

Camp Crowder, Missouri

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OPENING

The city was Bend, on the planet Andradeel, of the star Alcon IV. It was evening and the bright colored lights of the street were hot against the blue sky.

He was Jed Gray, and as he walked along that street, going nowhere, he was nineteen years of age.

Inside doors there were dim places where people drank, bright places where men and women struggled sweat-ingly to jazzy tunes, but he walked alone on the outside.

He searched the faces of the ones he passed, but they were all masks of no understanding and among them he felt alone.

A razz of music jarred at him from a suddenly opened door, and because inside him there was a need for great, noble, beautiful music, he made an expression of repulsion and disgust.

Because he felt in himself something great and noble, he carried himself erect, with pride, looking into the faces of the people, and failing to find magnificence in them.

The world should have been magnificent, its cities beautiful, its people fine, and its civilization worthy of the two thousand years that had passed since the beginning of space flight. But instead it was cheap, tawdry, dirty, in body and in spirit, and that caused him to be tense with rage as he walked down the street.

He thought. Furiously, angrily, fists clenched, striding long-legged, grimly.

Cheap. . . cheap. . . Miserable cheap people spending their cheap time without a thought in their empty heads about what's going on.

All of them dull creatures moving mindlessly thru their lives in a stinking, jarring city, while in the big halls the stellar governments send their fleets out to train for a war.

There will be no more wars.

That's what they said How they'll run and scramble when it starts.....

The newsboard there on the corner with the words crawling across it..... The ships move thru space The drums are beating in the distance, and a few people pause, startled, as they dimly hear them. Then they escape into the nearest bar for another drink.

So..... There will be a war, and I will be in it. The Fate Juggernaut. The inevitable. The effect of the causes and unstoppable.

And I'll be in, and that will be the end of everything.

You spend your life in labor, sweat, sleeplessness, study. To finish school so you could be somebody. Somebody like Carson, of atomic energy, or Adler, of space travel.

Work your brain until it hurts, work your eyes til they're blind so you can be a great person, so the greatness inside you can have a chance to come outside.

So .. smash .. the war comes to smash you and your plans and your work, and it catches you up in its machinery and all of you has gone to waste. Waste. Waste. Damn it. All of it wasted.

Biting his lips, he struck his fist against the palm of his hand, because he was nineteen years old and it hurt him so much.

And yet, when the Sirian fleet sailed into the Alcon region, some perversity inside him clanked and dragged him to the enlistment office, where he signed onto the Alcon Fleet, and in a few months it was work, sweat, study, burning eyes and numbed mind all again like it had been before.

The months passed by as he battled his way thru the Fleet School and the Sirian fleet came closer to Alpha Sector and then slowly began to be driven back. There were machines to be studied, maintenance and operation. Machines, existant not completely in a single solid space, which plotted and piloted the ships in their faster-than-light courses.

Months of weeks and days; months of learning and of expanding knowledge. Knowledge not only of the things they taught him, but wisdom of the people around him and of the ways that they had.

Finally, inevitably, he had all that the school could give him, and he sat in the great spaceship that took him from the school to the fleet base where he was to join the crew of a battle-ship.

As he sat there in unaccustomed leisure, his mind went back to the time when he'd been nineteen years old, and again he was thinking furiously.

Time passes and the aspect of things changes. Eternities ago it had been a kid, his guts busting with self-pity at the waste of his talents, and his ego busting with ideas of his own greatness, importance, differentness, uniqueness, his mind busting with the belief that he of all people had vision of the future and the wonders of possible civilization.

And though he had entered the fleet service with a sense of great tragedy and impending doom, there had gradually come upon him a peace and equilibrium of mind he had never before experienced. He had found that life was not instantly at an end, that there was not immediate blood and thunder upon entering the fleet, but that in a war like this there was need for a long period of knowledge gathering and technique acquiring, and that people like him, hungry for learning, lapped it all up and asked for more.

Peace and mental equilibrium came from the anonymity of Fleet life, from the knowledge that within the framework of the rules and regulations he was his own master, an independent individual, with no one to question his actions as long as he kept out of trouble.

He floated in a half-world of his own -- between the machine life of the fleet and his personal private life, the two never coalescing, but each remaining separate and distinct.

And as he went along in his way, many others went

with him for a time, moved away to other schools and disappeared from his life. For a few weeks or months he would know the company of others like him, who varied in mind and character, and then they would be gone, off to other organizations, until the people he had known were spread across an entire system of stars.

It was thru these others that there came to him so gradually and so resisted by him the knowledge and realization that altered his character. It was by knowing these people, living with them, disliking some and liking others, and finding some to be his equals and even some to be his betters, that the struggle and pain in his mind was appeased.

For little by little, by weeks, by months, by rising understanding and blooming maturity, the realization came to him that he was not a superior being, that he was not a unique creature, that he was not a genius, that he was not even a great man, but that he was an ordinary person of ordinary capabilities, more intelligent than many, less intelligent than others, with perhaps a greater variety of talents and interest than most, but not sufficiently so as to be a phenomenon; with more intensity and seriousness than most, with more awareness of life, but not in such amount as to make him the supreme creation of life.

Instead, he knew precisely what he was -- that he was one of a large groups, called by various names in various times, which was characterized by moderately higher standards of life than the average person.

And, as he sat in the spaceship thinking of the past and also of the future, he knew that if he ever got out of the war his part in the world would not be that of a great man, but that he would follow the course of the many who were necessary to manage the affairs of civilization and do the lesser scientific work to fill in the valleys between the peaks of advancement made by the extreme geniuses.

He knew that in his new Fleet School knowledge was the groundwork for future study of inter-dimensional travel, and he knew that the life that lay ahead of him, though not one of great historic distinction, would be one of pleasure, with a varied mixture of activities, rich with what people called the Art of Living.

If there ever came to him a pang of regret at the loss of the dreams, he could shrug it off, as so many others had done, and hope that his offspring would come closer to his ideals than he had.

At that particular moment in the spaship that carried him from school to war, there was peace between himself and the universe. For an instant he was at equilibrium.

The thought insinuated itself into his mind:

When would his balance topple?

The Poet's Corner
(Apologies to Yank,
and to my readers.)

Explanation: After I had read thirty pages of Emil Ludwig's biography of Goethe, inspiration struck me a deadly blow. As a result I found that with no previous experience whatsoever, I could write poetry as badly as the other FAPs.

First Sergeant's Lullaby

Slumber, soldier, sweetly slumber,
For this shell has not your number.
Sleep this day in quiet and peace,
Comes morn, I give you kitchen police.

Chorus:

Sleep, sleep, gently sleep,
Like the motion of a jeep,
Floors you do not have to sreep
Down within your foxhole deep.

Lay your head upon that mud,
Do not think of sreat and blood.
Dream, instead, of some fair wench,
For soon you dig a large slit trench.

Chorus:

Peace, peace, heavenly peace.
In this home you need no lease,
Trousers need not bear a crease,
You may give yourself at ease.

Look: more of this yet.

Rest your bones midst smoke and fire,
But guard you do not rouse my ire
By bursting forth with raucous snore
That sounds above the cannon's roar.

Chorus:

Rest, rest, calmly rest,
Couched in Earth's sweet flowing breast,
Do not leave your gun, though, lest
Comes Jap as uninvited guest.

ugh

Saturday Morning

Broom and rag the dust abolish,
Red wax give the shoes a polish,
Blanket smooth atop the bunk,
Room as neat as of a monk.

Body freshly, cleanly bathed,
Shining face so neatly shaved,
Footsteps heard upon the stair,
A silver flash, the Captain's there.

'Tenshun!

4 Oct 44

Your scribe continues his merry round of army posts and, Elmer, adds his rollings to the sum of fourteen thousand miles of long trips, not counting the thousands of miles burned up hopping between Philadelphia and Washington, and between Sacramento and San Francisco. The monumental size of this issue is inspired by the fine appearance of the last, the cover of which came as a delightful surprise to me. Thanks, Laney.

At ten cents per half-hour on a public typewriter, this has cost me thirty cents so far, so it is time to stop.
