practice in crafting them. I fear tailors and dressmakers on the more "ethnic" parts of the Islands have a hard time selling their wares.

December 5th, 1934

Dear diary - a day long awaited. After a further night of rain, the clouds swept away at breakfast time - with quite a chorus of cheers from our Class. Indeed, we were served a "flight breakfast" of ham and eggs, as if we were a regular Squadron setting out on a Mission - sometimes I suspect our Tutors might be having more fun with us than they admit. Regardless, it was a very welcome change from the quantities of fish, rice and "Poi" that feature large in our diet (Poi being something between mashed potato and flour glue by all appearances - Missy K. eats it by the bucket full, which is no great advertisement to my way of thinking. Give me a good plum duff or treacle pudding any day.)

At ten o'clock it was time for the long walk to the Airport hangars and our waiting aircraft. Our parachutes seemed awfully heavy, but quite reassuring. Though the schedule only calls for take-off "bumps" and a circuit or two, we were in full flight gear with first-aid kits, Emergency kits etc all packed in the pockets, equipped to fly out over deserted islands. Again, strangely reassuring in its way.

Well ! I was half expecting the weather to blow in and shut the Islands in - or to fall off the boarding ladders and twist both ankles this time, or a dozen other disasters after waiting so long. But by half past ten I was strapped into the back seat behind Miss Wildford, reading out all the checklists from memory (fuel cocks open, magneto on, flaps down, accumulators charged, radio frequency set and checked.) Then we swung into the Westerly wind, Miss Wildford eased open the throttles smoothly, and up we went!

After nearly half a year on the ground, it was definitely a thrill I had been missing. Our circuit was a bare five minutes around to the North of the island, circling around the Radio LONO transmitters, then down to land again while the others took off. Ten minutes of quizzing on air traffic safety, then up again, and when we had levelled out, Miss Wildford switched over the control locks to my cockpit, shouting the magic words, "You have Control". I completed the spell, "I have control", and experienced my first three minutes of free flight over the Spontoon Islands. Three minutes and ten seconds, (I was checking my course and stopwatch quite diligently) then handed the "stick" back to Miss Wildford, who took us in for an uneventful landing.

Most of us felt too nervous to be hungry, but celebrated with a bottle apiece of the Nootnops Red, while checking our aircraft over and refuelling. After lunch, we started on "Bumps", taking the Tiger Moths taxiing till the tail lifted, before bringing it to a halt. I confess I was quite tempted to push the throttles open and take off, but even Helen resisted the temptation. Ten "bumps", then we called it a day. And what a day indeed !

Maria has been oddly quiet since the flights. I did ask her if she found it disappointing: she has often described the experience of flying one of her country's Schneider Trophy prototypes, sitting behind some thousand-horsepower monster engine screaming its cylinder heads off (perhaps literally) as it gulps eight gallons a minute of methanol, acetone or something chemically frightful. Next to that, a sedate circuit in a Tiger moth might be expected to pale - but no, she seems quite as enchanted as the rest of us with the day's events. Absence seems to definitely make the heart grow fonder, even of flight at eighty miles an hour.

December 6th, 1934

Off to dancing lessons ! The four of us went straight after breakfast (Poi featuring depressingly largely on the menu, alas) to Miss Devinski, who issued us the long-awaited Passes to us, with a further cautionary note not to abuse them. Each pass states its owner, the route and reason for the trip, and the time to be back on Eastern Island. No need to caution us today, as the passes are for exactly where we most want to go !

On the water taxi over to Casino Island, we were travelling with our tutor Miss Wildford. From what the Senior years tell us, she is as new to Songmark as we are ourselves, having come here after a Summer of high adventure around the Malay Straits and (reportedly) very perverse Dyucks. We did ask her if Native dress was an option for the course, and she promised to find out for us. I have already been practising my basketwork weaving, and have produced a coir-matting dancing skirt (which itches intolerably, but such things could explain the rather wriggling walk observed on some of the Natives.)

The Casino Island Dance School, we found to be a large hall on the Northern side of the island, away from the main hotel section. It has large grounds, where in better weather the classes are held in the open air, with fire pits visible (hopefully for the barbecues we have heard about, and NOT for fire-walking, which I for one am happy to leave to the experts.) Our registrations had been arranged already, and so with a minimum of paperwork, we were engaged in our first lessons. Fascinating ! I had not realised how these dances tell stories, but once it is explained, one soon picks up the rudiments. I doubt it would go down well back home in Barsetshire, where the original Medieval laws against mimeshows are still enforced with authentic Medieval severity.

Our first lessons were quite like a ballet class, though with somewhat different moves - pirouettes and such replaced by the exotic swaying and such of the Polynesian dances - which looks perfectly easy until one tries to do it, especially in formation ! Maria at least has the hips to look good in such a dance, and her horns could support one of the more extreme head-dresses we have seen in films (though not actually worn on the Islands. I presume the really extravagant costumes, piled high and topped with fruit and such, are kept for Sunday best.)

Two hours of instruction proved quite exhausting, even compared with our self-defence classes. Indeed, some of the non-natives enrolled in them were definitely flagging - including half a dozen I recognised as members of the Spontoon Island Technical High School. Helen seemed quite amused by it all, though she has definite athletic advantages.

(Memo to myself - we should do more swimming and general fitness training, given the chance. Helen's ideas on "We'll dance they folk into the ground" seem a jolly fine notion.)

At lunchtime, we moved over to a restaurant across the street, which seemed to be entirely filled by the Dance School instructors and students. At last, we meet up with the whole Hoele'toemi clan, including two sisters, Oiaroani and Moeli - naturally, none of them are in our Introductory classes. Indeed, we had a most pleasant lunch, the only time we have had to talk at any leisure (usually, the fifteen minutes or so on the water taxi is all the time available.)

It seems that the actual Native "costume" is far plainer than the films would lead one to think - which comes as a great relief, as we hardly have the resources to build Carmen Miranda style headpieces. Oiaroani showed me how to tie a sarong properly, while Molly regaled us with lively tales of her family's Import business. I had scarcely realised how competitive being in Trade could be - indeed, it sounded much like my Father's tales of being on Campaign, but with better pay.

Surrounded by pieces of film set and adequately Exotic scenery, I was prompted to ask Jirry what sort of film the Islanders actually watch - as any time they want to see the scenes filmed here by overseas studios, they can do so without the price of a cinema ticket. To my surprise and delight, he too is a keen follower of stark and brooding German Expressionist films (We all were at St. Winifreds, and my dear chum Mabel had memorised every scene of Fritz Lang's "Metropolis".) Although on reflection, knowing he liked V-Gerat should have been a clear pointer to such good taste in other things. If we ever get Passes to go to the Cinema, I think I will give the idyllic island epics a miss myself.

Indeed, Jirry is proving a Very - Interesting gentleman, the more so the better we become acquainted. More than charming, he has a sparkling wit and a lively imagination (Maria points out that he has a fine taste in Costume,

which leaves little to the imagination. Mind you, she seems quite taken with Jonni, the eldest Brother of the set, who is similarly dressed, if dressed is the word.) The timetable for the dance school includes various social events, including a "luau" or such, on the last week of our term here, and definitely we are looking forward to it.

At last we have met the whole Hoele'toemi family, comprising Jonni, Oiaroani, Saimmi, Tomma, Moeli, Jirry and young Henery. An interesting collection of names, the sisters being the only ones not of European descent, though indeed all are Island "Flavoured".

The break seemed all too short, and then we were hard at work again, learning the basic dance steps and suchlike movements. I'm not sure what this "Bump and Grind" is that Molly compares it to, but I'm sure it is quite good fun and healthy exercise. Certainly, the dance classes promise to get us in fine shape for the more physical side of our courses - or visa versa, it hardly matters which.

At last, the dance leader, Mrs. Mahoabe, called the day's classes to a close, and we crowded off towards the showers - very necessary, though I suppose in warmer seasons a dip in the ocean would be traditional. Exhausting indeed, despite the gentle appearance - I hardly recall aching so much since that hockey grudge match last year against the penal squad of St. Attila's reform school.

Retrieving our passes from our bags, we discovered to our alarm that the day had slipped away far quicker than we expected - and in half an hour we had to be back at Songmark. A very hasty farewell - then a mad dash across the North side of the island, legs feeling distinctly like jelly after the day's exertions. Luck was with us, in the shape of a water taxi just about to pull away for Eastern Island - and with three minutes to spare we presented ourselves back at Miss Devinski, who was awaiting us stopwatch in hand.

Another much-needed shower, then to bed, glad not to be doing this in the Summer heat. Somebody should invent a "frequent use" fur shampoo, as we are definitely in need of it out here !

December 7th, 1934

Dear Diary - whether it is all the exercise we are getting or whatever, we are definitely sleeping like logs. Alas, Maria snores like a radial engine with one cylinder mis-firing, but in the past weeks we have been far too tired to notice. Barely up and dressed in time for breakfast, but at least it is good practice should there be classes in "quick change" costume variety acts.

Missy K and her cohorts seem quite green with jealousy, that we were the first with Passes. Helen was perhaps a little Too sarcastic, when Missy K was promising to show us how a dance should be done - and Helen started reading out the earthquake survival notice on the wall. (I am sure Missy K can dance - since seeing Uncle Reginald's company of Vickers Medium tanks playing "Tank Polo" on Salisbury Plain, I have kept an open mind about anything being declared "Impossible". But Tank Polo and Missy K dancing gracefully seem equally practical.)

Off to Casino Island again, this time without passes (but under the gaze of two parties from the Senior Year.) It seems that Songmark is fairly self-policing, and quite economical of effort. Anything we might do to misbehave (should we wish to), the senior years have thought of already, and are ready to intercept. At least, we did get the chance to chat with Jirry and his brothers - it seems their sisters are far more "native" than they are, and never attend the European churches. A fascinating notion occurs - to ask for Passes to take a look at the Native Culture ! Jirry quite agrees, though points out that there are few water taxis to South Island where the Temples are, this time of year. It will have to be an all-day trip, evidently...

Church was interesting as ever, with the Reverend Bingham in creative mood. At least, I rather doubt there is a purely Scriptural "Parable of the lifeboat and the three wise engine mechanics", but he gets his points over very well. Helen seemed definitely interested, and there might be hope of getting Molly to attend at this rate. But not MUCH hope - the Reverend B. could definitely chalk up one Miracle if that happens any time soon!

On the way back, we noticed the first Christmas decorations going up outside the Marylebone Hotel, one of the few big hotels open this time of year. Seeing Father Christmas depicted as arriving on a catamaran, is certainly a novelty.

December 9th, 1934

Back in the cockpit ! Another morning of refresher circuits, and at last I make my first takeoff. All went very well, and the Tiger Moth actually climbed quite boldly. (As opposed to poor Flying Flea #3, I fear I built it somewhat underpowered. That lawn-mower never worked again after I salvaged the engine from the wreckage, either.)

Anyway, a fine day, the wind streaming through my hair, the engine purring smoothly, and a clear view out over the whole Spontoon island group. With Miss Blande in the rear seat ready to take control at need, we did two circuits of Eastern Island, and a loop out to the South, to near a very wild-looking island seemingly quite innocent of buildings, jetties etc.

Getting down again proved somewhat "Hairy", as the wind had changed in the twenty minutes since takeoff, and the windsock was pointing right across the airstrip. Yes, dear Diary, I can now see there is a use for Ailerons, as they make banking and other fancy manoeuvres possible. Miss Blande proved quite forgiving as we bounced twice on landing - though had I dented a wingtip or (heaven help us) splintered the prop, I doubt I would get away from the repair workshop all week !

(Sophie D'Artagnan dug a wingtip in, poor girl. She'll be seeing a LOT of the repair shop.)

December 10th, 1934

Quite a boating tour today, on a navigation exercise around the islands. Miss Pelton handed us over to Captain Ryalsov, an Off-White Russian from the island of Vostok. His ship was a "forty-footer", equipped with a covered deck big enough for us to use map tables out of the wind and spray. Given our position, it was fascinating to try and plot a course, which we then called up to the helmsman - and ten minutes later, went up on deck to see where our course had actually taken us. Not a few blushes amongst us ! At least, all my courses were "approved", and none were halted by the ringing of the ship's bell announcing we were heading to run aground on a reef.

Over the day, we went right round the islands, stopping off for lunch at Meeting Island, where the regional "Government" meets. How quaint ! It seems that after the islands were (unwisely) abandoned by the Empire forty years ago, the Natives adopted Icelandic traditions and called their local council a "Thing." According to the newspapers, the council worked quite adequately in the early years, but there is increasing call for various reforms as commercial and diplomatic pressures from the Great Powers increase all the time.

As Crumley, our family's Cockney chauffeur, would almost certainly say - "Things ain't wot they used to be."

On the homeward run, we looped back past Eastern Island, waving at Songmark's Senior years practising formation flying above us. Alas, Helen's navigational plotting had us piling up on the beach at full speed, had the Helmsman actually followed the course - a few black marks for our group.

Interestingly, we toured around the deserted island to the South of us, which is not named on our air charts (Eastern Island is about a half-inch across on that scale, its only features being the airstrip, radio towers and summit altitude.) Captain Ryalsov could not enlighten us, never having landed there - suprisingly, Missy K chose to tell us something useful for a change. It appears that it is a "Sacred" island, with no constructions allowed there, not even a grass hut - but that various of the islanders and their curious "shamans" visit at certain times of the year. (A shaman seems to be a sort of local vicar, many said to be quite mad, but surely not as extreme as our The Very Rev. Ezekiel "Looney" Pontephrigh, back home.)

Having visited Meeting Island, we have now set foot on all the main islands in the group except this one - which even Missy K admits not having visited. Looking at our timetables, next term we will be doing some work with reconnaissance cameras, and given a choice, I think I know where I shall be pointing ours !

Miss Pelton was awaiting us at the dockside, ready to escort us back. In conversation, it seems that it is a small world (again), as her parents were Missionaries who came out from my very own Barsetshire when Spontoon was still part of the Empire. I would never have guessed it - her fur patterns are most unusual for Home, though indeed I have seen quite a few like them in these Islands. (I assume they share descent from some of the settlers who came out from Home, like Jirry and his family.)

December 11th, 1934

A shocking surprise in the post today - my first letter from Father, since I arrived here (I write every Sunday of course, but he is a very busy man.) Despite the advantages of modern travel, being on the far side of the world means a fair bit of advanced planning - and in my last missive I had asked about setting a date for my return trip. I told him I felt sure that Flying Flea #8 could swiftly be put back in flying condition, with what I have already learned at Songmark.

Despite the Academy closing for the Christmas holidays for 3 weeks - Father tells me he is taking an official inspection tour of Eastern Matabeleland, to inspect the anti-tank fortifications there. So, far from being back in the cheerful snows and rainstorms of Home, I am to remain here till the new Term starts - Father is advancing me more than sufficient money to stay at the Marylebone hotel should I wish to.

(Later). I have been looking through the Academy's copy of the Military Gazette, and "Jane's All The World's Fighting Trenches", for Father's destination. Though the section on "M" has forty pages on the French Maginot line, there is not a word mentioned about Matabeleland. Very odd indeed.

Helen seems quite delighted with the news - being sadly orphaned, she is staying here too, having been left very well provided-for by her late Father. She tells me the Academy closes down completely, all the Staff taking a well-earned break from their labours. (I certainly don't believe what I have heard about their activities on their "Time-off", and resolutely believe they spend the Christmas season in quiet celebration with their friends and families. Ethyl's story about Miss Blande's adventures last year is little short of libellous.)

Molly seems somewhat envious, as she will be returning to the Chicago winter, where it seems there are snowfalls that can reach tail-high in a morning. She has various suggestions as to what we might do while away from supervision - some of them, I will Definitely not be following up on. I think she must have been talking with Ethel too.

Alas, Helen had to point out that staying on between terms does not mean we are free to do as we please - while we remain on the island, the staff are in some ways "in loco parentis" and obliged to keep half an eye on us. Neither can I stay in the Marleybone, though now I can easily afford it - the SponTari Guest House on South Island gives Songmark students discounted rooms in the "off" season, and by all accounts is run most respectably.

I could wish Helen would not pull Quite such a face whenever she says "Respectably."

December 12th, 1934

Definitely a wild and stormy day, for a crossing to Moon Island and a rather graphic Safety lesson. In the shelter of one of the seaplane hangars, on a wide concrete apron, we were introduced to two officers of the Rain Islands Naval Syndicate, who were quite swathed in thick white overalls with helmets. On the far side of the hangar, we had

passed an array of small fuel drums - and soon enough, we gained a lot of respect for their contents, having seen a gallon apiece ignited on the concrete.

(Memo to myself: though the Gypsy 1 engines of our Tiger Moth trainers use plain 80 octane aviation fuel, I can see we would be a lot safer on diesel - far harder to ignite. 100 Octane burns much hotter, and methanol flares up almost colourlessly. We were told sad stories of fire-fighters not noticing spreading pools of burning methanol, when handling crashed Schneider trophy aircraft and others using "hot" fuels. For the nitro-methanol demonstration, about half a cup rather than half a gallon was used - the results were rather spectacular. Better stick to 80 Octane.)

Having seen the problem, we were treated to a demonstration of fire-fighting, with appropriate and inappropriate methods. Certainly, the old saying about oil and water not mixing, should apply tenfold when the oil is alight ! One of the instructors deliberately threw cold water over a diesel fire, and it splashed burning fuel everywhere - a good thing he was wearing an asbestos suit, or it would have been definitely Unhealthy.

It was certainly an impressive demonstration - Molly noticed from the manufacturer's label that one of the firms her Family has a controlling share in, made the methanol (or "Wood Alcohol" as she calls it.) She tells me that it is easy to make - in fact, a fair percent of all her Family's products traditionally contained wood alcohol, even without trying.

It seems that with the Schneider Trophy being held on Spontoon, the naval base has one of the Pacific's most experienced fuel handling and fire-fighting teams, capable of handling a full range of noxious fluids that designers have been using to wring the maximum horsepower out of their engines. Some of these are distinctly worse than castor oil - the advice given to encountering furfuryl or methyl hydrazine, is to hold one's breath and run upwind as fast as possible.

(Helen claimed that would be sound practice with most of Molly's Family's product. I had to step in between them, or the nitro-methane might not have provided the biggest bang of the day.)

Maria seems quite put out on hearing the races are held in August - the height of the Tourist season, but of course the month none of us will be here to see it. In fact, she has been muttering dire things about the Islands having "stolen" the trophy race, which was formerly held in Italy at least some of the time.

I have had a talk with Miss Devinski, about staying on over the Holidays - a suprisingly painless interview, one might almost have thought she was expecting it. The SponTari Guest House will be booked from December 20th to January 15th for me, and I have been recommended to take in a stock of good books to read. (Presumably not the "Spicy Island Adventures" series that Molly is hiding in her trunk.)

Thinking of Molly, she has been quite downcast since the newspapers appeared this morning. One of the features from America carried the obituary of a Mr. Al Dente, a sabretooth gentleman and friend of her family. Quite a dangerous place her home neighbourhood seems to be! The obituary mentioned that he was slain by the guns of J. Edgar Hoover - or possibly the Hoovers of J.Edgar Gunn, the accounts seem a little confused. Molly is sitting on her bed rolling a pair of "Lucky Dice" that Mr. Dente gave her. Certainly, sevens seem to come up half the time she throws them.

(Memo to myself - stop playing Ludo for money with Molly. She is quite unbeatably lucky at the game.)

December 14th, 1934

After three days of simply awful weather grounding all flying, at last the sun shines through, and we head out to our Dance Lessons again. Not alone this time - Jasbir Sind and her bunch have finally got Passes, and are joining us. It seems they sneaked out and worked half the night in the repair sheds, helping their Sophie D'Artagnan fix her wingtip - very odd, that the Staff noticed and we did not. (Though on reflection, Jasbir HAS been smelling unaccountably of fabric dope this week, causing Prudence A to suspect she's taken to drinking the stuff. By repute, various folk in the Middle East actually drink petrol, which is not Forbidden them by religion. One hopes they are non-smokers too.)

This trip, we have packed bathing costumes and our approximations to Native sarongs to wear on top - the exercises are rather Physical, and it could be embarrassing if our improvised costumes parted company without a "backup". One hardly realises it at first, but we are constantly thinking of "backups" these days, always packing two parachutes, and planning alternative routes to wherever we are aiming for. A useful sort of qualification, though not on the printed Songmark Prospectus. (The really - Interesting - things, seem not to be printed in public.)

Anyway - that makes eight of us enrolled in the Native Dance class - and Jasbir has had experience in a similar style at home, it seems. Eight is enough for our own Club, as soon as we train up on the moves. Our version might be less like the dance of the Seven Veils, than the Dance of the Seven wing canvas offcuts, which should at least be cheaper.

Tiring indeed ! By lunchtime, we had just about mastered the basic steps of a traditional dance "The Summer Palm Tree" - only to discover from the other students that this ancient traditional dance was created here for a film six years ago ! One would scarcely credit it. It seems to be a favourite at the Tourist hotels though, and we have passed The Coconut Grove, where by reputation various "Sophisticated Entertainment" runs nightly all through the tourist season.

Maria was puzzling slightly about the local idea of Sophisticated Entertainment, given that the whole style is supposed to be centuries old. I suppose to the immigrants arriving from Europe, it seemed better than the good old-fashioned Crude Entertainments of home, such as Barsetshire's annual Shin-Kicking contests or the mass formation Gurning contests that Prudence speaks of from her native Lancashire.

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Gurning was, and is, the chief contribution of Lancashire to world Culture. It basically consists of pulling extreme facial expressions - anyone who ever managed to pull their lower lip entirely over their head, would be instantly acclaimed as a local Hero.)

Again, we broke for lunch at the restaurant across the road, "The Missing Coconut". An odd sort of name, for these islands - though now I come to think of it, coconut trees do seem rather inconspicuous around here (Possibly the weather is somewhat too dismal and grey at this time of year. I felt quite at home.) The Hoele'toemi clan were there in full force, the five brothers and two sisters - certainly the climate seems fertile for Some things in the Nimitz Sea !

I had a long talk indeed with Jirry - certainly, he is in no need of training in dance techniques, though at the "top end" of the tradition things seem quite competitive. Hopefully, next term we might be given some "casual" Passes, to visit the cinema and such - Jirry tells me the local theatres show stark and brooding Expressionist films that are SO Stark and Brooding, that they have been banned in several countries ! Definitely a treat to look forward to.

Possibly it may be a Local Tradition, but the actual Natives seem quite - restrained. Sitting next to Jirry all lunchtime, he did not Once try and even put his arm round me, until I managed to contrive an "accident" in that direction. Happily, he seemed quite taken with the idea (though unhappily, we had to part three minutes later when the next classes started.)

I really must have more Words with Molly about losing her temper. A larger contingent of the Spontoon Islands Technical High School showed up than last week, and after a few choice words were exchanged, Molly challenged them to a Dance contest before the end of next term. Oh well, naturally we had to back her up, though a "showdown" might be rather premature - after all, by their accents about half the SITHS seem to be native "Spontoonies" and none of those at the Dance lessons look particularly unfit.

On the return trip, Jonni Hoele'toemi (the eldest sibling) was deep in conversation with Maria, as it seems they have several things in common. Most of his clan were helping out at the Schneider Trophy this Spring, crewing tenders, crashboats, and doing general athletic chores in and out of the water. By the time we had parted on the dock, they were deeply engaged in swapping notes on their favourite racing aircraft - it seems Maria favours her own countrymen (naturally) and enthuses about the redesigned Pregni effort that runs on water-skis rather than floats. I recall seeing a picture of in the Academy's scrapbook, but assumed it was a picture of a crashed rather than a working aircraft - the cockpit is only just clear of the water, heaven help the Pilot in a rough sea.

Helen comments that the Post Office on Eastern Island is a useful "drop box" for any Correspondence we may have that we might not want our Tutors to open. I'm sure I don't know WHAT she's referring to, never having "entered into Correspondence" with anyone clandestinely. Anyway, I already have most of the parts for a Morse transmitter. Jirry is quite handy with a radio, by all accounts.

December 15th, 1934

A day of drama indeed - though one that started dismally enough, waking up with the sound of wind howling around the rooftops and heavy rain hammering at our windows, blown almost sideways at us. Poi for breakfast again (alas!) which at least gave me the chance to be generous to Missy K, who eats the substance like a whale eats shrimps - which may explain a similarity of shapes. Oh, for the breakfasts of Home, with bacon and eggs, devilled kidneys and more courses than one can shake a stick at (I recall making the experiment, when very young.)

Alas ! The weather was absolutely awful, and none of the water-taxis were running - a rare occurrence, short of an actual typhoon. All the boats were pulled up high on the beach and the sea-lanes were quite deserted, with the exception of a large cruiser slowly heading away from Moon Island for the safety of deeper ocean waters. Not that we were allowed to stay idle - our Tutors called us all down, ordered us outside in our oilskins, and took us across to the airfield to check all the hangars were secured and the aircraft outside tied down.

Quite a drama - low cloud and tearing gusts, then just as we finish up with our own hangars, the emergency sirens start up from the control tower, and the airport staff appear in oilskins with crash and fire trucks at the ready. Miss Blande and Miss Devinski vanished for a hurried conversation, and come back looking genuinely alarmed - the first time any of us has ever seen them flustered.

No wonder ! We hear that there is an aircraft requesting emergency landing permission - and not just any aircraft, but a Russian bomber, a Kalinin K-7, a veritable flying battleship, easily the biggest thing flying - and our Airfield is only just long enough in the best of conditions, which today is definitely NOT. They had requested to land far out West on Vostok Island, but the Authorities refused to let them anywhere near their airspace. (Some Political thing, by all accounts - at any rate, it will be the first actual Red Russian aircraft we have seen here.)

Though we could hardly hear her over the storm, Miss Devinski called for volunteers to help the airport crews - naturally we all volunteered, even "Soppy" Forsythe from Missy K's bunch. With thirty tons of strategic bomber bearing down on us from somewhere in the clouds, homing entirely on Radio LONO by all accounts, definitely none of us was going to be left watching from the sidelines! While they were battling in following the signal, we were working desperately to erect the crash barriers, five rows of a sort of giant steel tennis-net affair at the end of the main runway. Even with gloves, it was awfully hard on the hands, but we managed it just in time - at least, with four minutes to spare.

It was quite a sight - coming in from downwind in the storm, we heard nothing till we saw it - dropping down from clouds barely two hundred feet above the ocean, searching for the runway as it made a ground speed of hardly sixty miles an hour - an absolutely Enormous elliptical wing, six engines (Seven, as I later found out) and a tail on great twin booms that seemed to be about to tear off in the gusts. The pilot was marvellous - I heard Helen

stop swearing in astonishment as he managed to put his undercarriage down at the very threshold of the runway. Just as well - as the runway was a sheet of water, and the Kalinin seemed to be skiing along rather than landing. We had scattered to each side, and watched it charge into the first crash barrier like a bull through a line of laundry - and the second, and the third. Only the fourth barrier stopped it, wrapped around the big podded landing gear like fishing-nets wrapped round the prow of a speedboat.

(Dear Diary - it would be nice to record how the grateful crew turned out and cheered, before inviting us out to a slap-up meal at Mahanish's Pilot's bar. What really happened, was that a very scared-looking officer jumped out screaming "Nyet Kamera ! Nyet Kamera!" and about a dozen equally worried crew stood around the aircraft with pistols drawn, dissuading anyone to get too close while the airport Authorities arrived. Ungrateful behaviour ! Maria had a lot to say about the Russian Government, and I for one quite believe her.)

The good side is, we all were awarded 12-hour Passes to visit Casino Island next Saturday ! Prudence A and Missy K were grinning "fit to bust" at the prospect, and hardly surprising seeing it only took them forty minutes hard work to get the Passes.

The Airport staff were more grateful than the crew we saved (Maria was muttering things about Bolsheviks, in Italian) and invited us into the control tower to dry off - normally quite out of bounds to the Public, but absolutely nothing else was in the air that day. Certainly, we were soaked through to the skin and freezing cold by then, as the rain was practically coming in sideways at us. After firing up the oil heaters for us to stand around, one of the airport staff came in with a gallon flagon of "hot grog", a beverage I had only heard of in Pirate books. Molly was whispering that our Tutors would definitely decline the offer on our behalf, but much to our surprise, Miss Devinski sampled a rather large tumbler and gave us permission for a small one apiece. Only "Soppy" Forsythe turned the offer down, and had coffee instead - her family being Quakers, as opposed to the rest of us who were simply shivering.

Well! I can put this down as Medicinal, and indeed the Second and Third-years are allowed one small flask for expeditions, though by all accounts they have a twenty-page form to complete if they come back having used any. Molly was advising us to take it Very cautiously, which we did. Prudence A attempted to down hers in one gulp, having watched too many swashbuckling films for her own good - I suppose it was of some Educational value as well as Medicinal, as none of us could recall anyone turning that exact colour before.

Miss Blande and Miss Devinski definitely declined a second glass for us, and after ten minutes warming we struggled back into oilskins for the trip back to the living quarters (wet fur and wet oilskins do NOT mix - or rather, they stick awfully. I was combing out tangles all evening.) As it was Sunday and no lectures were scheduled, we were invited to work out what the crew of the Kalinin would do next. A harder proposition than one might think - though we took the hint when Miss Blande started handing out large-scale navigational charts, weather reports and tables of runway length across the Pacific area.

Actually, Maria was the first one to spot the difficulties the crew are now facing - according to the emergency landing request they were absolutely out of fuel, having got here only with the help of a steady fifty-knot tail wind all the way from Siberia. To make matters worse, Eastern Island airstrip is too short for them to take off with the full fuel load they need to stand any chance of returning home - and if Vostok still refuses them landing permission, they are stuck here ! To add to their troubles, they have a brand new and fairly secret aircraft never before seen outside Russia, and as soon as the weather clears, every aircraft enthusiast on the Islands will be training binoculars and cameras this direction. (There are a LOT of them, and the Kalinin is far too big to fit in any of our hangars.)

The next few days should be Interesting, and I would not trade places with the bomber crew for all the tea in China - really, somebody should think of a method of refuelling aircraft in flight - that or building runways a mile long everywhere, a silly idea if ever there was one. Hurrah for flying boats! If the worst came to the worst, a tug could always tow one home.

December 16th, 1934

The weather continues awfully rough, though a few of the bolder water taxis are risking the trip. Quite a few tales of damage across the island, and one of the hotels is regretting waiting till the off season to replace its roof - the half-repaired roof has rationed itself across most of Casino Island. On Radio LONO (which we manage to listen to before breakfast, now hiding the receivers in the bed frames) there are anecdotes of boats swamped, and dry goods stores that will have to change their titles for awhile.

Miss Wildford arrived at breakfast, having been stranded by the storm all day on Casino Island - she seems oddly tired, as I might have thought she had plenty of time to catch up on her sleep. Still, she managed to hand us over to the Fairburn-Sykes for another lesson in self-defence - with some fairly graphic examples. Amazing, what a sock full of grit, forcefully swung, can do to a large and quite hard melon ! Messy, too. (Memo to myself: avoid being hit on the head by socks full of grit. And a spare empty cotton stocking in the pocket might someday prove useful in somewhat un-genteel circumstances.)

Mrs. Fairburn-Sykes proves quite a formidable teacher, having by her account helped with her husband in maintaining order in Shanghai, a definitely lively place by all accounts. Her demonstration on how to defend oneself against an assailant armed with a pointed stick, was quite a piece of gymnastics - maybe someday folk might make films about odd Oriental self-defence methods, but I doubt they would sell. Anyway, this time round I managed to throw Missy K rather than the other way round - and without injury, except to her pride and possibly the floorboards.

At lunch, some of the Third-year students arrive back from the airfield with news of our newest arrival - despite the crew of twenty having sat up all night guarding the aircraft and each other, the pilot has gone missing !

Major protests in all directions, with the rest of the crew accusing the White Russians of kidnapping - but most of the bets are that he has simply run off, having thought of the reception awaiting him back in Siberia. (Maria reckons he would be employed breaking altitude records - negative ones, down a lead mine.)

Hurrah ! After lunch, we joined with Jasbir Sind's bunch, having gained permission to form our own dance club - entry fee nil, and all costumes to be made by ourselves. Certainly, one afternoon a week is too little to practice such a strenuous hobby, and with the aid of a suitable radio we were soon getting "into the swing" of a local hula dance.

Maria expressed an interest in Jasbir's national dances - indeed, it seems both her Uncle and the German leader Herr Hitler have expressed ambitions to go to India some day soon. Jasbir pointed out that what we had seen on the films, "belly-dancing", is only a very small part of her national dance traditions, and not one that the daughter of a Maharajah would ever be learning. (She told us, in rather excessive detail, just what belly-dancing was originally designed for. Gosh !)

(Evening): A somewhat depressing time, with Molly and Maria starting to pack their bags - they are travelling on the same Clipper as far as Hawaii, whence Maria heads North to Seattle and thence via a Caproni Transaero II over the Pole back to Europe. A fascinating flight that must be, fourteen hours through the Polar night, lit only by the aurora above, before seeing dawn somewhere over Iceland. One hopes that the cabins are heated.

December 17th, 1934

It looks indeed as if our little band is breaking up - Jasbir is leaving tomorrow night, catching the week's only Imperial Airways flying boat to Humapore, Rangoon and changing there for her home state of Utterly Pradesh. Helen was quite surprised to learn that things are not quite as the maps depict - though India shows as a solid block of red on the map, in fact many states are independent in all but foreign policy. Hence her Father, the Maharajah, has his own native army (British-trained and equipped), and the makings of an Air Force in progress. Conditions are difficult for flying out there, with only the major rivers proving reliable runways (except in case of drought. Or flood. Or logging rafts getting in the way. And the crocodiles can be a problem, by all accounts.)

Maria is proving quite a "politico" as my Father would say, and often debates the finer points with Jasbir and Li Han right up to "lights out" at night. Still, one cannot hold it against her, given her Family background. She has few countrymen to talk to out here, although the occasional aircraft does drop by. Not that we get much opportunity to make small-talk with them. One day we may get casual passes to Mahanish's Pilot's Bar as the second and third years do, but until then we are reduced to aircraft-spotting, Maria always in fits of joy at the sight of a Caproni or Piaggio heading over us to the airport or the seaplane base.

Whatever the flying abilities of the Italian Air Force may be, one cannot but be impressed by the uniforms. We can spot them half a mile away, without the field-glasses.

As classes are beginning to "wind down", Helen and I went out this afternoon to South Island, in the company of Miss Pelton and a half-dozen second-year students. The water-taxi trip was quite long, stopping first at Casino Island before heading round into the teeth of a blustery wind and choppy seas. I am doing my best to cultivate Helen's social graces, but alas it is an uphill struggle. I shall keep at it ! Given a small boat and a most irritating sea, at least I could join her in demonstrating that while she is vulgarly seasick, I may be indisposed with "mal-de-mer", a far more refined condition.

(Helen seemed less than sympathetic. and attempted to hit me with a large wet fish. Happily, years of dodging wet towels in the showers of St. Winifred's has improved my reflexes against that sort of thing quite considerably.)

Having finally arrived on South Island, we were quite impressed by the grand new resort hotels in the northern bay. But Miss Pelton escorted us out of the main strip, quite out of the village along a track heading up between the two highest points of the island, twenty minutes walk from the jetty. Quite a place - a great green tunnel of jungle around us, without another sign of habitation till we suddenly came out in a wide clearing, and saw the SponTari Guest House.

It is quite an impressive place, is the Guest House. Three storeys high, it stands next to a roaring stream, on a big rock platform reminding one of a Japanese castle. The eaves are low and overlapping, looking like a waterfall as the rain cascades in sheets from one roof section to another. I was quite impressed, though Helen's tail was definitely drooping. I think she was hoping for something a little less rustic, however charming.

We were introduced to the proprietors, Mr. and Mrs. Tanoaho, both native "Spontoones". A fascinating pair, who by all accounts have set up here after a long and strenuous career in the import-export trade. Exactly what they imported and exported, they do not make exactly clear, but it seems to have been highly profitable.

On the way back to the docks, we passed Maria's church, the South Island Chapel Of The Sacred Heart. Not a hugely imposing structure, but obviously the biggest of its kind for a considerable distance. The Native islanders seem to have been influenced by it, though I doubt if the Church Authorities quite approve of having the South Island Pie-shop of the Sacred Steak and Kidney built right next door.

December 18th, 1934

The last official day of Term, hurrah for the hols ! As a matter of fact, we have today off to use our Passes, so after a hasty packing away of books and notes, we piled into water taxis bound for Casino Island. I believe all of us had detailed plans written up for a day like this, after so long discussing how we could make the most of such a chance.

Things worked out very nicely, my Morse transmitter having alerted Jerry three nights ago to our good fortune. (My callsign is Osprey, which Maria has been making fun of, seeing that Ospreys unexpectedly plummet

from a great height. Maria is no devotee of the dear old Flying Flea.) We met up at a café he recommended, on the West side of the docks, a crowded place full of the wail of steamers, the steam of whalers etc. Though Maria, Molly and Helen went off with Jasbir's group to watch an aeronautical epic, Jirry recommends a small cinema with a very select programme of brooding Expressionist films.

My ! The audience was mostly islanders, some of them devotees of the genre, and some obviously in from curiosity. We could easily spot the latter, as the film was so marvellously Stark and Gritty, that every few minutes one of the faint-hearted watchers would dash out of the cinema screaming. (Fortunately it was a silent feature, and one Brooding enough to make "The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari" look like "Steamboat Mickey". *)

Certainly, it was a new experience, and one I hope to repeat - though one associates cinema rendezvous with shop-girls and waitresses' entertainment - I can definitely see the attraction. As before, Jirry was really very Restrained, but not hard to Encourage. Gosh!

After a saturation of film, we met up with the rest for lunch, at a pilot's café charmingly titled the Tow Bar. The mural on the front wall depicts a very small tug trying its utmost to shift a rather stubborn-looking Dornier X off a mudflat, an episode that we are told took place not three years ago off Eastern Island. Lunch was excellent, and remarkable for a total lack of Poi on the menu.

We ordered our favourite drink, Nootnops Blue, in large quantities as ever. I asked Jirry why he always seemed so surprised at this - and we all get rather a shock as he tells us of its actual ingredients. Quite a shock indeed, we all felt in need of a restorative drink.

Maria started fuming loudly in Italian (Molly later told me that what she said was not only perverse, but physically impossible except to a trained contortionist) and then announced that she was going to make Missy K wish she had never been born. And then I realised - Missy K had introduced us to the drink just before our Exam, which we failed so awfully ! Being a native "Spontoonie", she surely knew its probable effects on us.

Hopefully, I managed to defuse Maria, and pointed out that it is the season of Goodwill to all, fast approaching. Still - one cannot but reflect that next term, Missy K had better take great care when we are around.

In the afternoon, we attended a small native Dance Contest that Jirry and his brothers were competing in. Fascinating ! I must definitely work hard over the holidays with Helen, practising our exercises ready for the next term (the final dance class of Term is sadly cancelled, so we have more time to work on our beating the Spontoon Technical High School crowd.)

The hours flew by far too swiftly, and soon I was having to pull Molly and the rest away from such pleasant company, and get us back to the water taxis on time. As we set out, we could see the Imperial Airways clipper arriving to take Jasbir homewards tonight, and indeed Molly and Maria are setting out at first light tomorrow. Quite a day, Dear Diary - and indeed it has been quite a term !

- (Editor's Note: A modern translation might be "Makes "Eraserhead" look like "The Care Bears Movie".")

***** Amelia's adventures continue in "Songmark Solstice", coming soon. *****