



Glide Path

Arthur C. Clarke

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During World War II, as an RAF officer, Arthur C. Clarke was in charge of the first radar 'talk-down' equipment, the Ground Controlled Approach, during its experimental trials. His novel GLIDE PATH is based on this work

Glide Path Details

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Author : Arthur C. Clarke

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From Reader Review Glide Path for online ebook

Mike says

I gave the book four stars but it's closer to three and a half. GLIDE PATH is far from Clarke's best work but it shows that he can produce a decent novel outside of Sf genre. A quick and effortless read.

Akshay Sankar says

I started to read Glidepath on a whim, just because of Arthur C Clarke. The book was enjoyable, however, the tension built up throughout the pages concluded itself quite tamely. I expected more from the final few pages.

The attention to detail and strong verbal imagery are evident, as ever. A far cry from his regular science fiction environs, the bases described in the book were quite enjoyable to think of. It offered a glimpse into the lives of on-base personnel during the war, whose efforts, though not directly visible or on the front line, were just as important if not more.

Jason says

OK story, but not what I expected. No sci-fi from the master. However, the story was still pretty good. I did enjoy it. Nice quick story.

Cheryl says

Having just gotten my pilot's license probably made me enjoy this book far more than I would have a year ago. But with that said, this is a well written fictional account of how radar equipment got its start in aviation.

Ian Brydon says

This is one of Arthur C Clarke's earliest novels, and his only one that isn't science fiction. It draws heavily on Clarke's own experiences in the R.A.F during the Second World War. From his teenage years he had been obsessed with radio transmission and he was able to put this to good use in his role as Scientific Officer at a number of airbases supporting the maintenance and operation of their radar installations.

Even this early in his career, Clarke is already showing signs of his facility as a storyteller. His protagonist, Alan Bishop, finds himself transferred to an airbase in Cornwall where he encounters the ultra-secret Ground Controlled Descent system, a development from the early radar machines which would enable ground-based staff to 'talk down' pilots returning from missions in poor weather of limited visibility. Clarke captures the

life of the airbase vividly - Bishop's war is not one fraught with excitement. Instead, he finds himself working hard, with limited opportunity to relax.

There are, though, some humorous vignettes. Bishop finds himself on the fringes of a pale imitation of a house of ill repute just as it is being raided by the police, though they are actually there to investigate allegations of hoarding of rationed food (a cardinal sin during Britain's darkest war privations).

While not a work of science fiction, there is a fair amount of science hovering in the background, but as ever Clarke is careful not to frighten the layman. This is not the most memorable of his books, and it does now seem rather dated, but it still offers a very enjoyable read.

Jeff says

During World War II, Arthur C. Clarke served in the Royal Air Force, and while he never flew a Spitfire in a dogfight against German pilots over Europe, his story was interesting and exciting none the less.

Specifically, Clarke's work in the RAF was with radar, one of the many new technologies which was first used in the second world war. This book is loosely based on Clarke's own work on Ground Controlled Approach (renamed Ground Controlled Descent or GCD in this book), a system using radar to talk aircraft down in bad weather or other poor flying conditions.

This book is a unique one from Arthur C. Clarke in that is really more of a work of historical fiction than science fiction. Yet, it is still a very interesting book and one worth reading for all fans of Arthur C. Clarke. Moreover, as *Glide Path* is about people working with new technology and pushing the envelope of its applications, it still has many of the feelings of a science fiction book.

Thomas says

This non-science fiction novel reads like a fictionalized memoir of Clarke's World War II experience as a young officer working on ground control approach radar systems. It is therefore interesting for anyone interested in Clarke's biography. However, I am not sure how many of the details are accurate.

L.A.B. says

Arthur Clarke is one of my favorite writers of science fiction, so when I found *Glide Path* (New American Library, 1963) in a used book store I was pleased. The slightly garish cover art, so common to science fiction, promised something in the military genre. But the publishing house blurb on the back of the book talked more of Clarke's *2001: A Space Odyssey* and said little about the paperback I had in my hand.

The book was an easy read, without much complexity. Set in England during World War II, it is the story of a young air officer who is assigned to a top secret radar project. As he helps troubleshoot and test the equipment, he tests himself as well. Amid midnight test flights and planes sailing through the infamous fogs of the English Isles, the fellow comes of age as an officer, leader, and man.

I failed to find anything about it that I recognized as science fiction, however. While I was disappointed by that, I still found Glide Path a pleasant little book.

brian dean says

The novel is about the first radar systems designed to assist aircraft in landings in poor visibility. This is a fictionalized account of what Clarke himself likely went through as he was involved in the project.

It reminded me of the movie 'Dambusters', another "Engineering project in the war" story, although that story finished with the bombs being dropped, a more thrilling conclusion than Glide path manages.

Still, I read the whole novel (it is 1970'2 sized -that is, under 200 pages, which is hard to find nowadays) in a day and the material was interesting. A few life threatening situations are included, but a thrilling war story, it is not.

James Christensen says

Novel based on his experience as commander of the GCA (Ground Control Approach) system developed by the American physicist, Luis Alvarez, and a few others, but first implemented in Britain during WW2 - a rather dry read, but interesting look at how the system developed and the many lives of pilots, not to mention their aircraft, saved by the radar "glide path".

Steve Walker says

This is a non science-fiction book from Arthur C Clarke and definitely did not have his normal "voice", but I thought it was a very good read. Set in WWII he follows one soldier's journey in the service as he learns about radar and becomes part of an elite team that develops a radar system that can be used to talk pilots down to the runway when they cannot see due to bad weather. They keep the pilot on the "glide path". A well developed main character, group of buddies, engaging descriptions of their day-to-day work, and their escapades off base. He throws in a little mystery and intrigue with a group of women that own an inn in the little town near the base. Would have made a wonderful John Wayne era war flick, but most of the story is dated to modern audiences and the plot is sometimes predictable.

Bill Yancey says

Not sci-fi. WWII. Fictional account of early use of radar for ground controlled approach. Great companion book if you read "The Invention that Changed the World" by Robert Buderi.

Judy says

This is the sixth book I have read by Arthur C Clarke, as part of My Big Fat Reading Project and my study of the development of science fiction. The surprise was to find it was not science fiction but a scientific novel set in early WWII.

Flying officer Alan Bishop finds himself posted on a British RAF experimental base where a new use of radar is being developed called ground-controlled approach (GCA). The science was unfamiliar to me sending me to the Internet to learn the basics and terminology. I even found an image of the real-life vehicles in which the work was being done!

According to Wikipedia, *Glide Path* was Clarke's only non-science fiction novel and is based on his own experiences during the war working on the ground-controlled approach project. In an author's note he assures us that all the characters are imaginary, but it is evident that he had intimate knowledge of the project and its technology.

Alan Bishop is a great character, who comes of age during the story, loses his troubled father, rises out of his humble beginnings, and finds his purpose in life.

Many of the scenes when the testing of this prototype was used to "talk" pilots out of the sky, during storms and low to no visibility, by means of radar on the ground, are full of exciting tension. Amazing to think that even to this day, every time one lands in a jet the further developments of the GCA are the reason one's aircraft lands safely where it is supposed to, no matter what the weather is doing.

Quite an enjoyable and informative read.

King Ævil says

An entertaining and semi-historical novel about one RAF officer's role in implementing an experimental radar-based landing system to guide airplanes to a runway under reduced visibility. The characters are fictitious but the technology is, apparently real. Arthur C. Clarke always tells good stories, but I feel his straight science fiction is more compelling.

Peter says

Who would have thought a book about the pioneering days of RADAR and a young RAF officer would be so entertaining?
