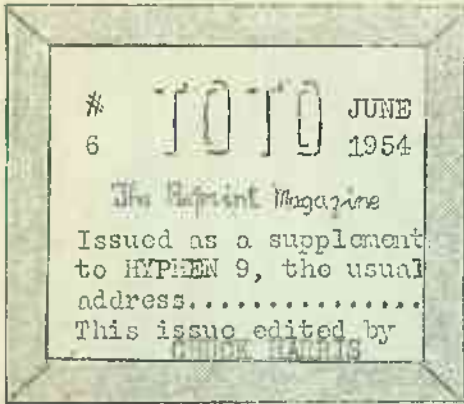


AL ASHLEY, ELFIN EDISON

by CHARLES BURBEE

(From "Burlblings Combined With Elmmurmurings" July '47)



Some of you may have heard of Al Ashley's hobby. As stated in a fan publication (which I published myself) -- the Pacificon Combozine edition of Shangri-L'Affaires -- Al Ashley's hobby is "making things."

I believed this statement when I stencilled it from Sneary's manuscript. I believed it later on when Al Ashley told me the same thing with his mouth. About 18 months ago this man told me of the mimeo-

graph he had designed. In his head, of course. It was to have the best features of all the mimeographs that have ever been built, plus a few ideas added from his vast store of knowledge. All the bad features were to be scientifically eliminated.

In fact, said Al, it will be the god damnedest mimeograph you ever saw. He wriggled with joy.

Will it have moving parts? I asked.

A startled look came into his eyes and for a time his brain lumbered on in silence, and then he finally said, Yes, I guess it will. Why, sure it will.

Well then, I said, what is so special about this mimeograph?

It will have nothing but good features, said Al, warming up again. Seems to me it could be portable. Fold up into a little square no larger than a portable typewriter. That'd be a handy feature if you moved around a lot.

I looked at Al Ashley in amazement. I believed he meant it. I had faith in this man, much as you may have had -- before you started reading this series.

Well, I said, I don't see how you're going to do that.

Al smiled tolerantly. Lots of technological developments have been made since before the war, he said. It's a simple matter of good engineering. I can design anything.

Yeah, I said, but will the finished machine work like the drawing says it should?

Why, sure, said Al.

But how, I said, are you going to iron out the bugs that crop up unless you build a model first?

All the bugs are taken out in the drafting stage, said Al. I once designed a gun that used dry ice as a propellant. That would've worked if I'd built it.

Perfectly, you mean, with no flaws anywhere? I asked.

That's right, said Al. Why not?

I doubt that, I said. (Some of my blind faith was ebbing away.) I doubt it like hell. Oh well. When are you going to build this mimeograph?

One of these days, said Al. Any time now.

That was 18 months ago.

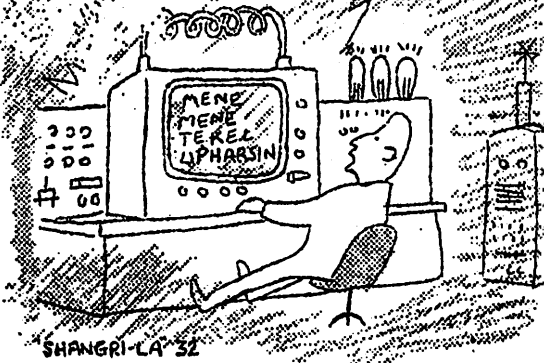
The other day he began to explain to me a complicated machine which had any number of gears, plus some relays. None of the gears seemed to mesh with any other gears (in the drawing he had made) and none of the relays had connections of any sort. The lettering work, though, was excellent. I naturally wanted to know what it was all about.

Well, said Al, it's a device I've designed to measure time.

You mean a clock? But that's already been invented. By Joseph J Bulova in 1703.

"The Still Office" "Saddle of the Spirit" "The Greatest s-j theory" "Great Machine"

You bastard, said Al. Now look, don't be silly. This machine has a definite purpose beyond that of a clock. You see, the subject sits here in front of it and I ask him a psychological question. Then he answers. Oh, something like a word-association test. This machine measures the number of seconds that it takes him to answer. When he answers, I press the button and the machine records it.



God, Al, I said. You've got something stupendous here. I can see millions in it. In fact, somebody's already made the money. You've invented a stop-watch. Somebody has already done this, Al.

This isn't a stop-watch, said Al, after some thought. This is a machine for measuring short intervals of time. By using this machine people will learn to think faster.

Oh, I said.

It beats a stop-watch, said Al, because it teaches people to think faster.

Well, I said, your results are going to be somewhat off the beam because with you pushing the button, the time intervals will be far too long.

Besides, I said, I saw a machine in a psychology class many years ago. A little magnetized disc rotated above another little magnetized disc. The subject, ordered to react to a given stimulus, pressed a button which stopped the discs. The stimulus, a light or a sound, energized the discs, which began to rotate at a given speed. The pressing of the button stopped them instantly. By looking at the position in which they stopped, you could read the time in hundredths of a second off the scribed lines on the discs. A super stop-watch. That seems better than your machine, with you pushing the button.

That machine you described is no good, said Al. It just measures short intervals of time. My machine teaches people to think faster.

Yes, Al, I said.

I'll show you another machine I made, said Al.

You mean you actually made it?

I mean the drawing, said Al. And he showed me a drawing of a very long rod on the end of which was a turntable like a phonograph. It seemed to be powered by friction drive off a roller which took its motive force from a singularly stupid-looking gear. Off bearings.

What the hell is this? I asked.

This is a machine to rotate spiral discs for the purpose of hypnosis. I am going to manufacture them and sell them to all the hypnotists in the city, said Al.

Well, Al, I said, somebody has beat you to the gun again.

What do you mean by again? said Al.

Well, this is a phonograph turntable such as may be found on a phonograph. You lay a disc or record on it and it rotates at 78 rpm's.

Oh no, said Al. This is entirely different, because it is built specially to play discs on.

Al, I said, you have some of these spiral discs, haven't you?

Sure, sure, said Al.

And where do you play them?

On the phonograph, said Al.

Well, then, I said.

Sure, sure, said Al, but this machine is especially designed for the purpose.

You mean it goes round and round, I said. Is that it?

No, no, said Al. For one thing, this machine will run vertically as well as horizontally.

And what else?

Well, that's all, but that's an exclusive feature.

You may have something there, I said. But a large mirror over a phonograph turntable at an angle of 45 degrees will give a vertical image of the turntable.

That's no good, said Al.

Why not?

Why, said Al, suppose you have a disc on which the spirals go inside out. In the mirror that would be reversed. They would be going outside in.

No they won't, I said.

Yes they will, said Al.

Al, I said. Al. Listen to me, Al. An inside-out spiral will also be inside-out in the mirror. The only difference will be in the direction of rotation. The phono turntable will be going clockwise and its reflection will go counter-clockwise.

Oh no it won't, said Al.

Oh yes it will.

So he sat there and thought and thought. At last he shook his head. No, he said. I don't visualize that. You may be right. Let it go.

You can prove it with a mirror right now, I said.

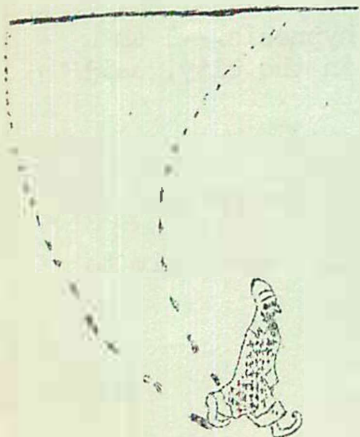
I don't have to, said Al. Besides, this machine I've designed eliminates the use of mirrors. You don't need mirrors with this machine because it's been specially built to operate vertically.

I said, What would happen if you were to turn a phonograph on its side? A small one, that is, like you have. You could turn a table model like that easy.

No, said Al. Their specifications do not call for that. What is needed is a special machine like the one I've designed.

Well, Al, I said. You may be right.

This has been a brief glimpse into the life and times of a busy inventor as he dredges up old and new laws of nature and twists them expertly into novel and bizarre machines such as stop-watches, mimeographs, and turntables that go round and round.



T The first of the fan magazines, Vol 1, No 1,
r May 1930, was titled The Comet, 8 x 11. Title
o later changed to Cosmology. Although it app-
m eared regularly every month for nearly a year,
S the last issues followed no definite scheme
F of numbering or interval of publication. The
B magazine lasted, in all, seventeen issues,
I the final one bearing the date, 1935, Vol.VI,
E No. 1.
L Copies are now so rare that they are almost
I unobtainable at any price. Featured were let-
O ters and articles by Willy Ley, the German
G rocket experimenter, Miles J. Brouer, R.F. Star-
R zel, Lilith Lorraino, and P. Schuyler Miller.
A Raymond A. Palmer was editor for almost the en-
P tire period. All issues, except the last, were
H mimeographed. The final number was published
Y by the Science Fiction Digest Company.
Volume 1, Number 1, 1935 (SF Syndicate, Texas)

The cover story is "The Secret" and what it's been discussed in all my life... (Subb)