

Summer Daze

Being the 13th part of the diaries of Amelia Bourne-Phipps at Songmark Aeronautical Boarding School for Young Ladies on Eastern Island, Spontoon. Amelia is in her second and last Summer holiday, and is keen on having an exciting time of it...

Saturday 18th July, 1936

Holidays at last! It was quite a party last night, starting at Bow Thai where even the first-years were invited. This is the first time I think that all three years have sat down to dine together outside Songmark, and indeed we took every table in the place. Even Liberty Morgenstern showed up, though she insisted on helping the staff serve the food as a "comradely gesture striking at the heart of capitalistic subservience and worker's oppression." Oh well.

Beryl was on her best behaviour, and indeed was on top form as ten minutes scribbling on the back of her menu produced a "Politically Approved New Haven Phrasebook". It consists of three lists of the distinctive words Liberty generally uses once per sentence, and as with the Bow Thai menu one simply selects one from each column. So having passed the chart around we could mutter knowledgeably about "positive dialectic enfranchisement" or "revolutionary proletarian dynamism" whenever a certain coyote girl passed. It took her half the evening to tumble what was going on; at least someone who harps on constantly about the greatest good for the greatest number cannot complain too much when all Songmark (except her) enjoyed the joke.

The party broke up at about ten with various folk heading on to other venues; Prudence and her dorm were heading over to the Double Lotus, taking the similarly inclined dorm headed by Florence Farmington with them. Florence herself does not seem to share their interests; happily that bar is not at all pushy about things, and she is perfectly safe there by all accounts. I have never been there late at night, and hear it is rather livelier than I have seen so far: if nothing worse Florence will have her education expanded.

Prudence has mentioned that folk there have been investigating on their own account what happened to Molly last year aboard the Three Castles and have come up with a name; Captain Granite is definitely marked if she returns to Spontoon, and the denizens of the Double Lotus say they will bring Molly in if there is anything left to do by the time they find her. One gets the impression they have enough folk prejudiced against them without villainesses such as Captain Granite doing further harm to their image.

From the few things we hear, Prudence's dorm are involved in a lot of behind-the-scenes adventures, perhaps as much as we are ourselves. I remember Madelene X officiously asking just what they had been up to last term when they vanished for the whole weekend; Prudence obligingly filled her in with details of exactly what she and Tahni had been doing. I am sure Madelene will never ask again – and Prudence might have been telling the exact truth although other weekends are more serious.

Farewell to our third-years at last; folk such as Conchita have been a fixture since we first arrived and it is hard to imagine Songmark without them to look up to (and occasionally dodge). We can sew that third bar on our musical note collar badges any time we wish – from now on, we are it. As Molly says (having been brought up reading Film Frolics) whatever else you may have, the key thing for a star to have is "IT" by the tonne. Personally I think of coal and sand as the sort of things one buys by the tonne; valuable commodities are measured in carats and troy ounces.

Strictly speaking the third-years are still here, in that they have a final week rather like departing soldiers being "de-mobilised" before heading out into the uncertain world without the uniform or guaranteed rations. But as we are heading out to South Island tomorrow we are hardly likely to see them again, so I made sure to quiz Conchita on her trip to Cranium Island a year and a half ago. Happily she keeps a diary too, and as we sat in Song Sodas I treated her to a Mixtecan style chocolate and habanero soda while she translated it from her local Quechca dialect. I tried her drink but far prefer a strawberry phosphate.

One thing she pointed out was the Tanoahos who organised the expedition seemed to know the island quite well, as they severely warned the party off various harmless-seeming areas and mentioned having arranged safe passage with the locals for the areas they prospected in. Now, the Tanoaho family are someone I hopefully might see on South Island, in fact we are none too distant neighbours. It will be interesting to discover how their scrap metal business is doing; every now and then one sees an article in the Daily Elele where they have pulled off some major coup in (say) managing to sell some thousands of tonnes of scrap iron to the Japanese. I wonder what they want with all that rusty metal.

Conchita did mention that the party had been troubled by mysterious noises off in the jungle, which were not cries of any sort of animal known to the rather cosmopolitan adventuring party. They had also found some very odd marks on the ground; one might call them pawprints except they did not seem to be made by anything one could really describe as paws. When I asked for details she rather evasively said I would have no trouble in recognising them when I saw them. Conchita was very helpful but did say Cranium Island is somewhere she definitely will not be returning to, for any money.

Unlike last year we are not expecting to be spending our Summer mostly in grass skirts, so the afternoon was taken up deciding what to leave in storage and what to take to South Island. Grass skirts are very comfortable but our adventuring suits are more practical in terms of pockets and insect-proofing. There

is a local saying we have heard about being able to tell a Songmark girl from her X-ray photos; fish-hooks and lock-picks hidden in the head fur and assorted hardware concealed all over. It is not all exaggeration; certainly our pockets bulge when we go out adventuring, and although our packs may be full of useful food and equipment we have trained to make do on far less. On field trips our Tutors sometimes gratuitously announce that we just lost our main pack and have to carry on with what is in our pockets and what we can find around us – even though we are still actually lugging the pack on our backs to add injury to insult.

Molly received a surprise present last week but only just told us; a complete German sniping rifle and all the accessories! It is very unlike her to keep quiet about this sort of thing, and I rather wonder where she got it from. If Lars had contributed, she would definitely be loud in his praises as usual. For a change, I will be bringing my own T-Gew along, as there may be things out there that merit it. I may have to cut down on the food and bedroll weight myself, as the cartridges are about half a pound each and if I need any I am liable to need plenty. Plus a little matter of forty pounds for the rifle and case itself. Molly has offered to carry the saw-backed bayonet, and if it cheers her up I shall let her.

(Later) Our bags are packed and we are saying farewell to our dorm, as when we next unpack in Songmark it will be in the third-year rooms. One more year and then – who knows? The world is full of opportunities as well as dangers – and not all of them can be dealt with using a 13 mm anti-tank rifle. Molly grudgingly agrees, but insists that is the default approach.

Sunday 19th July, 1936

This is more like a real holiday! Last night we hauled our cases over from Songmark, and have already packed our “euro” clothes in them for the season, as we are happily established in the Hoele'toemi household on Haio Beach. Saffina is staying in the village with some of Moeli's friends and we showed her this morning how to properly oil fur in the local style. She says she is quite comfortable with Native dress, as in Ubangi-Chari the traditional costume is just as scanty. Her part of Africa still follows the religions they had thousands of years ago, and has been fending off missionaries of all persuasions very effectively.

Helen gets the guesthouse, as is her right being Tailfast, and indeed by her smile and bitten ear this morning seems to have started the holiday as she means to go on. The rest of us are in the village unmarried women's hut, and a very fine bunch the rest of the villagers are. We are speaking nothing but Spontoonie now, even Maria (who says it sounds more sympathetic to her Italian ears than English, which in turn is much better than German or Russian.)

Thinking of Germans, Professor Schiller is on the islands still and some of Jerry's guide friends are helping him around Main Island. One expects he is being watched rather carefully. But despite having received various mysterious crates of metallic hardware from Germany it really is what he claims, the latest in climbing equipment. This Summer he has applied to the Althing for permission to attempt the main face of Mount Kiribatori, which is twelve hundred feet of sheer rock and one of the biggest “walls” in the Pacific.

Of course, one can imagine folk debating whether to let him try; it is proudly listed as “unclimbable” in all the tourist brochures and postcards, and apart from a few minor routes such as we climbed its reputation has always looked quite safe. But technology and skill keeps advancing, and we have heard stirring tales of hardships and triumphs on the Alpine peaks. Maria has seen the Eiger, and assures me that anyone used to climbing that in the snow would jump at the chance to try an equally impressive face in the far less uncomfortable conditions here. Possibly it will be worth rewriting brochures for next year, given a newsworthy enough ascent (or a newsworthy enough catastrophe as Molly says; a lot of the folk who did attempt the North wall of the Eiger never came home. Some folk would love to see him fall off.)

Saimmi arrived just after breakfast, and Helen and Saffina joined us as we headed up Mount Tomboabo to look at one of the shrines there. Certainly Maria's church has no view like this, a thousand feet above the beach and the whole island chain spread out below us. Saimmi took us through more religious exercises, which she says should protect us to an extent against what we find on Cranium Island. She is still rather worried about Molly and Maria going, but points out that it is a very rare combination to find any qualified Adventuress who are remotely suitable and interested in being a Priestess. Finding three of us at Songmark at the same time is the one thing that has made this trip possible, she says, and if they waited another ten years it is hardly likely she can find a more qualified team. Even so, with some of the party spiritually unprotected it might end up as in that ironic song from the Great War:

“They're warning us, they're warning us / one respirator for the four of us

Thank your lucky stars that three of us can run / and one of us can use it all alone.”

The trouble is, it is hardly likely that running away will be an option – after all, the fragment is the very thing we are going there expressly to find! On scale it is like Father's sapper teams being called in to make safe an unexploded bomb – one never knows exactly what its condition will be. It might have smashed open on impact with the detonators already lying harmless in the duck pond, or be intact with the fuze ready to start ticking again at the slightest touch. Given this is Cranium Island we are thinking of, the worst possibility is some of the locals have already been trying to salvage pieces for their own purposes and set the timer running.

On the way back we stopped at the Spontari Guest House where we stayed for our first Songmark holiday; unfortunately the staff tell us the owners are away on Vostok this month talking about magnesium

with a Count Vorishov who owns extensive metal refineries and mills there. So we will probably have to go with the information we already have; I just hope it is enough.

An excellent luncheon of fresh fish and breadfruit followed at the Hoele'toemi household, with a big dish of home-made Poi for some of the other family members. This is quite a ritual all across the Pacific, in that the Poi pot is said to embody the Family spirit, and when it is opened all quarrels must be put aside. Saffina is certainly happy to eat it; which is just as well as if she insisted on the usual diet for her species that would be the family's usual meat delivery for the week gone at a sitting! Then again, if one reads the pulp magazines one would hardly expect a hereditary priestess of "Voudon" to be a chatty and friendly girl one would trust with the family cubs. It is not all howling rituals and blood sacrifices, doubtless much to the disgust of the film industry.

Thinking of pulps, Molly has a pile of them she bought on Casino Island yesterday, as life on South Island can be rather quiet. Some of them are just as strange as any Jane Ferry has mentioned her family printing; there is even one that claims to be written by and for ventriloquist's dummies! A more believable publication is at least full of cautionary tales, and plenty of adverts for adventuring equipment "used once, owner no longer requires". Being an international adventurer has its pitfalls, as every page of "Soldier of Misfortune" vividly shows us with thrilling tales of woe and disaster. Some of the pitfalls have sharpened stakes or collections of venomous animals waiting at the bottom, and I can see the use of that cumbersome ten-foot pole we carried on Albert Island when hunting the Sturdy Boys.

Beryl is staying on Casino Island and hopefully keeping out of trouble. Sadly her notion of a trouble-free holiday probably involves pulling off the Perfect Crime leaving the Police forever baffled. At least she is not coming to Cranium Island, which is a great relief for all but the Casino staff. She is very handy in self-defence true enough; like most of us she is prepared to fight for what she believes in, which in her case is an unshakable belief in money.

We were very glad to forget our troubles for an afternoon and head down to the beach in full Native costume, having briefed Saffina on what the tourists are like. She is a Princess after all in her own country, even if the traditional job of the eldest daughter involves looking after the royal cattle. I fear that many of the Hawaiian-shirted visitors seeing us in our Native dress look on us as part of the "facilities" laid on for their use like the beaches and swimming pools; although Saffina is perfectly friendly I have visions of her handing some over-eager tourist his head or indeed other body parts. Still, Saffina being mostly a lioness by descent, few folk really want to risk their hides irritating her.

It is a good thing we have practiced our costume building, as traditionally the Polynesians do not wear them in the water and swim bare-furred. Our reinforced grass skirts held up well, and certainly dry out a lot faster than the stretch woollen bathing costumes of the "euro" tourists. One poor fennec girl must have been trying on a scanty yellow polka-dot bathing suit that she wore for the first time today—only to discover it is a make of cotton that goes almost transparent when wet! We spotted her distress and gathered round (she was afraid to come out of the water, she was as nervous as she could be) as we shielded her from over-eager eyes back to her beach blanket. Some tourists are perfectly nice and most at least inoffensive – but as Helen says, "the squeaky wheel's the one you notice."

(Later) Despite what some visitors might think, life in a longhouse is really perfectly respectable, and the unmarried women's hut is almost as much so as the Songmark compound. Of course, unlike Songmark in term time we are not obliged to stay there. The nights are very warm now and in oiled fur one needs no insect protection for a night under the stars: a pandanus palm mat is quite enough to keep the sand out of the fur. Definitely a fine evening to take a stroll.

Monday 20th July, 1936

After all this time I should have known; just as I get settled in for an enjoyable break somebody invokes our call-up papers and recruits us for an Adventure. When Jirry and I returned at breakfast time my ears drooped as we saw Mr. Sapohatan happily chatting with the family over a shared bowl of breadfruit mash. I have no idea what he has of a social life, but he has never paid us a purely social call yet.

It is one thing to be excused a navigation test in term time for this kind of thing, but after a very fine evening and having made plans of more to follow, I must confess my heart was not really in it for a minute as he beckoned Helen and myself aside to brief us. Still, nobody will ever call a Songmark girl a slacker, especially when there is something like this to be tackled. Mr. Sapohatan told us a family house on one of the smaller Kanim Isles had been burgled, which is nothing very alarming – except it has three daughters who were meant to be there on their own but changed their plans at the last minute. Night fishers in the area heard the sound of a seaplane taking off, which is a risky thing to do in fitful moonlight; putting two and two together it looks rather as if the raiders are back.

Of course, what gives this some urgency is they were unsuccessful and can be expected to try again. He mentions having other teams in the area, but asks if we are interested. We can hardly refuse, can we? Our holiday plans are suddenly very tentative as we are put on call to head off at short notice for points unknown, either in Native or Euro costume. He pointed out that only Native areas have been raided; one can see why as any kidnapers making off with rich tourists would have half the world's navies after them, but the sorry fact

is nobody will be sending any non-local gunboats if a few folk vanish from the Kanim Islands. Most of the world would probably just dismiss it as an inter-tribal rivalry or something of the sort.

In the meantime, we are still heading out tomorrow with Jirry and his friends testing our “Native” disguises against Professor Schiller, who only knows us in Songmark uniform. It hardly matters if he does recognise us; if worst comes to worst we can just plead poverty and say our Songmark suits have to last us another year and we are improvising in the holidays. Grass skirts are famously economical in dressmakers’ and laundry bills.

Molly asked Mr. Sapohatan about Professor Schiller, as she has heard many things about the “Ahnenerbe” he works for and their surprising adventures in distant lands. Unlike (say) Kansas Smith they are willing to buy strange artefacts if the locals can prove ownership, and I would not be amazed if she has hopes of selling them some factory-made tourist Tiki as a genuine Lemurian artwork. I have heard other things of him from Saimmi and Huakava, who calls him a “Knight of the Great Wyrn” though she has not yet explained what that means.

The ferret gentleman nodded pleasantly and explained that the Prof has wide interests; apart from climbing rock faces (which he has been sold an expensive licence to attempt) and collecting antiques, he is very interested in spotting ancient Native traits, as part of his grand historical “Out of Thule” theory. Though everyone knows the Spontoones came from all over and are about as mixed as citizens of Molly’s Chicago home town, there are quite a few folk of more ancient Polynesian stock whose ancestors were living on Spontoon before the accident with the Great Ritual rendered the place uninhabitable. According to tradition and the surviving statues the first Spontoones seem to have been reptile folk but those from other islands were not, and have various unusual features Euros tend not to have. Mr. Sapohatan suggested we ask just why the particular interest, as it is something that could be useful to know.

Having briefed us, Mr. Sapohatan bowed and left us to it. There is no telephone in the Hoele’toemi household, but I am sure he can contact us at short notice when he needs to. Until then – on with the holiday!

Thursday 23rd July, 1936

Two rather idyllic days were more than I had expected to get, and indeed we all made the most of them. Helping out with the household, bathing on Haiio Beach and the less touristy West coast of the island, and domestic life with Jirry in oiled fur and not much else – it has been very fine.

All good things come to an end, at least for awhile. Today Helen and I joined Jirry, Marti and three of their friends on Main Island where they are supporting a reconnaissance climb of Professor Schiller and his team on the slopes of Mount Kiribatori. We met the party on Casino Island to escort them over; Main Island as ever is restricted access to Euros and qualified Guides are needed for every trip. He saw through my disguise in a heartbeat, explaining that costume and fur pattern can be changed, but he never forgets a skull shape. It is just as well I did not dye my fur as Kim-Anh, or her cover would have definitely been blown.

With him were three young silver wolves, Gunter, Uwe and Ulric, who have come over with their Schneider Trophy team. They are very striking even when put next to Jirry and his guide friends, and though they are not brothers they certainly look like it. Professor Schiller explains they are experienced climbers, as climbing is something they do a lot in that new German boy-scout sort of organisation their Chancellor sponsors. They are quiet but extremely keen, and indeed they seem very well-chosen ambassadors of their country. We have heard all sorts of tales of the decadent times of the Weimaraner Republic of ten years ago, and things have indeed moved on.

It is quite a contrast to leave the bustle and noise of Casino Island and head into the cooler greenery of Main Island, passing up near the waterfalls to the foot of the main face of Mount Kiribatori. For once the guides do not have to slow down to wait for their customers, as even the Prof is quite athletic and Gunter, Uwe and Ulric (I am calling them G-U-U for short, as it is hard to tell them apart) look as if they are fresh from the Olympics.

This was only a trial and survey trip, but an awful lot of climbing was done – exploring the start of the route, getting a feel for the conditions and photographing the way ahead. Although they have a lot of steel pegs they only used them on practice routes they will not be taking on the day; the Prof explained that would be cheating, as otherwise one could claim to have conquered in a single climb while taking a month to hammer spikes in no faster than a railway. G-U-U are amazing on the rock and make us look like tourists; there is something quite terrible and intrepid with the way they scale terrifying rock walls on the tiniest of claw-holds.

It was a jolly strenuous day carrying the camera gear and ropes; we went up the rock-falls around the base trying to get the right angle on the main face. Still Professor Schiller was not quite satisfied, and asked if there was any way of getting closer shots of the top pitches. Of course, we have assets that a normal Guide party do not – four Songmark aviatrixes and my Sand Flea!

Friday 24th July, 1936

Not the sort of day I had expected had you asked last week - instead of beaches and grass skirts, runways and flying goggles. We fly every day in term time now (weather permitting) but I had lovingly put my Sand Flea

into hangar storage last Friday not expecting to see her till September. Until my finances are sorted out I can only fly her when someone else is paying the fuel bills – normally our Tutors but today Professor Schiller.

It was a long day, with Molly, Helen and Maria back over to Eastern Island to help fit the cameras onboard and rig up cable releases. Once they had done their share in the workshops I could get away and in eight minutes was over the coast of South Island, spiralling up half a mile from the rock face. Alas, my Sand Flea is hardly an altitude record-breaker, and three thousand was as high as I could go with the weight of the cameras and the usual full fuel tank – so I fired off the film and managed to glide most of the way back, the engine just ticking over.

While Maria dashed off to develop the film we planned the next flight, removing all but one camera and only filling the fuel tank to a quarter. It was a scorching hot day and we decided to wait till after lunch in the hope of catching a thermal. It was Molly's turn next, so we wished her good luck and waved her off, Helen following her progress with the binoculars while I helped Maria finish and dry the prints. Although they only covered the lower part of the rock face, they turned out sharp and gave a good angle. It is awfully important when half-way up a cliff to know what you are heading for is a real crack and not just a fault on the film.

Molly was back in twenty minutes, having reached four thousand feet on a good thermal; she fired off the one roll of colour film we have and says the route looks fine all the way to the top. Of course we have no facilities for developing colour over here, so she volunteered to make the trip to Casino Island and took enough shells to get it handled as priority. One day, it is possible most tourists will be firing colour film and hardly thinking twice about it.

While she was gone I serviced my dear Sand Flea and read through one of the pulp fiction magazines in the pilot's lounge, "Dial M for Monster." The back cover proudly proclaims, "*Same low price! Now 20% more lurid!*" and indeed the author and illustrators are trying hard to please. I suppose it is all good acclimatisation for Cranium Island, though hopefully we will not have quite the same experiences as the heroines on the front covers. That series should be titled "*Scantly clad ladies in peril for no believable reason but to sell this magazine*".

Maria was next up – she needs the logged flight time this month and Professor Schiller wants as many photographs as possible, so we could have spent all day in the air at his expense. Still, by the time Maria returned with another roll to develop we had quite a coverage, some taken from less than a hundred foot range. Having some more flight time in our logbooks is always a bonus on the Songmark course.

Farewell again to my dear Sand Flea for awhile – until I receive another flying commission or come into some serious money. The airport staff looks after it very well and charge Songmark students a minimal storage fee, which is just as well. In exactly a year's time we will be on our last day at Songmark, and all the privileges and protections will vanish like the morning dew the next day. Hopefully we will no longer need it all by then.

Today is the day new applicants hear whether or not they have been successful; the telegraph office does a roaring trade in worldwide confirmations, which must make Western Onion very happy. Of course, some folk might not get to hear about it till later, such as Saffina who was two days travel from the nearest telegraph post at the time. This must be a difficult year for our Tutors, what with that Spanish equivalent closed by the war and so many folk wanting to carry on at any price. Maria wanted to go there initially, but her Uncle decided Spontoon was a better place for her. Possibly because there are plenty of Italians in Spain already, and possibly because it is on the far side of the planet. At any rate, Maria decided in her first term here that a four year course under the strict rule of Jesuit tutors would probably be too much of a good thing.

Some folk have heard already – on the way back to South Island we met a very downcast pair of sisters, Peggy and Ruth who sailed out starting Easter time from the English coast in an improbably small yacht which they had restored themselves. It is an awful shame, as they look jolly decent types who I would trade in a heartbeat for some students I could mention – but they have been turned down for this year. I suppose our Tutors have a trying time weighing up everyone's merits, and would rather turn away ten perfectly good students than let one in who would not make the running. We still have not heard which of our third-years failed to qualify.

Saturday 25th July, 1936

A complete washout of a day – the cloud was covering the bottom of the climb and lashing rain was making things awfully unpleasant, so we were quite pleased to hear the next trip is postponed. Still, we were invited over to Casino Island for an official thank-you by the Prof who is staying next to Lingenthal's and has no great distance to go for his coffee and cakes. As we had to see him anyway to hand over the films, we decided to make a day of it.

Quite a party! We put our respectable Euro costumes on for the occasion, as did Jerry and Marti Hoele'toemi. It is rather a shock to remember this is how we first saw them nearly two years ago in their church-going best – something we rarely see nowadays having quite different religious ceremonies on Sundays.

Lingenthal's was quite crowded as the Schneider Trophy teams were grounded by the weather and were taking the chance to relax. There were mostly Germans but Maria was happy to spot several of her countryfolk in there, and a few Spontoonies who I recognise as being part of the racing committee. I know Mr.

Sapohatan did say last year that this place is rather more than it seems and we should not make a habit of coming here, but on the other paw he is interested in Professor Schiller and this is where we find him.

Some of the mechanics and such pilots as are not on flying duty tomorrow seemed to be very keen on drinking the place dry; the “German” beer comes from Tsingtau in China, and somehow makes its way out even though the Japanese have closed that area to European trade “for protection of the local industries” as they put it. As usual I contented myself with a glass of white wine, though Molly seemed quite in her element and had a whole bottle. At least it was not that “Vin Marinara” that some of the Italians had brought along; Lingenthal’s is a respectable place and does not sell such.

One of the waitresses is a Spontoonie from Main Island we have met at the dance classes, a very striking girl of mostly Polynesian stock. The standard costume is rather revealing on her but she hardly seems to mind – you might say that if two-piece bathing costumes ever get into common fashion she will need a six-piece version. We have met a few like her, such as that Crew Chief Edy Lodis on Moon Island, who doubles as a Moon Priestess in tourist time. Noticing Professor Schiller’s more than expected interest, Molly managed to ask him about it more discreetly than I had hoped.

It is always fascinating to hear from someone who truly believes in his work. When Professor Schiller is not busy measuring skull shapes and tail lengths, he is plotting their distribution across the world and drawing up surprising conclusions. He tells us that some of the most ancient European pottery figurines from cave excavations have much the same features as some of the Polynesian girls – there is the famous “Venus of Ludendorff” that was discovered fifty years ago but never publicly displayed to avoid shocking the sensibilities of the time. His “Out of Thule Theory” has some sides to it that would read well in “*Weird Tails*” magazine but he is collecting real evidence for it in these islands. He has mentioned rather sadly that his Superiors read pulp magazines, link unrelated facts and send him out to “prove” them; just because there are Lamas in Tibet and Llamas in Peru does not necessarily mean the two were once linked.

The Prof seems to have been quite well received by the Althing, and indeed he says he has been invited to give a public lecture next week on Meeting Island. We shall certainly attend if we can, this “Geo-politics” seems a fascinating idea and it will be interesting to get his point of view.

G-U-U were at the party and danced wonderfully though Gunter explains they do not drink alcohol or smoke, in emulation of their leader. I doubt he chews gum either. If they were omnivores rather than wolves they would probably be vegetarians by choice, which to my view is taking things rather too far. Rather like Violet in our first-year who insists on half an hour a day of breathing exercises, wearing special fibre undergarments of natural reticulated jute and only eating her family’s ethically approved brand of breakfast cereal (“Pummelled Wheat TM”).

Maria did seem rather on edge, as the foreign newspapers have made much of Italy falling behind and her Uncle’s failings. He has actually said in public “*It is a good thing our folk are hardy and not accustomed to eating more than once a day*” which is hardly wonderful peacetime propaganda. She has often complained that the Germans have just copied her Uncle’s ideas, and it must be galling that they are doing it better; “guns not butter” pleases nobody when neither actually gets made in usable quantities. Unless Italy does well in the Schneider Trophy this year there will be no living with her.

Certainly the Italian pilots seemed very confident and dashing; if flair and élan could win the trophy there would be no stopping them. It is interesting to see how they react to her – though she has been away from home two years folk seem to know her by sight, and indeed she was definitely in her element surrounded by admiring company. She has told us something of the months before she was sent to Songmark, and it seems to have been one escapade after another. Perhaps that is why her Uncle preferred to send her somewhere she cannot fly home to Italy from at weekends.

An excellent party and one that was still going strong at sundown, when folk started bringing out the 100% schnapps and we made our excuses as soon as the rain stopped. Their gramophone was (briefly) playing the German equivalent of George Formless, a certain Ernst Straintz who has a vibrato style suggestive of driving tractors crossways across ploughed fields. Fortunately that record was taken out and “disposed of” as Molly puts it, and the assembled company started back on traditional tunes before we left.

I recalled the last time we left here singing jolly folk-songs when Helen reminded us we ran into that Doctor Maranowski who has never spoken to us since; I replied at least that could do us no further harm. “Auf die Lunenberge Heide” is a perfectly innocent hiking song that I am sure folk were singing fifty years ago, and it has (I am told) not a political word in it.

Oh dear. Life is full of surprises. Major Hawkins happened to be in the coffee-house just across the road with a good view across the exits, and he greeted us respectfully – though said he was surprised at my choice of company. Molly rather ill-advisedly retorted that Professor Schiller is our employer these days, which is perfectly true and no secret, but perhaps rather the wrong thing to say to him. At any rate, the Major raised an eyebrow and thanked her for clearing some points up that had been puzzling him for some time.

This will not improve my chances of getting my name cleared in London.

Sunday 26th July, 1936

Weather definitely improving, but no climbing today as the Prof is busy studying our photos and deciding a route. It would be most galling to be three quarters up the face and run into a dead end or featureless section, and he is using all the thoroughness his nation is famous for in planning his next move.

Helen, Saffina and myself went over to Main Island to look at some of the shrines near the waterfall; there is a nice little glen near there where the water used to flow that someone has built a hut in since we were there last; a Japanese “Euro” as Saimmi says. Generally the Spontoones keep this part an untouched-looking (though actually carefully tended) wilderness, so it was surprising anyone had been allowed to build here. Euros are very restricted on Main Island, and I thought they would definitely not have been permitted.

Saimmi explained that the waterfall shrines are amongst the oldest on the island, and indeed Mount Kiribatori is the main landmark one sees when approaching from the South. They have been given a guardian for the time being; all the more vital as Saimmi will be away from the islands awhile. From the way she said it, one would think Saimmi is taking out insurance against not getting back from Cranium Island.

Still, we learned some more of the rituals and indeed I seem to be making progress. There is one rather fascinating one of closing the eyes and trying to see without them – it is vague but I could swear I could somehow “feel” where folk were, like the heat from a bonfire. It only works well when near a shrine though, rather like those infra-red films one reads about that need a special lamp to get a good picture. Saimmi seems definitely the “brightest” if I could use the word, but Saffina is not far off. It is something we are going to have to practice, Saimmi tells us, adding that some priestesses do not need to be near a shrine to use it.

On the way back to the beach we passed the site where folk are building a huge Ferro concrete statue some four storeys tall: a slender and “realistic” portrayal of the Rain Goddess holding up her bowl benevolently towards the central waters of Spontoon. It is rather odd, in that all the other Tikis holding bowls are rather squat affairs with their bowls facing out onto the open ocean; we asked Saimmi but she just laughed and said this was the one done the way the artist wanted in the first place. I thought Mr. Tikitavi designed them all anyway?

There are plans I hear for one of the squat and less artistic bowls to go on the South-west corner of the island, on a rocky shelf looking out over to the West. That will make five big sculptures on the same model; it is quite impressive the way the Spontoones invest their public funds in artistic endeavours.

Back to South Island and a jolly fine luncheon at the Hoele'toemi household. Molly and Maria seem to have settled in rather well; Maria at least has got over her phobia about doing housework (it has only taken her a year and a half.) She has always complained it is her sisters who are “good little home-makers” who make their family proud, and she never had the slightest interest in emulating them. She rarely writes home except to her Uncle, and most of that is in code. It is such a pity that Maria, the only one of us four with a full complement of parents, is so uncomplimentary about them.

Maria had a lot to say about her morning where Father Dominicus had been making some impassioned speeches to his flock about preserving the South Island chapel. He has been given “carte blanche” by the Vatican to protect the interests of his Church, and waving his authorities has pulled in Father Mulcathy and all the others to his side regardless of their own opinions. The local clergy are used to dealing with Spontoones and adopt a definitely low-key approach which gains them few native converts, but keeps them out of controversy. From what Maria says, their high command in Rome has decided that is no longer good enough and has sent a firebrand to heat things up in the area. Of course the trouble with a firebrand is that it can set the rest of the neighbourhood alight.

She also mentioned having seen a dozen new faces in the congregation, Spanish-speaking girls of our age who are definitely not Mixtecan tourists. They look hard and weather-beaten she says, and if Spain had lady soldiers they would look like that. I can guess who those are, the refugees from Aero-Iberian who have been pleading their case to our Tutors. They had a long chat with Father Dominicus and were still at it when she left the chapel; one hopes this will not be the start of anything troublesome. A Vatican envoy sent here with carte blanche and a sudden surge of (probably) unemployed Jesuit-trained aviatrixes available and (probably) irritated about not getting into Songmark ... I can see some worrying possibilities. Anyone determined enough to cross the planet knowing how hard it is to enter Songmark at the best of times, is liable to be interested in other adventures.

Still, the rest of the day passed very happily helping out on Haio Beach. Although I kept in Native costume and spoke Spontoone, I was tempted to blow my cover and talk to the British Schneider Trophy team who turned up for a relaxing sunbathe and swim in rather warmer waters that they get at home. I recognise some of the faces from last year's newspapers and such; quite a few have other claims to fame being distinguished sportsmen, tennis and cricket players mostly. It is a very well-established tradition, and when the Royal Flying Corps was founded folk looked not so much for mechanics but for sporting gentlemen with the correct “cavalry mentality” as anyone who can handle a skittish horse should have been a natural in an aircraft. At least that was the theory.*

The Spontoones do still play proper cricket as well as Kilikiti, and I spotted our famous and controversial Mr. Stubshaw who did so well last year against the Australians; he is the sort who achieves fame and posterity with his portrait on collectable cards the cigarette manufacturers print. He is one of the new “bodyline” bowlers who tend to aim at hitting the opposing batsman rather than the stumps, unsporting as some folk say but quite effective.

Of course, when I mentioned it to Beryl last year she was singularly unimpressed. At Saint T's, she tells me, they have been "bodyline" shot-putting and javelin throwing for years.

* (Editor's Note: in 1914 and 1915, the casualty rate in Royal Flying Corps training far exceeded anything the enemy managed to inflict. Alas for the Cavalry Mentality.)

Monday 27th July, 1936

Back to the mountain! We started off at six, and by seven had carried the ropes and equipment to the foot of the main face. The Prof is a fine climber for his age, and G-U-U were up the lower slopes as if they were monkeys rather than wolves. Still, one is no more secure than the rock one holds onto, and a flake came off in Ulric's paw as he was leading a pitch. He was belayed of course but fell about three yards down the sheer face before the rope brought him up with a jerk, and it was another few minutes before he was hauled to safety.

Having the rope tied round one's middle is traditional but not at all a comfy place to be suspended from, and Maria tells us some folk on the Eiger and other big climbs have perished from the pressure before being pulled to safety. There really must be a better way of doing things, and while we waited around at the base of the climb we put our heads together and began sketching ideas in the sand. Parachute harnesses are one idea, and we have seen folk comfortably sitting in canvas seats for an hour at a time working on telegraph poles. It should not be too hard to improve on a loop of rope around the midriff.

I must admit some other equipment the Prof has shipped over does look very handy. On our own climbing lessons we have learned to carry an assortment of beach pebbles to wedge in cracks and belay the rope around; an improvement is using big brass nuts with the inside thread machined out smooth and a loop of stiff rope threaded through ready for use. Definitely we will copy that idea next time we get to the machine shops.

I will certainly have words with Molly about keeping her snout shut; "loose lips sink ships" as the posters in the Great War warned. She gets on with the Prof very well, who is a jovial and fatherly type utterly unlike what she has mentioned her own father is; one gets the impression sometimes she unfavourably compares the two. Even so, it was awfully bad form of her to mention our Cranium Island trip, and far more so to mention we were looking for artefacts! That is absolutely the last person we want getting in ahead of us, especially as he has been inquiring about religious relics. It is just as well his climbing license runs out in a month, giving him the exclusive rights to this piece of rock but keeping him in the neighbourhood till he climbs it. We should get to Cranium Island before he does, at any rate.

On our return to South Island there was some disturbing news; Mr. Hoel'toemi is going off on a vital trade mission for two months and has asked Jirry to come with him. Jirry did say he is giving up being a Guide this year and it would be natural to join the family import and export trade, but this is rather a shock. He has mentioned some of these trips being profitable and others important – this is one of the "important" ones. It looks like Lars is not the only Spontoonie who is bringing things in which the League of Nations would want to question.

My tail definitely drooped as they discussed travel plans; I suppose I have taken a lot for granted as to the Hoel'toemi household being there whenever our adventures leave us free time. But then, I am the one training for a career as an Adventuress; it is a shocking thought that if Jirry was away as often as I am we would hardly ever meet!

Still, we have this time and indeed we made the most of it. Happily the weather has improved and the nights are warm and really quite excellent under the stars.

Tuesday July 29th, 1936

A busy time of things – yesterday we carried ropes and climbing gear up to Mount Kiribatori, and more of the same today – hard work but plenty of fresh air and good company. Today was rather different after work, in that we all headed out to Meeting Island to hear what Professor Schiller has to say about larger pieces of geography than a few thousand feet of bare rock.

I must say, it was jolly interesting. "Geo-politics" is not unlike our Geography lessons in school where we studied imperial power and the like, and learned why empires such as Austro-Hungary collapsed despite once owning colonies from Mexico to Franz-Joseph land near the North Pole (and the underground mining cities of Franz-Joseph land did rather well, being the last loyal pieces of the Hapsburg Empire fighting on alone against the Allies until 1921). But it was definitely a more ruthless philosophy, explaining how nations need hinterlands, buffers and the like which makes a lot of sense looking at the newspapers these days. It is a good thing Spontoon does not have anything strategic such as tin or oil, is all I can say.

His lecture was in the Althing assembly rooms and was very well-attended by Spontoonies, with a few other familiar snouts to be seen. Several of our friends from the dance class were there, plus Violobe and a lot of her junior Guide friends, and Mr. Tikitavi the sculptor. Of course, not all of it applies to Spontoon as such, as it is far too small and vulnerable to "project power" but other nations around the Pacific are not and it is as well to be warned as to how they might be thinking.

One could see Professor Schiller was getting quite carried away, and with a sympathetic-sounding audience I believe he said rather more than he might have planned. He talked a lot about “strategic depths” and the like which hardly seemed to apply to Spontoon being so small – but he mentioned that an ocean was probably even better than land for the purpose as it takes no damage being fought over.

Helen and I exchanged glances and she silently mouthed the words “aerial torpedo”. Suddenly a lot of things made sense; if anyone seriously tries to invade Spontoon it will be far too late to engage them on the beaches since the whole islands are in range of a battleship’s guns from anywhere in sight; folk found that out in the Gunboat wars and have not forgotten it. Given seaplanes and aerial torpedoes intercepting them out in the Kanim Islands things would be different.

We are invited to the next lectures, and will certainly come if we can. I doubt we will have to tell Mr. Sapohatan about this, as if he is not actually listening in the building somewhere I am sure he will have heard all about it by the time the Prof arrives back at his rooms on Casino Island tonight.

Of all the folk I least wanted to see in the crowd, Major Hawkins was there and spotted us leaving. He raised his hat to us and enquired after our good health – though if we were working for Professor Schiller the way I think he thinks we are, I hardly think he would wish us well. Actually he has news from Home – he mentions having spoken with my Brother in Intelligence and my cousin in the Royal Armoured Corps – neither of whom are likely to head this way. He did mention my cousin is in India on the North-west Frontier having a lively time with his light tanks – and asked politely if I had seen any such around Spontoon.

Actually, I could have wished he had a star-nosed mole for an aide as it would make a nice change to have something reassuring I could truthfully tell him. I said I had seen nothing of the kind since Vostok. Indeed, I have been reading Molly’s copy of “Jane’s Military Vehicles” and could point out that Spontoon is mostly hills and jungle. Somebody very high-ranking at the War Office has officially pronounced that hilly wooded areas such as Malaysia and the French Ardennes are quite impossible going for tanks, so that is that.

He nodded and murmured that I am certainly up with the latest thinking, and hopes everyone has read and believed the same reports. Tipping his hat to us again, he vanished into the night. Very disturbing.

Still, I managed to forget about our troubles for awhile on South Island. Jirry met us off the water-taxi, and he has the loan of a friend’s longhouse to cover a week’s fishing trip. A very welcome piece of news, as it was starting to rain and even in oiled fur, the great outdoors gets uncomfortable!

Wednesday August 1st, 1936

A sad day that came rather sooner than anyone expected. Today I waved Jirry off from the docks of Casino Island, as he follows his Father out on a semi-official buying trip. That is, the Althing is ultimately paying but he hints it is a Macao-registered company writing the cheques (you can get any sort of company registered there for ten guineas, no questions asked). Certain deals happen a few times a year, and one seizes them with both paws or misses out. There seems a definite sense of urgency in the air that was not there last year, sometimes one can almost scent it.

It was a very rare occasion, being on Casino Island at a loose end – usually we never have time to do more than the essentials, let alone relax. I tried wandering as a happy tourist for an hour, but it is what being a magician’s assistant in the audience must be like – knowing what is happening behind the scenes it is hard to just sit back and marvel at the show. Quite a lot of the Spontoonies running the booths and stalls know me and only charged me half the regular price for a dish of Popatohi and a Nootnops Red – very nice of them indeed but it rather reinforced the feeling that I do not fit with the tourist stream.

Actually I am not the only one who looks at a loose end – sitting on the end of the Rainbow Bridge I spotted Zara, our third-year from Albania. She was watching the Schneider Trophy teams practicing (the first official race is next week) although her country had to pull out at the last minute through lack of funds. She says she was planning on going home with friends who were in the team, but is now rather stuck.

I noticed she was still wearing her Songmark jacket, but minus the collar badges and with different buttons sewn on. It reminded me rather shockingly of Father’s tales of what happens to soldiers who are court-martialled – they have to take off the insignia and even the belt buckles, before being dismissed from their Regiment. I did not like to ask Zara if she was the one who has broken Songmark’s winning streak of graduating everyone who reached the end of the course – but I got that impression.

She says she is staying on Casino Island until a ship arrives heading towards the Albanian South Indies where at least she will be one of the best qualified folk around there, and should find a position. I wished her luck, and left her to it.

A rather happier Songmark student turned out to be Jasbir Sind, who I did not at all recognise when she tapped me on the shoulder. Her scent has not changed but her fur pattern and costume has entirely – I would have said she was a pine marten rather than a mongoose, given a photograph. She has been professionally worked on – two days treatment at Madame Maxine’s is awfully dear, but she can afford it.

Jasbir has absolutely set her heart on dancing at the Coconut Shell, and has passed their talent auditions. Unfortunately our Tutors have not just said no, but warned the management against her; she needs a new identity entirely to get around that. As part of it she is heading out to one of the small islands in the

neighbourhood, where she is having two weeks' holiday away from it all and purchasing a few testimonials about being who she says she is. Gull Island, I think she said.

It was rather too early to drink Nootnops Blue (very nice but it makes the rest of the day rather a haze) so I joined her in an ice-cream. She knows the one place on the island that does cashew and betel nut, not a combination available in most places though very recreational.

I asked about the other folk who are staying on here that I have not bumped into recently – Jasbir has met Prudence's dorm who are auditioning for extras in Miss Margot Melson's latest film. I know the local studios tend to make more than one version for Polynesian and European markets, but in this case I think they will have to change the title as well for most countries. "Bride of the Serpent Queen" is perhaps a little blatant, though one can quite see why Prudence would give her tail to be in it. Molly has told us surprising things about the film industry, and hints that Miss Margot Melson has a lot of wear and tear on her "casting couch."

Certainly, I found myself thinking our Tutors have picked quite a range of talent over the years. Sometimes one wonders just what they are thinking of – they dismissed the very decent-looking Blackett sisters, and let in Beryl and that troublesome Red Dorm. Teaching Liberty Morgenstern to be a better shot is not what I call doing the rest of the world a favour. But on the other paw, I must admit that had I been in charge, having seen Molly's history I would have never let her in, and done myself out of a good friend. I would have spared Spontoon Beryl's presence although she does come from a proper, or more accurately improper, public school. No doubt she is busy on her "projects" already, whatever they may be. She even asked for a copy of my Pedigree, which I was glad to give her as it is perfectly good and no secret to anyone (a telegram and the search fee wired to the Public Records Office in London would get it anyway.)

To be honest, if I had been in charge of recruiting Songmark would look more like my old school with a different timetable, and . I could never sort out which of a dozen Mixtecan girls I wanted, let alone deciding how to find good in the most unpromising of people.

Back to South Island, where there is always something to at least keep one's paws occupied. With so many folk working the hotels and beaches the garden-plots need work and the weeds never give up. There is no telling how long Jirry is going to be away, and had it been a destination folk would want written up, I am sure he would have told me. I know his father is often away for a month or two at a time.

Thursday August 2nd, 1936

This Summer is developing into quite a roller-coaster ride already – or possibly a ghost train, one surprise jumping out after another. Strictly speaking this is hardly a surprise, but it is quite a development.

We are in one of the small Kanim Island villages, dressed in non-tourist Native costume and having the markings on our oiled fur re-drawn by the villagers. Helen has trusted her Tailfast locket to the local priestess, and consented to be re-marked as a local maiden. Someone involved in these raids has some local knowledge, and while we do not know how much it is best to be cautious. The villagers already know who we are but someone from a neighbouring island only needs to spot we are in matching fur markings.

Last night an urgent message came through just as we were finishing supper – from what the Detective magazines call "information received" we had warning of another raid expected in the area. There are three islands with significant settlements that are too small for a full-time constable – and we are on the small island of Wakalenga, a likely candidate. It has a very tricky coral reef all around making any large boat landings difficult, but it does have a mile of protected lagoon water behind it which would do well for a seaplane even at night.

I had less to lose than Helen, but it still felt sad to comb out my South Island fur patterns. We are expected to be here for a few days, by which time the raiders will probably have made an attempt or decided to leave the area – it is a business with profit and loss like any other and operating seaplanes is expensive. One idea is for us to head out from the village on fishing trips; the village can always use the fish and we look a more tempting target out on our own. Molly has borrowed back from Jasbir the spear-gun she sold her last year, and for once we are not objecting to her carrying it everywhere as it is very much "in character".

Molly has adjusted to the lack of firing practice quite well; that braided steel knout she was given in Vostok gets a lot of work, and indeed she has been demonstrating tree pruning to the locals. She is really getting rather good with it, and from a distance it looks like a coil of rope, quite inconspicuous.

The island is at its best this time of year and though we see the tour boats going past far offshore the reef protects it from any major tourist invasion; a lot of the younger inhabitants are off working on Spontoon so there are plenty of sleeping spaces in the huts and folk are pleased to see a new snout, especially as we can speak Spontoonie with them. All in all we would be quite enjoying the trip, if not for the knowledge of just why we are out here in the sunshine.

Molly has told us what Lars revealed about what happens to folk captured as she was, who end up in Kuo Han and other nameless places. Oh my. By the time they wake up most of them have been permanently ... modified, one might say, to fit them for their future career and nothing else. The disturbing thing is, the trimmed fur style we both wear was the first step in the process that had already been done to Molly, although we have kept it as it has advantages in other circumstances.

Definitely, anyone caught in this business will not get a public trial; one hears about smart lawyers getting completely guilty folk off on a technicality, but in this case they are not going to get the chance.

Saturday August 4th, 1936

Dear Diary: life as an Adventuress certainly has its thrills and chills. We are back on South Island recovering from a fur-raising time, and could use a week to recover. I doubt we shall get it.

On Thursday night we four headed out to fish on the far side of the island, having a small canoe and the appropriate nets with us. The story announced in the village is we are Main Island Spontoonies who have come to take a break from the crowds; some occasionally do that by the middle of Tourist season and with a lot of the younger island folk over there the Wakalenga villagers can certainly use the extra help fishing. The priestess and a couple of the village elders have the full story. There are no off-island tourists on the island right now, and apart from a few wandering anthropologists who make a point of heading to islands that are not listed in the guidebooks, there rarely are. Palm thatched huts and nice beaches are ten a penny around this part of the world, and most tourists can see all that on South Island and still have egg and chips for lunch in a Euro snack stall afterwards.

It was a relaxing evening and outwardly we did not have a care in the world, as looking after small boats is something we are all very comfortable with now. The reef waters are very rich especially since half the regular fisher folk are out on Casino Island shaking a grass skirt at the audience right now, and in an hour we had enough to take back and start preparing and drying. Four seaplanes came within sight of our fires, but none of them circled or came particularly low. The weather looked rather stormy in the last light of the sun, with big cumulus clouds rolling in from the West; our hammocks have mackintosh sheets that we can throw over ourselves if it rains in the night. Being high off the ground, the arrangement is actually rather drier than a tent, and we are in no danger of flooding.

We had a few party-sized Nootnops Blue bottles on conspicuous display but they were filled with the harmless red variant, which was very nice while we sat round the fire cooking spit-roast fish while most of the catch dried in the smoke. It was hard to relax even knowing the chances were that we would be quite undisturbed – but when the moon rose we scattered the bottles artfully near the camp fire and found our hammocks. Although it is not strictly “native” equipment, we had a good radium dial luminous wristwatch which whoever was on overwatch could check on; the idea is anyone making a stealthy approach will not get close enough to notice it.

Maria was on first watch, then Molly, then myself with Helen taking the dawn shift. Although I had thought myself too tense to sleep, a day’s fishing is hard work and I was off before I knew it. The next thing I knew was Molly shaking me urgently, whispering about aircraft engine noises. She certainly has the best ears amongst us, and scheduled flights do not have regular routes over this island.

The island was about a mile and a half long, with a pronounced hook of beach at each end giving two spots of extra calm water. Molly yelled that we were on the wrong end – there was a seaplane descending towards the other side, a twin-engined model she said though added there was something odd about it. But then there was no more time to talk as we had grabbed our equipment and were sprinting along the beach just on the wet sand above the waterline, thankful the tide was going out and leaving the going firm under paw.

It is a good thing we are in top condition, as it was a mile run and we knew there was little time. The moonlight was just filtering through the clouds, but when we got near the village we saw there was not one but two seaplanes, a single engined Sikorski floatplane of some type and a Short Cockle. Including pilots they might hold a dozen people between them – long odds for us if those were all raiders but of course there would be empty seats if their plan was to leave with more folk than they arrived with.

The one thing that saved our plan was that the seaplanes had cut their engines on the approach and silently glided in, rather than taxing rapidly up to the shore. We dived into the shadow of the tree line and had to slow down further to avoid crashing into fallen branches and the like – fortunately there was still time as the crew of the Sikorski were on the floats silently paddling their aircraft ashore through the calm lagoon waters. We saw six of them land from the two aircraft and head out to the far end of the village where there was an isolated cluster of houses, far enough from the main block that folk there would probably not hear anything less than a gunshot. The wind was picking up, and far out on the horizon there was an occasional flash of summer lightning.

We had worked this out in advance, and a few words agreed on Plan 7A. Helen and Maria slipped further inland through the shadows to alert the folk in the main village, while Molly and I dived into the cover of a pulled-up fishing boat and started to swim out towards the aircraft now tethered ten yards offshore just out of the breaking waves. The water was shallow in the lagoon and we could just touch bottom with our foot-claws as we reached the Sikorski, coming at it from the seaward side. Our plan was to capture or disable the aircraft – and Plan 7A suddenly became 7B when we heard movement above and discovered the pilot was still onboard!

Molly’s spear-gun was out, and she patted the float – but I had to shake my head at that idea, as a few small holes would not prevent the aircraft taking off in the time available and the pilot would definitely hear

us doing anything extreme. Still we knew we had at most a few minutes before something happened – so as our Tutors teach us, we took the initiative and were the ones that made things happen.

We climbed carefully up onto a float apiece, moving together to keep the balance and not give the game away by rocking the aircraft. There was a step route up each support strut and we moved up quickly; it was a four-door cabin and both front doors were open, with the wolverine pilot standing at his seat looking out at the shore intently. He had a pistol but it was holstered at his side – and we definitely did not plan on giving him time to use it.

It could only have been seconds before he scented us or heard the sound of the water dripping from our soaked fur – and in those seconds we were on him. Molly counted down on her fingers and then we leaped up and yanked the back cabin doors open: he was just turning round when Molly looped the steel knout over his head and threw herself back, dragging him right out of his pilot's seat and into the back. Wolverines are awfully tough, and he managed to get a paw inside the loop as he landed on his back snarling; his musk was chokingly strong in the cabin, and he easily outweighed us. Our self-defence classes tell us to never get into a drawn-out fight – finish it fast and then away.

Molly kept tight hold of the knout and dived on him, planting one knee in the solar plexus but even that was not stopping him – he threw her off but as he started to get up I managed to get the Roedean Nerve Pinch on him. That settled his hash; he went down like a sack of potatoes.

For a second we just sat on him, panting, then Molly found a set of paw-cuffs and put them to better use than I fear its owners had intended. She grabbed his pistol holster – a Russian Tokarev, which means nothing in itself as they are all over the Pacific – and checked him over for any other weapons before helping me lash him tight with cargo strapping.

The Short Cockle was moored thirty yards away, but by good luck the angle had its engine blocking a direct view of our cockpit. Of course that meant we could not see theirs either, but we expected there would be another pilot in there primed for a fast takeoff and watching the shore for signs of movement.

I was about to suggest unscrewing the control cables to disable the Sikorski and swimming over to the second aircraft, when suddenly our time ran out. A flare suddenly arched out over the beach illuminating everything in harsh white light, and a crowd of folk suddenly appeared in the village. I recognised some of the villagers, who were surprisingly well-armed considering, and they headed straight for the end of the island where the raiders had gone.

The next thing that happened was a twin detonation from the engines of the Short Cockle, as its pilot fired starter cartridges and the props began to turn. Molly jumped into the pilot's seat of the Sikorski, yelled at me to keep my head down and hang on, and hit the self-starter button. Definitely these folk have invested in all the latest improvements, not surprising considering just how important a quick getaway is to them.

Looking down I saw the wolverine pilot already awake and glaring at us – we really do not want him gnawing out of his bonds in the cockpit with us. I motioned to Molly to swing us in past the shore and as we reached the shallowest point I opened the back door and heaved him out: it takes more than an eight foot drop into a couple of feet of water to do a wolverine serious harm, and with village folk already running across the beach towards us he was not going to drown before they fished him out.

By the time we had turned round the Short was already almost “on the step” with what must have been highly supercharged engines with throttles pushed to the firewall: Molly gave a wild whoop and jammed our own throttle wide open. I had to agree with her – we had already done a lot by depriving the raiders of their getaway wings, but having even one of them escaping with the news was not something we wanted. Of course, as we had kept things quiet our end the pilot in the Short hopefully still thought his wolverine pal was flying behind him, and indeed he throttled back slightly to let us catch up in formation.

I had to keep my head down below the cockpit just in case the Short got curious; the chances of spotting what species of pilot was wearing flying goggles at that distance were very poor, but if they saw two of us in the cockpit they would probably smell a rat. It occurred to me that the villagers were rather better prepared than they had led us to believe; not all those weapons they had suddenly appeared with could have been buried in oilskin under hut floors since the Gunboat Wars. Anyway, I could reach the radio from my position on the floor, and remembered the frequency we had been given. Channel Nineteen is one of those “allocated for future development” so the Althing can refuse anyone licenses to use it, but Mr. Sapohatan has said it is always monitored.

In ten minutes we were at five thousand feet heading South-East and probably invisible from the ground in the worsening weather. I used the code we were given, “Pan-Nimitz Airways Flight Echo One” and added my own call-sign of “Osprey”. I added that we were heading into Spontoon ahead of schedule in formation, and asked for a weather report and to get a reception laid on, hoping any unfriendly ears listening would take us for a scheduled flight – and hopefully the equivalent of Post Box Nine would understand what I meant.

Another fifteen minutes of flight through the turbulence went past before Molly shouted that we were descending towards Spontoon, and she could see the lights of Casino Island dead ahead. The Sikorski was pitching violently and rain hammering all over making conversation almost impossible, and I was having a rather poor flight all round. I cheered up remarkably when I heard a calm voice on Channel Nineteen

welcoming Flight Echo One to Spontoon and telling us our reception was arranged as soon as we gave final landing arrangements.

Of course, until the Short actually landed we could hardly tell them exactly where to go – so in my best Airline Pilot voice I mentioned that we were “Awaiting landing confirmation” and were in a landing queue of two. The other end acknowledged, and for a few minutes all we could see outside was the lightning outside and the lights of the Casinos and big hotels briefly shining through the shifting clouds. Certainly, had we lost sight of the Short for a minute and he changed course and we would have lost him for good – visibility was about half a mile and closing, with some truly awful weather ahead. Had we not already been heading into familiar Spontoon waters I would have been tempted to break off and let the “anti-pirate air patrol” chase him – but as it was we stuck to his tail like burdock and by two a.m. saw him touch down on the North coast of Casino Island, heading into Student’s Cove.

I was on the radio as soon as I saw the Short go down off the step, and with some relief heard the landing details acknowledged. The rain was absolutely hammering down and the lightning getting much nearer – fortunately there was not much wind and we were landing almost directly into it with the bulk of the island shielding us a little. Although I have a steady stomach I was very glad to feel the floats touch water, as crouched in the foot well of a cockpit is no way to travel and a good way to get air-sick in the calmest of conditions.

Molly and I had a minute to think as we taxied towards the cove, lit by the lightning. The natural thing would be for the pilot of the Short to want to talk to his comrade about what went wrong and what to do next, which of course we cannot do. She had the flight suit and goggles on but even in this visibility nobody is going to confuse her with a wolverine at anything but the longest of ranges. Happily, I came up with a simple workable plan. Hurrah for St. Winifred’s drama classes!

What the pilot of the Short thought he saw as he came out of his hastily moored aircraft was his comrade taxi up to the beach ready to join him. It was fifty yards away, but as the Sikorski pilot jumped out onto the beach with a mooring rope, a figure clad in Native costume emerged from the shadows beneath the aircraft having apparently hung grimly onto the float all the way from Wakalenga. The native girl came up behind, raised a spear-gun and without a second’s hesitation shot the Sikorski pilot in the back at point-blank range – who threw up his arms and collapsed on the beach, not moving.

That was quite enough for the Short pilot, who took off in a panic with a career’s worth of fear of Native revenge suddenly coming true. He did not turn around and see his “comrade” get to his feet – or hers actually, as Molly threw off the flying-jacket and joined me in hot pursuit through the sleeping rain-streaming streets. A spear-gun makes the same distinctive sound whether or not it is actually loaded.

As we followed him I could not help but note what a bizarre scene it was – all around us were thousands of sleeping tourists, dreaming in silk or fine linen sheets while the rain lashed the windows of their snug hotels. And there were we three out in the storm, a slaver, an ex-gangster and a girl of good pedigree chasing through the deadly darkness ripped asunder by lightning and echoing with tropical thunder. He turned round a few times but we were always within reach of cover; we had little fear of him outrunning us as very few regular citizens are as fit as Songmark girls and although our flying here was tiring work he had surely had more of it and less sleep than us that night. From what I could see of his tail he was feline, and we are better at sprinting than long-distance work.

In two minutes we were heading up towards Tower Hill Park, where the wider streets with clearer views made it harder to stay as close undetected. But just when we were getting worried about losing him help came from a source we would never have guessed. One of the distinctively dressed street cleaners one sees everywhere showed a surprising burst of speed, appearing as if from nowhere. He was a greyhound type, and before I could say anything hailed me as “Flight Echo One”. I was rather staggered but pointed ahead to where our quarry was silhouetted against the crest of the hill and the lights of the hotels below – at which he gave a quiet bark of laughter and said there were folk already lined up ahead of us.

From then it was more like a regular hunt at home, with beaters closing in from every side. Or rather it was like hunting with an elastic net, in that we wanted to find where the pilot was going without scaring him off by showing our paw too soon. I don’t know if he spotted that he was being chased, but he certainly had reason to worry and kept going at top speed all the way across to the South side of the island, where some bars and casinos and such are open all night. He was staggering at the end of it which we noted with a sort of grim satisfaction: having tried it we know someone fighting for breath rarely has the energy left to think too clearly, and the more he focused on bringing the bad tidings to his Boss the better for us.

By quarter past two we were amongst the big hotels, their neon signs and strings of hissing wet incandescent bulbs reflected eerily in the sheets of water flowing down the road. The street cleaners were there ahead of us, industriously taking the chance to scrub the pavements clean while the tourists slept and dreamed of hulas on sunny beaches for tomorrow. I had been freezing cramped in pedal well of the Sikorski with waterlogged fur and nowhere to exercise; at least the long run had warmed me up, though Molly and I dripped like soaked sponges and the rain hammered down in great curtains like a fire-hose falling on the sleeping streets.

Just then the pilot ducked into the entrance to one of the private casinos, its doorway still lit. I don’t know what he said to the doorman, but it must have been quite decisive to let a dripping figure in flying

costume walk into such a place at that time of night. The greyhound stopped us with a wave and whispered that our part in this was over – now we were just to wait and see.

In a minute we saw someone we had never expected – Lars himself, casually strolling down the pavement holding an umbrella raised above his horns, dressed in impeccable tropical whites! He winked at us and our guide, who gave a curt nod and pointed towards the brightly lit doorway. Though both of us were bursting to ask him what was going on, he flourished his umbrella and passed the doorman unhindered, vanishing into the interior.

We waited about five minutes – and then all pandemonium broke loose inside. The first thing we knew about it was a burst of light on the roof above, where by good fortune we had the angle to see a roof hatch opening up. Three figures scrambled out, then a few seconds another one after them – in the lightning we saw a familiar silhouette and knew that Lars was the last one out. Our guide beckoned urgently for us to follow and we dashed across into the nearest narrow street – in time to see a big ladder swing out across the gap and three figures teeter across, followed by a more sure-footed fourth one.

The next minutes were a hectic blur. Our greyhound guide had a key to one of the buildings opposite and we ran up echoing stairs, struggled with a padlock and were suddenly out on a roof, with the roar of the wind and the hard stinging lashing of the rain punching through our soaked fur to our hides, the cityscape of Casino Island lit as if by flashbulbs with one brilliant lightning burst after another. There had been ladders arranged in the gutters in various places; luckily it took time for the three fugitives to swing each one into position and we managed to start catching them up. From some scattered words down the wind I gathered they were expecting Lars to pull the ladders up behind them to slow pursuit or at least kick them loose – which he was definitely not doing. But as he kept just out of reach there seemed little they could do about it apart from stopping and unfastening the ladders themselves, and they were not slowing down to do that. Here and there I saw other figures suddenly appear on rooftops; evidently we were not alone in this. Some of the more old-fashioned hotels have “gothic” towers and tiny balconies like crows’ nests on the topmost levels, and that night I realised they are not merely ornamental.

Suddenly I caught sight of the discreet but recognisable front of the Marleybone Grand Hotel, and realised we were aiming straight for it. The hotel towered two stories above the nearest rooftops, but as we approached I saw there is a lower kitchen wing at the back that our route took us towards. The tiles were steep and running with storm water, but Molly and Lars are mountain deer and my feline heritage held me in good stead. The greyhound guide was perfectly sure-footed too, not what one traditionally expects from a canine but it goes to show that practice can go a long way to helping out ancestry.

As the three fugitives crossed the final ladder there was a terrific gust of wind and one of them slipped – straight down he went, four stories to the pavement below. Nobody else screamed, at least not that I heard above the storm, and as I watched him tumble to the ground I felt myself only regretting he was not going to be captured alive to talk. Then they were on the roof, with Lars fifty yards ahead of us and a minute away across the treacherous tiles: soon we were over the ladder and climbing to the peak of the Marleybone, looking out over the whole expanse of Casino Island.

In a brilliant lightning flash I saw what was happening, with the two remaining fugitives on the roof struggling to open a slanting maintenance door they had expected to be unlocked for them. I heard Lars laugh, but could not hear what he said. Then there was a crash of glass as they suddenly switched to Plan B and put a boot-heel through the nearest attic window, punching the jagged splinters aside as they dropped through into the hotel. Lars was straight after them, and ten seconds so were we – landing in a welter of burst stuffing in a laundry room, the sting of glass splinters almost going unnoticed as we dropped down and Molly crouched with her spear-gun cocked and loaded, a hundred and twenty pounds draw weight behind a steel-tipped expanding bolt factory guaranteed to stop a Great White shark extremely dead in the water.

For a second it seemed very quiet with the storm just above our heads and only the incongruous dripping of water on the polished floor – I was glad not to be the one who had to clean this up in the morning. But that was only for a second, and then in the corridor I heard the sounds of a fight – the three of us burst out, Molly jumping high, myself going low in a roll and the greyhound leaping right to the far side of the corridor. It was a narrow servant’s passage, less than three feet wide and too cramped to move forward and help, but we saw everything that went on.

Lars was there, his head down as he faced two opponents. One was already down and groaning, an Asian Sun Bear I think, and the other was an Annubis-like jackal, his shining fur plastered back by the rain. The jackal was cursing him, promising him his life was not worth a spit when news of this got out – at which Lars said in a rather chilling voice that it never would. Then the jackal pounced but Lars was ready for him and flattened him with a fairly unsophisticated “haymaker” under the muzzle – by which time there were other folk crowding into the narrow corridor behind who grabbed the jackal and hauled him and the Sun Bear away.

It took a minute or so to really take note of our injuries. Unlike in the films one does not hurriedly drop through a broken window unscathed, and everyone was bleeding more or less. The service corridor of a hotel we have no official reason to be in is no place for treating things, and though I pulled two obvious glass splinters out of Molly, we definitely needed looking over. Lars was having a hurried conversation with the

others – I kept expecting to see Mr. Sapohatan but he is probably too senior to personally run around rooftops these days. Lars turned round and smiled – and announced that the hotel was being very cooperative.

It seems that the trade we had interrupted must have been shockingly profitable. The ringleaders had reserved some of the best suites in the Marleybone which the police were swarming over – but there were two others they had reserved and paid for that they had never even collected the keys for, so were of no interest as evidence. It was only a floor below us but we were all wincing at the trip downstairs, trying our best not to bleed on the carpet. We met some sleepy-eyed maintenance folk rushing past us with hammers, timbers and a roll of tarpaulin, as the rain was hammering down still outside and it was no time to have a missing window.

Although I have never been in sympathy with Liberty Morgenstern, it was quite a shock to see how the rich live, especially those with ill-gotten gains to spend. There were luxurious carpets I kept well clear of, soft furnishings, huge windows (now curtained) looking out over the bay and the biggest bathroom I have ever seen, which I hurried into and turned on the taps. Unlike some places, the Marleybone has as much hot water as one needs at all hours of the day, and it was some consolation that it had all been paid for.

All of us were soaked anyway, and practicality came first. The bathroom cabinet was superbly stocked, and a pair of whisker tweezers proved perfect for hunting glass splinters. The drinks cabinet was just as useful; in our first-aid courses we have learned there is an actual good use for vodka and we washed our injuries with it very thoroughly, taking half an hour while the water turned noticeably pink-tinged but we made sure to dig out and disinfect every last splinter wound. Lars was full of complements at our work, noting that we were a thoroughly skilled and dangerous pair these days and a credit to Songmark – and he hopes Molly will congratulate our Tutors for him. I hope she does not; they would decidedly not appreciate it.

It was when we had finished that the reaction set in; everything goes well enough as long as one keeps moving and there is no time to think. Although the water was warm I was suddenly shaking violently, and Molly was much the same. Even Lars was looking definitely pensive; he drained a glass of five-star Napoleon brandy and announced he was retiring for the night. He is quite a sight in the fur; I found myself quite glad that none of his injuries are liable to leave any scars, and neither should ours if we take proper care of them.

Molly and I looked at each other as he left; she whispered that she had never dreamed the first time she retired to sleep tonight, she would be finishing her shift like this. I definitely agreed, thinking of four empty hammocks by the ashes of our fire on Wakalenga. Had the raiders gone elsewhere my own night shift would scarcely be half finished – and possibly half a dozen local girls would be already on their way to a fate I do not much like to contemplate.

If I thought the bath was huge, the bedroom was even bigger. Lars was fast asleep, and when my own shivers wore off I had a choice between silk sheets or the carpet. It was a very nice carpet, but not much competition. Neither Lars nor Molly snore, but if they had rattled the windows like Maria I am sure I would still have fallen asleep the second my muzzle pressed the pillow.

Friday morning started rather early for us – after all, Molly and I had started the evening with four hours solid sleep on Wakalenga and despite everything we were both awake as the sun rose. She commented idly that this is definitely more comfortable than the beach in the Kanim Islands where we went ashore after the Parsifal sank – and she intended to make the most of it. Oh my. Whatever her faults might have been before arriving at Songmark, she is certainly as good as her word these days – and decidedly generous to share with a friend in need. Lars was a perfect gentleman, and seemed to be none the worse for his rough and tumble the night before (I must stop doing this. I should be Tailfast to Jirry, and if it was up to me I would be.)

Happily there were no interruptions, and the bathwater afterwards was as copious as the night before, although it did not turn red this time. We had more time to work on and clean our wounds with the rest of the bottle of vodka, which is much the best thing to do with the stuff. I hope the room staff do not get the wrong impression when they come to tidy up and see the empty bottles. In fact, if we do get any sort of reward money I owe them an exceedingly generous tip, whether the regular room fees are meant to cover it or not!

By nine we were all respectably dressed except that Lars's suit would probably never recover, and between us we wore more square inches of bandages than many modern bathing suits have in total. I had brief pangs of guilt imagining Mr. Sapohatan and the hotel staff camped outside our door since dawn impatiently looking at their watches. Actually there was nobody there although someone had kindly put a "Do not Disturb" sign on the door of the suite. The cleaners had done a thorough job; no guests were liable to be alarmed by trails of blood coming down the corridors when they made their way down to breakfast today. Outside the rain had stopped and the pavements were steaming; I should not be amazed if some very heavy sleepers or inebriated guests had missed seeing the storm entirely.

Mr. Sapohatan was waiting for us downstairs, where a breakfast buffet was ready in one of the side rooms we hurried into and shut the door before the other guests noticed. We were scarcely dressed for the Marleybone, two of us in rather tattered Native costume and Lars in a suit that was as much rust-red now as white. But the staff looked the other way, and indeed we were ravenously hungry. Crisp bacon and eggs, grilled sausages and kedgeriee – I fear I had an appetite like a railway navvy and was very glad that the raiders had paid the bill. One never gets crisp bacon on Spontoon, unless it seems one pays the Marleybone's prices. It was only like Father's tales of setting captured ammunition alight to deny it to the enemy.

Lars was quite calm and said he trusted all had gone well – though he knew better than to really expect an answer. Watching him with Mr. Sapohatan was rather like the tales describe two duellists negotiating their choice of weapon, outwardly very polite but with a very deadly earnest.

The ferret nodded, and agreed that they seemed to have made a clean sweep of that side of the operation. He mentioned that folk were already working in Kuo Han and Shanghai as well as other places trying to follow the trail, but that was quite a different matter. Although I have never been there, the saying is “*If God allows Shanghai to endure, he will have apologies to make to Sodom and Gomorrah.*” Anyway, one might say that the raid here was decisively wiped out; he mentioned to our relief that Maria and Helen are unhurt and will be returning soonest.

Lars smiled pleasantly and announced that he was moving on to other projects, and is selling his controlling interests in anything that is too troublesome. He said one strange thing; that in more troubled times properly placed people could expect new opportunities, and he expected quite a lot of them.

Mr. Sapohatan looked rather sour at that, but agreed. He bowed to us though and said he had no complaints about us, indeed quite the reverse. He asked which of us was most in need of a good word with Songmark – Molly was silent so a second later I nominated her. I know they object strongly to her and Lars, and hope Mr. Sapohatan does not tell them too much about this morning or they will be very unhappy with me as well. It hardly takes a top-class sleuth to ask the laundry maid if it was cat fur, deer fur or both on the sheets.

At any rate, the ferret left us to our breakfast and indeed we had a lot to restore in terms of nerves and otherwise. A side door let us out onto the street though Lars had to leave to get a suit that does not look as if he has been working in emergency accident ward all night. Native dress is more easily repaired and replaced, although we would have been better served last night by something more armoured. When I mentioned that, Molly did point out the little fact that we had been swimming and running across Casino Island, neither of which would be too easy in the leather Sidcot suit I had been wishing for as I went through the window.

Moral: leave it to film stunt-men to jump through glass windows. They are paid and insured for it.

As our Tutors have impressed on us, we had fixed a rendezvous point to use if separated: nowhere is better than home at the Hoele’toemi compound to wait for Helen and Maria. Mrs H was both pleased and shocked to see us, even when I explained our bandages were only on minor cuts and it had all been in a very good cause. She pulled a wry face, then smiled at us – commenting that her sons had chosen Adventuresses rather than stenographers, and were quite aware how adventures take their toll.

Helen and Maria arrived back at tea-time, looking worn to a frazzle having not slept a wink since the raid on Wakalenga started; Maria has not slept all night as she had just handed over when Molly first heard the engines approaching. They had been worried sick about us, as the last time they had news of us was a report we had arrived on Casino Island. Maria was asking for details of the chase, while Helen looked from me to Molly and back again, her ears dipped and her tail bristling. Unlike them, Molly looks very relaxed and contented, and I felt much the same myself. I fear Helen hardly needed to scent us closely to work out some details of our morning, though she did that too – and was very annoyed to find what we had in common. I noticed she had retrieved her Tailfast locket and was wearing it with pride.

Of course, having been so worried about us all day it must have been a shock to discover we had woken in five-star luxury, let alone in company Helen so dislikes. But one must make allowances and their nerves were in a terrible state; Helen was very glad to vanish after supper to the guest longhouse for the duration, while Maria sat by the fire with Molly and myself, drinking palm wine from coconut shell bowls and being very grateful we had got through it all intact, if not quite without a scratch. Poor Maria keeled over completely exhausted after one round, dropping her snout in her bowl as one sees on the Bustard Keaton film comedies – we gently dried her off and carried her to the village women’s’ hut before retiring early ourselves.

Saturday has been spent relaxing and working in the garden plots. Maria came back with a late issue of the Daily Elele, but there has been nothing reported except “*Exercises of the anti-pirate air patrol in the Kanim Islands*” which may mean much or little and would plausibly explain seaplanes taking off and performing emergency starts at odd hours.

Definitely, there is a lot happening in these islands that does not get in the papers. I would never have suspected the street cleaners as being involved in such things – but then, they have a lot of unexpected loose ends they are well qualified to tidy away. And someone had to shovel up the raider off the pavement.

Sunday August 5th, 1936

A relaxing day, with Saimmi showing us further protective rituals in the morning and our airing our fur on the Western side of the island after lunch. The expedition to Cranium Island is on for this week, and we are doing our best to heal and rest up ready for it. Salt water and fresh air is the best cure, and we are getting plenty of both well away from the concessions stands and the cameras. It would not do to show up on Haio Beach while still bandaged; with all our bandages on show in our Native dress it would look rather alarming and we have learned the Golden Rule is “never upset a tourist”, even if they deserve it.

Still, even away from the tourist areas they make their presence felt; we returned past Herr Rassberg's shop where his gramophone was playing George Formless' latest hit "With my little ukulele in my paw." That track was actually banned on the radio in Europe, more for suspected rudeness than for quality as it should be; it is just as well Mr. Formless does not play the organ. On the other paw, that might get him banned entirely, this would be no bad thing. There is something unnerving about folk who can strum, sing and grin at the same time.

Maria was back from church with some interesting and disturbing news; Father Dominicus has applied to found a temporary flying school on Eastern Island, and is recruiting right now from the Spanish exiles. He seems quite well-funded, and is giving out "scholarships" to what he calls suitable candidates. That is something Songmark has never offered, worse luck. We could definitely have used them.

I can see Maria is definitely torn about this; on one paw she is duty bound to support her Church and whatever it decides, but she can see as well as the rest of us what this would mean if it goes ahead. Given the money and permission it would be an easy matter to get fifty students here inside a month just from the ones displaced from Spain, let alone folk who applied to Songmark in the usual run of things and were turned down. Some of those are still on the islands either awaiting ships home or hoping for any last-minute cancellations as approved students suddenly break major bones in bizarre lacrosse accidents, get unexpectedly married or both. As to "suitable candidates", that is fairly obvious; I doubt Jasbir, Saffina or Hanna Meyer would be getting in. Father Dominicus would suddenly have an extremely efficient and loyal power block in his paws responsible only to himself and his superiors, and from what I hear he would not hesitate a heartbeat in using it. Fortunately the Althing knows what Songmark can do, and I expect they will find a reason to sit on the idea before someone lands a much bigger Jesuit version of us on Eastern Island. Although he calls it "Temporary" that will probably be relative to his Church, who think in terms of Eternity.

Helen is still definitely disapproving of Molly and myself, especially me. I can quite see her point as she has been absolutely faithful to Marti since first putting his fur braid on, and although I never plan it that way I have hardly done as well. It is very puzzling. I recall the stories of one of Father's Sappers, who had been promoted to corporal and demoted again for brawling half a dozen times – his response was "it just happened" which was never good enough for his court-martials and certainly not good enough for me.

Still, we will be out of temptation for awhile on Cranium Island. If there was money to be made there I am sure Lars would be there already, but Molly has asked and he says he has never set hoof on the place.

Monday August 6th, 1936

Back to Casino Island with Saffina, shopping! At least, we are getting the final stocks together for Cranium Island; it is just us four along with Saimmi and Saffina once we leave the transports on the beach there and head inland. We are well practiced by now in planning expeditions and do not just fill our packs with tropical chocolate and tins of bully beef the way folk in the adventuring pulps seem to. But then, we have yet to see anyone in the pulps realistically caked to the snout in mud, and the heroines never seem to be able to run across a clearing without twisting an ankle. Then again, they never seem to wear proper footwear – indeed, in her home town Molly says "*your mother wears army boots*" is considered a mortal insult. Saffina is used to going bare-pawed at home, she says; her style of being a Princess is rather non-standard but she thinks it odd herself that the Euro royalty do not measure their true wealth in cattle.

The local sporting supplies shop has a most excellent line of very practical hock-length adventuring boots which are rather better than anything armies can afford to issue by the thousands, rather heavy but with steel toecaps and foot-beds which would be very handy if one steps on nails or other spikes. They look quite impressive on us while they are still clean and without chunks taken out – Maria suggests the five of us should have a name like the "*Special Boot Squadron*." Molly agrees, and having tested the steel toecaps by smashing a sour coconut with one good kick, announces admiringly that one could really hurt someone with these.

Sometimes one really wonders about Molly. Quite often, actually. Although she has tried hard to learn some social graces to be used where the situation merits it, she has said she has no plans to ever falsely pass herself off as a "good girl" so hardly needs to practice the restraint that involves. Actually that is how Lars describes me, adding that such are very rare in certain places and quite literally priceless - which is nice of him.

On the North coast near our usual dance classes we unexpectedly found the answer to something that has puzzled me, what happens to the Songmark guard dogs when the place closes for rebuilding and redecorating in the holidays. We met Miss Windlesham on the beach with all six, throwing sticks for them to chase into the waves. After all, she is canine herself and probably has no objections to the scent of wet dogs in her house. She is the Songmark treasurer but I think the funds are quite safe with her; not only are our Tutors famously competent at self-defence in their own right but she has six very devoted and obviously very affectionate bodyguards.

Our dear Tutors do earn their money – even while we are on holiday they are hard at work improving Songmark's resources for the coming term. Miss Windlesham seemed quite pleased to see us, and thanked Molly for her efforts in helping expand the air fleet. I am not sure what she means by that, but Miss Windlesham winked and promised her a surprise at the start of next term.

We mentioned what we had heard about Father Dominicus and his ideas for an alternative flying school here – at which Miss Windlesham quite lost her good mood and wrinkled her snout, while the guard dogs picked up the feeling and growled. She has of course heard all about it, and commented that the Althing never likes turning away money especially for businesses that have turnover in the tourist off-season. A school is the perfect sort of thing, as it can close down in the Summer season and pick up again just as the hotels and such are emptying out. Money is not everything, though - if the scheme went through it would be like Vostok here with its two independent secret police forces, except that on Vostok they are in theory both on the Government's side. Not that Songmark is anything of that sort, as I keep telling people.

Still, that is hardly our problem and indeed we have enough of our own. We said farewell and headed down to the marine chandlers' shop where they had finished some commissions for us. They do more heavy-duty work than regular tailors are equipped for, and have modified some of our hiking shorts to include climbing loops of sturdy one-inch strapping, sewn to take the shock of a fall. This way we plan on never being caught without them handy, and they are very inconspicuous when not tied to a manila rope.

As Saffina commented wonderingly, with compasses hidden in our buttons, fish-hooks in our head-fur, a core of steel string in our bootlaces and climbing loops in our beach wear – there is definitely more to a Songmark girl than meets the eye.

Wednesday August 8th, 1936

A surprise event today – a week ahead of the last schedule he gave us, Professor Schiller announced he is attempting the ascent of Mount Kiribatori tomorrow! We are asked if we would assist – certainly we would, and with Jirry and some of his other friends away the Guides' branch in tourist season is short-pawed.

Today we could relax and head over to watch the first heats of the Schneider Trophy, with the course laid out over the strait between Eastern and Moon Island. There are some famous names racing, from our resident German aviatrix Ilsa Klensch to the senior French pilot, Monsieur Crapaud. We have heard about him from Madelene X, whose family's country estates are just down the river from his. For more than thirty years the "Crapaud of Châteaux Crapaud" has been keeping repair shops and traffic Gendarmes busily employed, first racing around in high-powered cars (which he generally crashed) then after Bleriot crossed the Channel setting France alight with aviation fever, he moved onto aircraft (which he always crashed.) He hardly looks like a typical aviator, being a stout batrachian gentleman who must have more lives than any feline if half the stories of his spectacular crack-ups are true.

Still, he managed to bring his Dewotine 550C back in one piece today much to the astonishment of the French team mechanics, who had a lively bet as to where he would pile in and the size of the biggest piece of recoverable wreckage. I suppose he must have a mix of Adele Beasley's level of bad and good luck – bad in that he crashes often enough to consider it normal, but good in always managing to walk (or swim) away.

There was one surprise entry, a Tillamook team of one aircraft with its owner and three mechanics who came second in a very home-built effort. It had a pair of large Lamblin pattern radiators under the engine, which on its final run looked as if they had suffered a nasty accident – on the home straight the aircraft suddenly left a huge plume of steam behind, although it seemed to accelerate quite markedly for a few seconds. I noticed a lot of binoculars were trained on the aircraft, whose owners call it the "Lorinson".

This is definitely the life, warm sunshine and hot aircraft! We can only look on with envy, as there seems little chance of getting our paws on one. Maria has flown similar aircraft; she is not ashamed to use her political "pull" at home, but surprisingly has not tried it with the Italian team here. She says the prospects of bending an aircraft are too awful to think about – testing prototypes on the factory fields are one thing, but she does not want to get in the books as the one who spoiled Italy's chances for the year. Her Uncle would not be too pleased, and she has only half-jokingly predicted her next public flights would be making a troop supply run between sniper-infested mud strips in Abyssinia, forever.

Thursday August 9th, 1936

A hard day for us, but some folk had a much harder one. We started off from South Island while it was still dark, and had arranged with one of Jirry's friends to ferry us to Main Island where we met up with the rest of the guides and Professor Schiller who had camped at the foot of Mount Kiribatori. The Prof greeted us warmly, and then we helped carry the ropes and tackle up to the foot of the climb. G-U-U were limbering up, dressed in very neat black polo-necked shirts that set off their fur very nicely. Though they are about the least vain folk we have met, it is rather like a Vicar taking care of his costume not for personal pride but in what he represents. They certainly earned their ticket here, and on a mountain unlike in a career such as Archbishop Crowley's they cannot bluff their way all the way to the top.

By the time the sky was getting light over Eastern Island they were already on the route; to get to the foot of the main face is quite a scramble, nearly eight hundred feet of minor cliffs and boulder slopes from where they had camped. It was a very good thing we are all exceedingly fit, and our cuts and bruises from the Wakalenga adventure had mostly healed.

I am not sure just how much the Prof is paying for the license to make the attempt, but the island is doing very well in guide's fees. While some folk stayed at the base of the cliff (and for the first few hundred feet prepared hot coffee and such to be pulled up the ropes) we headed out on the long route to the top, heading right over the main ridge of the island and climbing up the steep trail from the West. When we stopped to look back we could see small bursts of light at our camp – it looked quite alarming until Helen got the binoculars out and announced the flashes were not grenades but flashbulbs; the Press had arrived and were busy making up for lost time.

Of course, G-U-U and the Prof cannot carry the weight of twelve hundred feet of strong manila rope plus everything else up the rock face – so after about two hundred feet they hauled the rope up to use on the next pitch and from then on were quite on their own, moving steadily up the route they had picked out from our photos. When we turned round the shoulder of the mountain they were out of view, and we could take our time heading for the top. It was an hour and a half along the trail, quite wearing enough for us. At least we could console ourselves that we had the easy bit, and imagined the Prof snout-jamming and tail-belaying his way up the almost vertical face below us. Molly's comment was that there is nothing so good as hard work, which is something she can stand and watch all day.

I was asking some of the other guides how the Prof and his team have been getting on since we last carried for them; they certainly are putting in a lot of hard work on the minor faces. While most tourists are still getting dressed they are usually to be found half way up a crag, hammering pegs in; some folk sneer rather at the style of “dangle and whack” as they call it but half-way up Mount Kiribatori a climbing team needs all the help they can get, artificial or otherwise!

Still, they have made a quite favourable impression, and though Maria expected them to have “missionary” objectives seem to only demonstrate by example rather than preaching (unlike say Liberty Morgenstern, who has got nowhere.) I have heard the Prof shrugging off the fact that Germany did no better in this year's Olympics than the previous Berlin ones in 1904; he pointed out that it is of course the same stock competing, and people only ask a race-horse its pedigree and performance rather than its politics.

By lunchtime we were nearly on the top of Kiribatori, on that short grassy shelf that had Helen and me exchanging glances as we recalled the last time we were there with the Hoele'toemi brothers. Though today there was very good company, we definitely miss Jirry and Marti. On the other paw, we are here today to work and it might be embarrassing if matters proceeded as last time and the climbing team came over the top unexpectedly early.

None of the Press had made it all the way to the top with us, which was a shame in that we had to keep a close watch with our cameras ready to snap the party coming over the final rocks. At least that was the plan – though by lunchtime they had been out of sight from us for six hours and we had no idea where they were. Having portable radios would be nice, as we could keep in touch with the folk at the base of the cliff who are watching with binoculars. Unfortunately even the latest military two-way radios are the size of a large knapsack and the weight of one filled with bricks – and getting up here is quite hard enough as it is.

By three o'clock we were not exactly worrying, but it would have been useful to know what was happening. Maria shouted down over the edge at half-past (the top part of the cliff slopes at about twenty degrees so we cannot see much of the steeper bits below) and was rewarded by a distant yodelling. Unfortunately the yodel was in a different Alpine dialect than she ululates in, but it was some comfort to know folk had not all fallen off.

We were taking it in turns to look over the edge, securely belayed to a large boulder; it was Helen's shift when she shouted that Gunter was in sight, and to pass her the cameras. A few minutes later I saw her tail bottle out completely in shock – she gave a yelp that they were climbing it without any sort of belays, and if one of them slipped it was curtains for the whole team!

It was a tense quarter of an hour while the rest approached the top of the cliff, Gunter leading then Ulric followed by the Prof and Uwe. They had been climbing non-stop for ten hours, and the Prof was looking definitely grey-faced by the time he came over the edge and sank breathlessly on the grass while we fired up the primus stove for about half a gallon of strong black coffee.

As we earned our shells being good support guides and passed around the coffee and cakes, we heard the full story. There was a good reason why they had been climbing the last half of the face without using their pitons – Gunter demonstrated as he pulled out one from his pocket, put it on a rock and hit it with a hammer – at which the steel peg broke like glass. The whole batch was like it – except for the ones they had brought out themselves, which had been used up at the start of the route. Had they fallen while belayed on any of the brittle pegs, the whole team would surely have perished and nobody would ever have known why.

Maria looked down at the broken pieces, scratched her ear and commented that she thought Ruhr Valley steel was better than that. The Prof nodded slowly, and assured her it is – when it leaves the factory. He asked us to bear witness, and gave two of the Spontoonie guides a peg apiece requesting they take them to Superior Engineering to be officially checked as soon as they could manage it; definitely it looks as if someone was determined that Mount Kiribatori was not going to be climbed today.

Still, it was a more impressive achievement getting up without so much artificial help. We gathered up what equipment there remained, packed up our camp and set off down the long trail back to camp. The Prof was in rather a bad way, as ten hours on a rock face is hard on the nerves as well as the paws even when

nobody is trying to sabotage the trip. We took another four hours getting him back to the tents, where the remaining guides had a meal ready. Certainly nobody can accuse G-U-U of extravagant living; most folk would have broken out the champagne in celebration but they contented themselves with heroic portions of spring water, pickled fish and the sort of tar-black densified pumpernickel I so enjoyed on Vostok.

Back to South Island and the Hoele'toemi compound by dark, with our interesting news for everybody. The main face of Mount Kiribatori has been conquered, and although it will not be our names in the books, we helped put the record there. And although Spontoonie huts are rarely equipped with champagne, palm wine is perfectly good enough for us to celebrate with.

Friday August 10th, 1936

Time moves on – while we were busy on South Island yesterday, Saimmi was making the final transport arrangements as to our Cranium Island trip. All our equipment is ready and packed up, including a wheeled golf bag for my T-Gew and Molly's KAR-98. They do not look quite like golf clubs in their travel cases, but this way are less liable to cause alarm when we take them past the hotels on Resort Bay.

It feels like the last day of the school holidays with everything packed in the hallway, ready to pick up and go in the morning with only the farewells to say. We have everything arranged, right down to the pickup details – the Lockheed Lamprey with its pilot and mechanic will be based in a safe village in the Ventura Isles some fifty miles South and from there it is due to fly past our landing beach at noon every day and look for our signal. Having a small party camped waiting for us with the aircraft on the open beach would on Cranium Island be a very bad idea.

Our own plans have to remain definitely sketchy, as we have very little idea about the conditions over there. But the basics are to keep moving, find and deal with the fragment at best speed and then straight out as quickly and quietly as we can. It is just our luck that the Tanoaho family who might tell us more are only expected back on South Island next week, by which time we might (all being well) be heading back ourselves.

There was no point in sitting around worrying ourselves sick about the probable dangers ahead – we have spent two years training for this sort of thing, and with any reasonable luck will get away with our ears and tails still on. One thing we will certainly not find over there is crowds and entertainment, so I suggested taking a brief “pre-embarkation leave” and we headed off to Casino Island for the day.

I must say, the Daily Elele and the other newspapers were jolly hot off the mark – they must have been working all night to get the front page story about the Prof and the boys climbing Mount Kiribatori. To judge from the angle and the close-ups in the paper, the “Mirror” reporter must have used a telephoto lens that could take good shots of the volcanoes on the moon, or the canal towpaths of Mars. Helen speculates he has a ten-inch Cassegraine, which is not as rude as it sounds.

We were mentioned though not exactly by name as Songmark girls lending a paw to the support team, but there was no mention of the sabotaged pitons (assuming they really were sabotaged, and did not just slip through Quality Control back in Essen). It would be an easy enough job to spoil the heat treatment of the pitons just by heating them red-hot then rapidly quenching in cold water; although the Prof has not visibly lost his temper the steel certainly would but just as invisibly. I know what Liberty or Tatiana would say if he started accusing anyone. Actually, they would say the same about him whatever he did; really some folk are quite prejudiced.

There was one dissenting article on page two about the loss of the “inviolable summit” but that hardly holds water, we have been to the summit itself which is not that hard to get to and no doubt the first Spontoonies struggled up there a thousand years ago. True, the folk in charge of printing postcards and guidebooks will have to do some revision, but it is August already and they cannot have too many of this year's editions left. I have seen one postcard already expensively hand-stamped “*First Ascent of Kiribatori Main Face commemorative special limited issue*” that in fifty years will probably be worth a few shillings to collectors.

There was still nothing in the papers about our adventures on Wakalenga Island and afterwards – it was rather odd to see the Marleybone Hotel standing proudly in the sunshine, a great block of respectability and luxury filled with happy and indulged guests. Not the sort of place one imagines rooftop chases and fights to the finish with slaver gangs. I found my ears blushing as I recalled the finish of that adventure, and reminded myself that the baths are no doubt sized to suit one extremely large tourist such as a hippo to wallow in rather than being intended for mixed company. That surely never happens. I could see Molly's tail twitching as she followed my gaze, and indeed she had a thoroughly good time there as well – in some respects more than would suit me.

Looking around at the bustling crowds, it is still hard to believe that chase in the small hours where apart from the hunted and the quarry there seemed to be nobody on the island. Molly finished the paper and commented that it looked as if Lars was right about the whole business being kept quiet – certainly the Tourist Board do not want to know about folk having to be shovelled off the pavement outside the most prestigious hotels they have! That could quite put breakfast-time tourists off their corned-beef hash and scrambled eggs.

There was another article about Father Dominicus and his attempts to found a rival flying school, with a debate being held by the Althing next week. If they say no, we will definitely breathe a sigh of relief, as that will be that. Helen's phrase is “you can't fight City Hall”, which Liberty Morgenstern has repeatedly

argued with. Liberty seems quite proud of the idea you really can successfully fight City Hall, burn down the building and have the employees all hung from the nearest lampposts as Enemies of the People (the People being oddly enough the ones who elected them, not the ones doing the hanging, which hardly seems to fit.)

Casino Island was in full swing with hordes of tourists queuing up for the Crazy Golf, the Criminally Insane Croquet and the fairground rides on the sea front. I keep forgetting that Saffina had never seen anything like it before she came here, and she is fascinated by the Aircraft spin-dizzy, the Wheel of Misfortune and the Cone of Tragedy. She says she has never seen people paying good money to be made explosively sick before, except for Helen on a water-taxi and that hardly counts.

Maria was greatly cheered up when one of the Italian Schneider Trophy pilots decided “Taxiing trials” could be interpreted as using his million-lira Macchi racer as a runabout to get some lunch at the Rainbow Bridge café. That, she says, is style. There seemed to be quite a few folk who agreed, as in ten minutes there were half a dozen admiring girls who swam out and were sitting on the floats as he chatted happily in a mixture of broken English and splintered Spontoonie. Evidently he must have been here in previous years; there are advantages in these islands permanently hosting the Trophy races, in that folk coming from around the world always know what languages to swot up on.

I have seen some of the British racing aircraft moored on Casino Island but they always took their mechanics with them and it was a case of showing the flag rather than just showing off. I have not seen any of the Germans doing the same, much to our pal Carmen’s disappointment. She had an enlarged publicity photograph of Ilsa Klensch on her wall the last time I saw her dorm room, despite Prudence warning that the German champion seems to have absolutely no interest that direction and would not be at all pleased to find out about Carmen’s crush on her (actually what Prudence said was “Ey, lass, one whiff o’ that off thi’ and she’d ‘ave tha’ tongue fer a bootlace.”) Miss Klensch certainly seems someone it would be very bad to get on the wrong side of.

All too soon it was time to post our last postcards from Spontoon and head back; there is nobody we will want to write to saying “Wish you were here” from the reported dangers and horrors of Cranium Island – since we don’t have an address for Sobby Forsythe.

(Amelia’s adventures continue in “Monster Hash.”)