

# THE PACIFIC MYSTERY

Stephen Baxter

Like many of his colleagues at the beginning of a new century, British writer Stephen Baxter has been engaged for more than a decade now with the task of revitalizing and reinventing the “hard-science” story for a new generation of readers, producing work on the cutting edge of science that bristles with weird new ideas and often takes place against vistas of almost outrageously cosmic scope.

Baxter made his first sale to *Interzone* in 1987, and since then has become one of that magazine’s most frequent contributors, as well as making sales to *Asimov’s Science Fiction*, *Science Fiction Age*, *Analog*, *Zenith*, *New Worlds*, and elsewhere. He’s one of the most prolific new writers in science fiction, and is rapidly becoming one of the most popular and acclaimed of them as well. In 2001, he appeared on the final Hugo ballot twice, and won both *Asimov’s* Readers Award and *Analog’s* Analytical Laboratory Award, one of the few writers ever to win both awards in the same year. Baxter’s first novel, *Raft*, was released in 1991 to wide and enthusiastic response, and was rapidly followed by other well received novels such as *Timelike Infinity*, *Anti-Ice*, *Flux*, and the H. G. Wells pastiche—a sequel to *The Time Machine*—*The Time Ships*, which won both the John W. Campbell Memorial Award and the Philip K. Dick Award. His other books include the novels *Voyage*, *Titan*, *Moonseed*, *Mammoth*, *Book One: Silverhair*, *Manifold: Time*, *Manifold: Space*, *Evolution*, *Coalescent*, *Exultant*, *Transcendent*, and two novels in collaboration with Arthur C. Clarke, *The Light of Other Days* and *Time’s Eye*, *A Time Odyssey*. His short fiction has been collected in *Vacuum Diagrams: Stories of the Xeelee Sequence*, *Traces*, and *The Hunters of Pangaea*, and he has released a chapbook novella, *Mayflower II*. His most recent books are the novel *Emperor* and a new collection, *Resplendent*. Coming up are two more new novels, *Conqueror* and *Navigator*.

Here he takes us to an alternate world that ultimately turns out to be a lot more different from our own time line than it would at first sight appear to

be.

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Editor's note: The saga of the return of the aerial battleship *Reichsmarschall des Grossdeutschen Reiches Hermann Goering* to London's sky, and of the heroic exploits of a joint team of RAF and Luftwaffe personnel in boarding the hulk of the *schlachtschiff*, has overshadowed the story of what befell her long-dead crew, and what they discovered during their attempted Pacific crossing—inasmuch as their discoveries are understood at all. Hence, with the agreement of the family, the BBC has decided to release the following edited transcript of the private diary kept onboard by journalist Bliss Stirling. Miss Stirling completed the Mathematical Tripos at Girton College, Cambridge, and during her National Service in the RAF served in the Photographic Reconnaissance Unit. For some years she was employed as a cartographer by the Reich in the mapping of the eastern Kommissariats in support of Generalplan Ost. She was also, of course, a noted aviatrix. She was but twenty-eight years old at the time of her loss.

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*May 15, 1950. Day 1.* I collected my Spitfire at RAF Medmenham and flew up into gin-clear English air. I've flown Spits all over the world, in the colonies for the RAF, and in Asia on collaborative ops with the Luftwaffe. But a Spit is meant to fly in English summer skies—I've always regretted I was too young to be a flyer in the Phoney War, even if no shots were fired in anger.

And today was quite an adventure, for I was flying to engage the *Goering*, the Beast, as Churchill always referred to her before his hanging. Up I climbed, matching its eastward velocity of a steady 220 knots towards central London—I matched *her*, the Beast was not about to make a detour for me. You can hardly miss her even from the ground, a black cross-shape painted on the sky. And as you approach, it is more like buzzing a building, a skyscraper in New York or Germania perhaps, than rendezvousing with another aircraft.

I was thrilled. Who wouldn't be? On board this tremendous crate I was going to be part of an attempt to circumnavigate the world for the first time in human history, a feat beyond all the great explorers of the past: we would be challenging the Pacific Mystery. Always providing I could land on the bloody thing first.

I swept up above the Beast and then vectored in along her spine, coming in from the stern over a tailplane that is itself the height of St. Paul's. It was on the back of the Beast, a riveted airstrip in the sky, that I was going to have to bring down my Spit. I counted the famous four-deep banks of wings with their heavy engine pods and droning props, and saw the glassy blisters of gun turrets at the wing tips, on the tailplane and around the nose. It's said that the Beast carries her *own* flak guns. A few small stubby-winged kites, which I later learned the Germans called "chariots," were parked up near the roots of the big wing complexes. The whole is painted black, and adorned with Luftwaffe crosses. Despite the rumoured atom-powered generator in her belly, it is scarcely possible to believe such a monstrosity flies at all, and I can quite believe it is impossible for her ever to land.

And, like all Nazi technology, she is seductively beautiful.

I've done my share of carrier landings, but that final approach through a forest of A/T booms and RDF antennae was hairier than any of them. Pride wasn't going to allow me the slightest hesitation, however. I put my wheels down without a bump, my arrestor hook caught on the tag lines, and I was jolted to a halt before the crash barriers. On the back of the Beast stood a batsman in a kind of all-over rubber suit, harnessed to the deck to stop from being blown off. He flagged me to go park up under a wing-root gun turret.

So I rolled away. Bliss Stirling, girl reporter, on the deck of the *Goering!* Somewhere below, I knew, was London. But the Beast's back is so broad that when you stand on it you can't see the ground...

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*Day 2.* The highlight of my day was an expensive lunch in what Doctor Ciliax calls "one of the lesser restaurants of the *schlachtschiff*," all silver cutlery and comestibles from the provinces of Greater Germany, Polish beef and French wine. It is like being aboard an ocean liner, or a plush Zeppelin, perhaps.

As we ate the Beast circled over Germania, which Jack Bovell insists on calling "Berlin," much to Ciliax's annoyance. Fleets of tanker craft flew up to load us with oil, water, food and other consumables, and we were buzzed by biplanes laden with cine-cameras, their lenses peering at us.

Jack Bovell is one of the token Yanks on board to witness the journey, much as I am a token British. He is a flying officer in the USAAF, and will, so he has been promised, be allowed to take the controls of the Beast at some point during this monumental flight. We tokens are in the charge of Wolfgang Ciliax, himself a Luftwaffe officer, though as an engineer he never refers to his rank. He is one of the Beast's chief designers. The three of us are going to be spending a lot of time together, I think. What joy.

This morning Ciliax took Jack and me on a tour of the Beast. Of course we weren't shown anything seriously interesting such as the "atom engine," or the "jet" motors rumoured to be deployed on some of the chariots. Ciliax in fact showed rare restraint for a boffin, in my experience, in not blurting out all he knew about his crate just for the love of her.

But we were dazzled by a flight deck the size of a Buckingham Palace reception room, with banks of chattering teletypes and an immense navigational table run by some of the few women to be seen on board. There are lounges and a ballroom and a library, and even a small swimming pool, which is just showing off.

Other guests walked with us, many from the upper tiers of the occupied nations of Europe. We were tailed by an excitable movie-film crew. Leni Riefenstahl is said to be directing a film of our momentous voyage, though she herself isn't aboard. And many sinister-looking figures wore the black uniforms of the SS. Pressed by Jack Bovell, Ciliax insists that the *Goering* is a Luftwaffe crate and the SS has no authority here.

Below decks, we walked through a hold the size of the Albert Hall. We marvelled at mighty aquifers of oil and water. And we were awed by the double transverse internal bulkheads and the hull of inches-thick hardened steel: rivets the size of my fist.

"She really is a battleship in the sky," Jack said, rather grudgingly. And he was right; the ancestry of this monstrous *schlachtschiff* lies truly among the steel behemoths of the oceans, not fragile kites like my Spitfire.

Jack Bovell is around thirty, is stocky—shorter than me—stinks of cigar smoke and pomade and brandy, and wears a battered leather flight jacket, even at dinner. I think he's from Brooklyn. He's smarter than he acts, I'm sure.

"Ah, yes, of course she is a *schlachtschiff*," said Ciliax, "but the *Goering* is an experimental craft whose primary purposes are, one, a

demonstration of technology, and two, an explorative capability. The *Goering* is the first vessel in human history capable of challenging the mighty scale of the Pacific.” That habit of his of speaking in numbered lists tells you much about Wolfgang Ciliax. He is quite young, mid-thirties perhaps, and has slicked-back blond hair and glasses with lenses the size of pennies.

“ ‘Explorative capability,’ “ Jack said sourly. “And that’s why you made a point of showing us her armour?”

Ciliax just smiled. Of course that was the point.

Every non-German on board this bloody plane is a spy to some degree or other, including me. Whatever we discover about the world as we attempt to cross the Pacific, we neutral and occupied nations are going to be served up with a powerful demonstration of the Reich’s technological capabilities. Everyone knows this is the game. But Jack keeps breaking the rules. In a way he is too impatient a character for the assignment he has been given.

Jack, incidentally, sized me up when he met me, and Ciliax, who isn’t completely juiceless, takes every opportunity to touch me, to brush my hand or pat my shoulder. But Jack seems sniffy. To him I’m an emblem of a nation of appeasers, I suppose. And to Ciliax I’m territory to be conquered, perhaps, like central Asia. No doubt we will break through our national types in the days to come. But Bliss is not going to find romance aboard the *Reichsmarschall des Grossdeutschen Reiches Hermann Goering*, I don’t think!

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Day 3. Memo to self: follow up a comment of Ciliax’s about “helots” who tend the atom engines.

These machines are contained within sealed lead-lined bulkheads, and nobody is allowed in or out—at any rate, not me. The atomic motors are a focus of interest for us spies, of course. Before this flight the RAF brass briefed me about the Nazis’ plans to develop weapons of stunning power from the same technology. Perhaps there is a slave colony of *untermenschen*, Slavs or gypsies, trapped inside those bulkheads, tending the glowing machines that are gradually killing them, as we drink wine and argue over politics.

In the afternoon I sat in one of the big observation blisters set in the belly of the Beast and made a broadcast for the BBC. This is my nominal job, to be British eyes and ears during this remarkable mission. We are still orbiting Germania, that is, Berlin. Even from the air the vast reconstruction of the last decade is clear to see. The city has been rebuilt around an axial grid of avenues each a hundred yards wide. You can easily pick out the Triumphal Arch, the Square of the People, and the Pantheon of the Army which hosts a choreography of millions. Jack tuts about “infantile gigantomania,” but you have to admire the Nazis’ vision. And all the while the tanker planes fly up to service us, like bees to a vast flower...

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Day 5. A less pleasant lunch today. We nearly got pranged.

We crossed the old border between Germany and Poland, and are now flying over what the Germans call simply “Ostland,” the vast heart of Asia. With Ciliax’s help we spotted the new walled colony cities, mostly of veteran German soldiers, planted deep in old Soviet territories. They are surrounded by vast estates, essentially each a collective farm, a *kolkhoz*, taken from the Bolsheviks. There the peasantry toil and pay their tithes to German settlers.

Jack grumbled and grouched at this, complaining in his American way about a loss of freedom and of human rights. But he’s missing the point.

“Americans rarely grasp context,” said Ciliax with barely concealed contempt. “It is not a war for freedom that is being fought out down there, not a war for territory. Asia is the arena for the final war between races, the climax of a million years of disparate human evolution. As the Führer has written, ‘What a task awaits us! We have a hundred years of joyful satisfaction before us.’ “ I must say that when Ciliax spouts this stuff he isn’t convincing. He’s fundamentally an engineer, I think. But one must labour for whoever holds the whip.

(Memo: check the source of that Hitler quote.)

Since Germania we have been accompanied by fighters, mostly Messerschmitts, providing top cover and close escort, and Jack Bovell and I have been happily spotting types and new variants. And we have seen lighter, faster fighters streaking across our field of view. They may be the “jet fighters” we’ve read about but have never seen up close. I know plenty of RAF brass who regret that the Phoney War ended in May 1940, if only for the lost opportunity for technical advancement. This ravaged continent is

obviously a crucible for such advancement. Jack and I craned and muttered, longing to see more of those exotic birds.

And then the show started. We were somewhere over the Ukraine.

One fighter came screaming up through our layers of escorts. It arced straight up from the ground like a firecracker, trailing a pillar of smoke. I wondered aloud if it actually had rockets strapped to its tail. Ciliax murmured, as if intrigued by a puzzle.

You have to understand that we were sitting in armchairs in an observation blister. I even had a snifter of brandy in my hand. There was absolutely no sense of danger. But still the unmarked rocket-plane came on. A deep thrumming made the surface of my brandy ripple; the Beast, lumbering, was changing course.

"If that thing gets through," I said, "it's harps and halos and hello St. Peter for us."

"You don't say," said Jack Bovell.

Ciliax said nothing.

Then a chance pencil of flak swept across the nose of the rocket-plane, shattering the canopy over its cockpit. It fell away and that was that; I didn't even see the detonation when it fell to earth.

Jack blew out his cheeks. Wolfgang Ciliax snapped his fingers for more brandies all round.

We orbited over the area of the attempted strike for the next eight hours.

Ciliax took me and Jack down to a hold. The bombs were slim, blue and black steel, perfectly streamlined; they looked like "upturned midget submarines," as Jack said. You can drop them from as high as twenty thou. I thought this was another piece of typically beautiful Nazi technology, but Ciliax said the bombs are a British design, made under licence by Vickers Armstrong in Weybridge, whose chief designer is a man called Barnes Neville Wallis. "They are as British as the banks of Rolls-Royce Merlin engines that keep the *Goering* aloft," Ciliax told me, his bespectacled eyes intent, making sure I understood my complicity. But I thought he was mostly incensed that anybody had dared raise a hand against his beautiful machine.

That night the *Goering* dropped stick after stick of these “Tallboy” bombs on the site from which the rocket plane seemed to have been launched. I have no idea whether the assault was successful or not. The movie people filmed all this, in colour.

With the bombs dropped, we flee east, towards the dawn. I must try to catch some sleep...

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*Day 7.* We have already crossed China, which is the subject of a colonization programme by the Japanese, a mirror image to what the Germans are up to in the west. Eurasia is a vast theatre of war and conquest and misery, a theatre that stretches back all the way to the Channel coast. What a world we live in!

Still, now we are past it all, a goodly chunk of the world’s circumference already successfully traversed. Our escort has fallen away. Our last supply convoy was Japanese; Jack has threatened to drop their raw fish suppers out of the bomb bays.

And now, alone, we are facing our ultimate target: the Pacific Ocean. We are so high that its silver skin glimmers, softly curving, like the back of some great animal.

Jack is taking his turns in a pilot’s seat on the bridge. This afternoon I was given permission from Ciliax to go up there. I longed to play with the controls. “I have a hunch I’m a better stick man than you,” I said to Jack.

Jack laughed. Sitting there, his peaked cap on, his flight jacket under a webbing over-jacket, he looked at home for the first time since I’d met him. “I dare say you’re right. But Hans is a better man than either of us.”

“Hans?”

Hans, it turned out, is the flight deck’s computing machine. Hans can fly the *Beast* on “his” own, and even when a human pilot is at the stick he takes over most functions. “I think the name is a German joke,” Jack said. “Some translation of ‘hands off.’ “

I crouched beside his position, looking out over the ocean. “What do you think we’re going to find out there, Jack?”



Jack, matter-of-fact, shrugged. "Twelve thousand miles of ocean, and then San Francisco."

"Then how do you explain the fact that nobody has crossed the Pacific before?"

"Ocean currents," he said. "Adverse winds. Hell, I don't know."

But we both knew the story is more complicated than that. This is the Pacific Mystery.

Humanity came out of Africa; Darwin said so. In caveman days we spread north and east, across Asia all the way to Australia. Then the Polynesians went island-hopping. They crossed thousands of miles, reaching as far as Hawaii with their stone axes and dug-out boats.

But beyond that point the Pacific defeated them.

And meanwhile others went west, to the Americas. Nobody quite knows how the first "native" Americans got there from Africa; some say it was just accidental rafting on lumber flushed down the Congo, though I fancy there's a smack of racial prejudice in that theory. So when the Vikings sailed across the north Atlantic they came up against dark-skinned natives, and when the Portuguese and Spanish and British arrived they found a complicated trading economy, half-Norse, half-African, which they proceeded to wipe out. Soon the Europeans reached the west coast of the Americas.

But beyond that point the Pacific defeated them.

"Here's the puzzle," I said to Jack. "The earth is a sphere. You can tell, for instance, by the curving shadow it casts on the moon during a lunar eclipse."

"Sure," said Jack. "So we *know* the Pacific can't be more than twelve thousand miles across."

"Yes, but western explorers, including Magellan and Captain Cook, have pushed a long way out from the American coast. Thousands of miles. We know they should have found Hawaii, for instance. And from the east, the Chinese in the Middle Ages and the modern Japanese have sailed far beyond the Polynesians' range. Few came back. Somebody should have made it by now. Jack, *the Pacific is too wide*. And that is the mystery."

Jack snorted. "Bull hockey," he said firmly. "You'll be telling me next about sea monsters and cloud demons."

But those ancient Pacific legends had not yet been disproved, and I could see that some of the bridge crew, those who could follow our English, were glancing our way uncertainly.

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*Day 8.* We are out of wireless telegraphy contact; the last of the Japanese stations has faded, and our forest of W/T masts stands purposeless. You can't help but feel isolated.

So we three, Ciliax, Jack and I, are drawn to each other, huddling in our metal cave like primitives. This evening we had another stiff dinner, the three of us. Loathing each other, we drink too much, and say too much.

"Of course," Ciliax murmured, "the flight of a rocket-plane would last only minutes, and would be all but uncontrollable once, ah, the fuse is lit. Somebody on the ground must have known precisely when the *Goering* would pass overhead. I wonder who could have let them know?"

If that was a dig at Jack or me, Jack wasn't having any of it. " 'Somebody'? Who? In Asia you Nazis are stacking up your enemies, Wolfie. The Bolsheviks, partisans. You and the Japanese will meet and fall on each other some day—"

"Or it may have been Americans," Ciliax said smoothly.

"Why would America attack a Nazi asset?"

"Because of the strategic implications of the *Goering*. Suppose we do succeed in crossing the Pacific? America has long feared the vulnerability of its long western coastline..."

Jack's eyes were narrow, but he didn't bother to deny it.

In 1940 America was indeed looking over its shoulder nervously at Japan's aggressive expansion. But the Pacific proved impassible, the Japanese did not come, and during the Phoney War America stood firm with Britain.

In April 1940 Hitler overran Denmark and Norway, and in May outflanked the Maginot line to crush France. The blitzkriegs caused panic in

the British Cabinet. Prime Minister Chamberlain was forced out of office for his poor handling of the war.

But Hitler paused. The North Sea was his boundary, he said; he wanted no conflict with his “Anglo-Saxon cousins.”

Churchill was all for rejecting Hitler’s overtures and fighting on. But Lord Halifax, the foreign secretary, argued that Hitler’s terms were acceptable. While Churchill retired fuming to the back benches, the “scarecrow in a derby hat” was prime minister within the week, and had agreed to an armistice within the month.

Hitler was able to turn his full energies east, and by Christmas 1941 had taken Moscow.

All this happened, you see, because the Japanese had not been able to pose a threat to the Americans. If not for the impassibility of the Pacific, America’s attentions might have been drawn to the west, not the east. And without the powerful support we enjoyed from America, if Hitler hadn’t been moved to offer such a generous peace in 1940—if Hitler had dared attack Britain—the Germans would have found themselves fighting on two fronts, west and east. Could Russia have survived an attenuated Nazi assault? Is it even conceivable that Russia and Britain and America could have worked as allies against the Nazis, even against the Japanese? *Would the war eventually have been won?*

All this speculation is guff, of course, best left to blokes in pubs. But you can see that if the Pacific *had* been navigable the whole outcome of the war with the Germans would have been different, one way or another. And that is why the *Goering*, a plane designed to challenge the ocean’s impregnability, is indeed a weapon of strategic significance.

This is what we argue about over lunch and dinner. Lost in the vast inhuman arena of this ocean, we are comforted by the familiarity of our petty human squabbles.

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*Day 10.* Perhaps I should record distances travelled, rather than times.

It is three days since we left behind the eastern coast of Asia. Over sea, unimpeded by resupplying or bomb-dropping, we make a steady airspeed of 220 knots. In the last forty-eight hours alone we should have

covered twelve thousand miles.

We should *already* have crossed the ocean. We should *already* be flying over the Americas. When I take astronomical sightings, it is as if we have simply flown around a perfectly behaved spherical earth from which America has been deleted. The geometry of the sky doesn't fit the geometry of the earth.

Somehow I hadn't expected the mystery to come upon us so quickly. Only ten days into the flight, we are still jostling for position at the dinner table. And yet we have sailed into a mystery so strange that we may as well have been projected to the moon.

I still haven't met the captain, whose name, I am told, is Fassbender. Even lost as we are in the middle of unfathomable nothingness, the social barriers between us are as rigid as the steel bulkheads of the Beast.

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*Day 15.* Today, a jaunt in a chariot. What fun!

We passed over yet another group of islands, this one larger than most, dark basaltic cones blanketed by greenery and lapped by the pale blue of coral reefs. Observers in the blisters, armed with binoculars and telescopes, claimed to see movement at the fringes of these scattered fragments of jungle. So the captain ordered the chariots to go down and take a shuftie.

There were four of us in our chariot, myself, Jack, Ciliax, and a crewman who piloted us, a squat young chap called "Klaus" whom I rather like. Both the Germans wore sidearms; Jack and I did not. The chariot is a stubby-winged seaplane, well equipped to land on the back of the Beast; a tough little bugger.

We skimmed low over clearings where lions ran and immense bears growled. Things like elephants, covered in brown hair and with long curling tusks, lifted their trunks as we passed, as if in protest at our engines' clatter. "Christ," Jack said. "What I wouldn't give to be down among 'em with a shotgun." Ciliax and I took photographs and cine-films and made notes and spoke commentaries into tape recorders.

And we thought we saw signs of people: threads of smoke rose from the beaches.

“Extraordinary,” Ciliax said. “Cave bears. What looked like sabre-toothed cats. *Mammoths*. This is a fauna that has not been seen in Europe or America since the ice retreated.”

Jack asked, “What happened to ‘em?”

“We hunted them to death,” I said. “Probably.”

“What with, machine guns?”

I shrugged. “Stone axes and flint arrowheads are enough, given time.”

“So,” Jack asked practically, “how did they get *here*?”

“Sea levels fall and rise,” Ciliax said. “When the ice comes, it locks up the world’s water. Perhaps that is true even of this monstrous world ocean. Perhaps the lower waters expose dry land now submerged, or archipelagos along which one can raft.”

“So in the Ice Age,” I said, “we hunted the mammoths and the giant sloths until we drove them off the continents. But they kept running, and a few of them made it to one island or another, and now they just continue fleeing, heading ever east.” And in this immense ocean, I thought, there was room to keep running and running and running. Nothing need ever go extinct.

“But there are people here,” Jack pointed out. “We saw fires.”

We buzzed along the beach. We dipped low over a kind of campsite, a mean sort of affair centred on a scrappy hearth. The people, naked, came running out of the forest at our noise—and when they saw us, most of them went running back again. But we got a good look at them, and fired off photographs.

They were people, sort of. They had fat squat bodies, and big chests, and brows like bags of walnuts. I think it was obvious to us all what they were, even to Jack.

“Neanderthals.” Ciliax said it first; it is a German name. “Another species of—well, animal—which we humans chased out of Africa and Europe and Asia.”

Jack said, “They don’t seem to be smart enough to wipe out the

mammoths as we did.”

“Or maybe they’re *too* smart,” I murmured.

Ciliax said, “What a remarkable discovery: relics of the evolutionary past, even while the evolutionary destiny of mankind is being decided in the heart of Asia!”

Standing orders forbid landings. The chariot lifted us back to the steel safety of the Beast, and that was that.

It is now eight days since we crossed the coast of China. We have come *thirty-five thousand miles* since. Perhaps it shouldn’t be surprising to find such strange beasts below, mammoths and cave bears and low-browed savages.

And still we go on. What next? How thrilling it all is!

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*Day 23.* Today, a monstrous electrical storm.

We flew under the worst of it, our banks of engines thrumming, as lightning crackled around the W/T masts. Perhaps in this unending ocean there are unending storms—nobody knows, our meteorologists cannot calculate it.

But we came out of it. Bold technicians crawled out to the wing roots to check over the Beast, to replace a mast or two, and to tend to the chariots. I wanted to check my Spitfire, but predictably was not allowed by Ciliax. Still, Klaus kindly looked over the old bird for me and assures me she is A-OK.

Last night *both* Ciliax and Jack Bovell made passes at me, the one with a steely resolve, the other rather desperately.

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*Day 25.* A rather momentous day.

Our nominal food and water store is intended to last fifty days. Today, therefore, Day Twenty-five, is the turn-back point. And yet we are no nearer finding land, no nearer penetrating the great mysteries of the Pacific.

The captain had us gather in the larger of the restaurants—we being the passengers and senior officers; the scullery maids were not represented, and nor were the helots, the lost souls of the atom-engine compartment. The captain himself, on his flight deck, spoke to us by speaker tube; I have yet to see his face.

We discussed whether to continue the mission. We had a briefing by the quartermaster on the state of our supplies, then a debate, followed by a vote. A vote, held on a flying Nazi *schlachtschiff*. I have no doubt that Captain Fassbender had already made his own decision before we were gathered in the polished oak of the dining room. But he was trying to boost morale—even striving to stave off mutinies in the future. Christopher Columbus used the same tactics, Jack told me, when his crew too felt lost in the midst of another endless ocean.

And, like Columbus, Captain Fassbender won the day. For now we carry on, on half rations. The movie-makers filmed it all, even though every last man of them, too fond of their grub, voted to turn back.

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*Day 28.* Today we passed over yet another group of islands, quite a major cluster. Captain Fassbender ordered a few hours' orbit while the chariots went down to explore. Of my little group only I was bothered to ride down, with my friend Klaus. Jack Bovell did not answer my knock on his cabin door; I have not seen him all day. I suspect he has been drinking heavily.

So Klaus and I flew low over forests and patches of grassland. We spooked exotic-looking animals: they were *like* elephants and buffalo and rhinoceroses. Perhaps they are archaic forms from an age even deeper than the era of ice. Living fossils! I snapped pictures merrily and took notes, and fantasized of presenting my observations to the Royal Geographical Society, as Darwin did on returning from his voyage on the *Beagle*.

Then I saw people. They were naked, tall, slim, upright. They looked more “modern,” if that is the right word, than the lumpy-browed Neanderthals we saw on the islands of mastodons, many days ago. Yet their heads receded from their foreheads; their shapely skulls can contain little in the way of grey matter, and their pretty brown eyes held only bewilderment. They fled from our approach like the other animals of the savannah.

Primitive they might be, but it appears they lead the march of the hominids, off to the east. I took more photos.

I have begun to develop a theory about the nature of the world, and the surface of the ocean over which we travel—or rather the geometric continuum in which it seems to be embedded. I think the Pacific is a challenge not merely to the cartographic mind but to the mathematical. (I just read those sentences over—how pompous—once a Girton girl, always a Girton girl!) I've yet to talk it over with anybody. Only Wolfgang Ciliax has a hope of understanding me, I think. I prefer to be sure of my ground before I approach him.

Certainly a radical new theory of this ocean of ours is needed. Think of it! Since the coast of Asia we have already travelled far enough to circle the earth *nearly five times*, if it were not for this oddity, this Fold in the World.

The Pacific is defeating us, I think, crushing our minds with its sheer scale. After only three days on half tuck everybody is grumbling as loudly as their bellies. Yet we go on...

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*Day 33.* It has taken me twenty-four hours to get around to this entry. After the events of yesterday the writing of it seemed futile. Courage, Bliss! However bad things are, one must behave as if they are not so, as my mother, a stoical woman, has always said.

It began when Jack Bovell, for the third day in a row, did not emerge from his cabin. One cannot have uncontrollable drunks at large on an aircraft, not even one as large as this. And no part of the *Goering*, not even passengers' cabins, can be off-limits to the godlike surveillance of the captain. So Wolfgang Ciliax led a party of hefty aircrew to Jack's cabin. I went along at Ciliax's request, as the nearest thing to a friend he has on this crate.

I watched as the Germans broke down Jack's door. Jack was drunk, but coherent, and belligerent. He took on the Luftwaffe toughs, and as he was held back Ciliax ordered a thorough search of his cabin—"thorough" meaning the furniture was dismantled and the false ceiling broken into.

The flap that followed moved fast. I have since pieced it together.



The airmen found a small radio transceiver, a compact leather case full of valves and wiring. This, it turned out, had been used by Jack to attract the attention of that rocket-plane as we flew over the Ukraine. So Ciliax's suspicions were proven correct. I am subtly disappointed in Jack; it seems such an *obvious* thing to have done. Anyhow this discovery led to a lot of shouting, and the thugs moved in on Jack. But as they did so he raised his right hand, which held what I thought at first was a grenade, and the thugs backed off.

Ciliax turned to me, his face like a thunderous sky. "Talk to this fool or he'll kill us all."

Jack huddled in the corner of his smashed-up room, his face bleeding, his gadget in his upraised right hand. "Bliss," he panted. "I'm sorry you got dragged into this."

"I was in it from the moment I stepped aboard. If you sober up—Wolfgang could fetch you some coffee—"

"Adrenaline and a beating-up are great hangover cures."

"Then think about what you're doing. If you set that thing off, whatever it is, do you expect to survive?"

"I didn't expect to survive when I called up that Russkie rocket-plane. But it isn't about me, Bliss. It's about duty."

Ciliax sneered. "Your president must be desperate if his only way of striking at the Reich is through suicide attacks."

"This has nothing to do with Truman or his administration," Jack said. "If he's ever challenged about it he'll deny any knowledge of this, and he'll be telling the truth."

Ciliax wasn't impressed. "Plausible deniability. I thought that was an SS invention."

"Tell me why, Jack," I pressed him.

He eyed me. "Can't you see it? Ciliax said it himself. It's all about global strategies, Bliss. If the Pacific crossing is completed the Germans will be able to strike at us. And that's what I've got to put a stop to."

"But there will be other *Goerings*," Ciliax said.

“Yeah, but at least I’ll buy some time, if it ends here—if nobody knows—if the Mystery remains, a little longer. Somebody has to take down this damn Beast. A rocket-plane didn’t do it. But I’m Jonah, swallowed by the whale.” He laughed, and I saw he was still drunk after all.

I yelled, “Jack, no!” In the same instant half the German toughs fell on him, and the other half, including Ciliax, crowded out of the room.

I had been expecting an explosion in the cabin. I cowered. But there was only a distant *crump*, like far-off thunder. The deck, subtly, began to pitch...

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*Day 34. We aren’t dead yet.*

The picture has become clearer. Jack sabotaged the *Goering’s* main control links; the switch he held was a radio trigger. But it didn’t quite work; we didn’t pitch into the sea. The technicians botched a fix to stabilize our altitude, and even keep us on our course, heading ever east. This whale of the sky still swims through her element. But the crew can’t tell yet if she remains dirigible—if we will ever be able to fly her home again.

Six people died, some crewmen on the flight deck, a couple of technicians wrestling with repairs outside. And Jack, of course. Already beaten half to death, he was presented to a summary court presided over by the captain. Then Fassbender gave him to the crew. They hung him up in the hold, then while he still lived cut him down, and pitched him into the sea.

I don’t know what Ciliax made of all this. He said these common airmen lacked the inventiveness of the SS, to whom he was under pressure to hand over Jack. Ciliax has a core of human decency, I think.

So we fly on. The engineers toil in shifts on the *Goering’s* shattered innards. I have more faith in engineers than in gods or gargoyles, priests or politicians. But I no longer believe I will ever see England again. There. I’ve written it down, so it must be true. I wonder what strange creatures of the sea will feast on Jack’s flesh...

\* \* \* \*

Day 50. Another round number, another pointless milestone.

I estimate we have travelled a distance that would span from the earth to the moon. Think of that! Perhaps in another universe the German genius for technology would have taken humans on just such an epic voyage, rather than this pointless slog.

We continue to pass over island groups and chains. On one island yesterday, covered by a crude-looking jungle of immense feathery ferns, I saw very exotic animals running in herds, or peering with suspicion at our passage. Think of flightless birds, muscular and upright and with an avian nerviness; and think of a crocodile's massive reptilian patience; combine the two, and you have what I saw.

How did the dinosaurs die? Was it an immense volcanic episode, a comet or other fire from the sky, a deadly plague, some inherent weakness of the reptilian race? Whatever it was, it seems that no matter how dramatic the disaster that seeks to wipe you out, there is always room to run. Perhaps on this peculiar folded-up earth of ours there is *no species* that has ever gone extinct. What a marvellous thought!

But if they *were* dinosaurs, down on that island, we will never know. The plane no longer stops to orbit, for it cannot; the chariots no longer fly down to investigate thunder lizards. And we plough on ever east, ever farther over the ocean, ever deeper into a past even beyond the dinosaurs.

My social life is a bit of a challenge these days.

As our food and water run out, our little aerial community is disintegrating into fiefdoms. The Water Barons trade with the Emperors of the Larder, or they will go to war over a tapped pipeline. Occasionally I hear pronouncements from the invisible Captain Fassbender, but I am not certain how far his word holds sway any longer. There have been rumours of a coup by the SS officers. The movie-makers are filming none of this. Their morale was the first to crumble, poor lambs.

I last saw Wolfgang Ciliax ten days ago. He was subtle and insidious; I had the distinct impression that he wanted me to join a sort of harem. Women are the scarcest commodity of all on this boat. Women, and cigarettes. You can imagine the shrift he got from me.

I sleep in barricaded rooms. In the guts of the Beast I have stashes of food and water, and cigarettes and booze to use as currency in an emergency. I keep out of the way of the petty wars, which will sort

themselves out one way or another.

Once I had to bale out over Malaya, and I survived in the jungle for a week before reaching an army post. This is similar. It's also rather like college life. What larks!

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Editor's note: Many fragmentary entries follow. Some are undated, others contain only mathematical jottings or geometric sketches. The reader is referred to a more complete publication forthcoming in *Annals of Psychiatry*.

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Day 365. A year, by God! A full year, if I have counted correctly, though the calendar is meaningless given how many times we have spun around this watery earth—or appear to have. And if the poor gutted Beast is still keeping to her nominal speed, then I may have travelled two million miles. *Two million*. And still no America!

I believe I am alone now. Alone, save for the valve mind of Hans, and perhaps the odd rat.

The food ran out long ago, save for my stashes. The warfare between the Führers of Spam and the Tsars of Dried Eggs became increasingly fragmented, until one man fell on the next for the sake of a cigarette stub. Others escaped, however, in chariots that went spinning down to one lost island or another. Klaus was one of them. I hope they survive; why not? Perhaps some future expedition, better equipped than ours, may retrieve their descendants.

And the Beast is hollowed out, much of her burned, depopulated save for me. I have explored her from one end to the other, seeking scraps of food and water, pitching the odd corpse into the drink. The only place I have not investigated is the sealed hold of the atom engine. Whatever survives in there has failed to break out.

However, the engine continues to run. The blades of the Merlins turn still. Even the heating works. I should put on record that no matter how badly we frail humans have behaved, the *Reichsmarschall des Grossdeutschen Reiches Hermann Goering* has fulfilled her mission flawlessly.

This can't go on forever, though. Therefore I have decided to set my affairs in order to begin with, my geometrical maunderings. I have left a fuller account—that is, complete with equations—in a separate locker. These journal notes are intended for the less mathematical reader; such as my mother (they're for you, mummy!—I know you'll want to know what became of me).

I have had to make a leap of faith, if you will. As we drive on and on, with no sight of an end to our journey, I have been forced to consider the possibility that there will *be* no end—that, just as it appears, the Pacific is not merely anomalously large, but, somehow, *infinite*. How can this be?

Our greatest geometer was Euclid. You've heard of him, haven't you? He reduced all of the geometry you can do on a plane to just five axioms, from which can be derived that menagerie of theorems and corollaries which have been used to bother schoolchildren ever since.

And even Euclid wasn't happy with the fifth axiom, which can be expressed like this: *parallel lines never meet*. That seems so obvious it doesn't need stating, that if you send off two lines at right angles to a third, like rail tracks, they will never meet. On a perfect, infinite plane they wouldn't. But on the curved surface of the earth, they would: think of lines of longitude converging on a pole. And *if space itself is curved*, again, "parallel" lines may meet—or they may diverge, which is just as startling. Allowing Euclid's axiom to be weakened in this way opens the door to a whole set of what are rather unimaginatively called "non-Euclidian geometries." I will give you one name: Bernhard Riemann. Einstein plundered his work in developing relativity.

And in a non-Euclidean geometry, you can have all sorts of odd effects. A circle's circumference may be more or less than "pi" times its diameter. You can even fit an infinite area into a finite circumference: for, you see, your measuring rods shrink as those parallel lines converge. Again I refer you to one name: Henri Poincaré.

You can see where I am going with this, I think. It seems that our little globe is a non-Euclidean object. Its geometry is *hyperbolic*. It has a finite radius—as you can see if you look at its shadow on the moon—but an infinite surface area, as we of the *Goering* have discovered. The world has a Fold in it, in effect. As I drive into the Fold I grow smaller and ever more diminished, as seen from the outside—but I *feel* just as Bliss-sized as I always did, and there is plenty of room for me.

This seems strange—to put it mildly! But why should we imagine that the simple geometry of something like an orange should scale up to something as mighty as a planet?

Of course this is just one mathematical model that fits the observations; it may or may not be definitive. And many questions remain open, such as astronomical effects, and the nature of gravity on an infinite world. I leave these issues as an exercise for the reader.

One might question what difference this makes to us mere mortals. But surely geography determines our destiny. If the Pacific could have been spanned in the Stone Age, perhaps by a land bridge, the Americas' first inhabitants might have been Asian, not Africans crossing the Atlantic. And certainly in our own century if the Pacific were small enough for America and Japan to have rubbed against each other, the convulsion of war we have endured for the last decade would not have turned out the way it did.

Besides all that—what fun to find yourself living on such a peculiar little planet, a World with a Fold! Don't you think?...

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*Date unknown.* Sorry, I've given up counting. Not long after the last entry, however.

With my affairs in order I'm jumping ship. Why?

Point one: I've eaten all the food. Not the Spam, obviously.

Point two: I think I'm running out of world, or at least the sort of world I can live on. It's a long time since I saw a mastodon, or a dinosaur. I still cross over island groups, but now they are inhabited, if at all, by nothing but purplish slime and what look like mats of algae. Very ancient indeed, no doubt.

And ahead things change again. The sky looks greenish, and I wonder if I am approaching a place, or a time, where the oxygen runs out. I wake up in the night panting for breath, but of course that could just be bad dreams.

Anyhow, time to ditch. It's the end of the line for me, but not necessarily for the *Goering*. I think I've found a way to botch the flight deck

equipment: not enough to make her fully manoeuvrable again, but at least enough to turn her around and send her back the way she came, under the command of Hans. I don't know how long she can keep flying. The Merlins have been souped up with fancy lubricants and bearings for longevity, but of course there are no engineers left to service them. If the Merlins do hold out the *Goering* might one day come looming over Piccadilly Circus again, I suppose, and what a sight she will be. Of course there will be no way of stopping her I can think of, but I leave that as another exercise for you, dear reader.

As for me, I intend to take the Spit. She hasn't been flown since Day 1, and is as good as new as far as I can tell. I might try for one of those slime-covered rocks in the sea.

Or I might try for something I've glimpsed on the horizon, under the greenish sky. *Lights*. A city? Not human, surely, but who knows what lies waiting for us on the other side of the Fold in the World?

What else must I say before I go?

I hope we won't be the last to come this way. I hope that the next to do so come, unlike us, in peace.

Mummy, keep feeding my cats for me, and I'm sorry about the lack of grandchildren. Bea will have to make up the numbers (sorry, sis!).

Enough, before I start splashing these pages with salt water. This is Bliss Stirling, girl reporter for the BBC, over and out!

\* \* \* \*

Editor's note: There the transcript ends. Found lodged in a space between bulkheads, it remains the only written record of the *Goering's* journey to have survived on board the hulk. No filmed or tape-recorded material has been salvaged. The journal is published with respect to the memory of Miss Stirling. However, as Miss Stirling was contracted by the BBC and the Royal Geographic Society specifically to cover the *Goering's* Pacific expedition, all these materials must be regarded as COPYRIGHT the British Broadcasting Conglomerate MCMLII. Signed PETER CARINHALL, Board of Governors, BBC.

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