

Weep for the Moon

Stephen Baxter

One of the unexpected pleasures of editing In Dreams is getting a story which is totally at right angles to your expectations. For instance, from his career to date, you wouldn't expect Stephen Baxter to write a story about Glenn Miller - one of the first superstars of modern popular culture to exploit the single as an artform. After all, in only a few years Baxter has established a reputation as a writer of Universe-spanning hard SF, with a slew of popular stories set in the same future history, and a novel, Raft, which Time Out called 'rigorous, vigorous sci-fi [sic] at its enjoyable best'.

But like all of Baxter's stories, this one has a solid speculative idea at its core. As he explains, 'I guess we've all had the experience of having a fragment of melody lodge in the consciousness and refuse to go away . . . It seems to me that one of the sadder aspects of the current fragmentation of the popular music scene is the loss of the source of such melodies. Once, it seemed, the music of our culture was lodged in all our heads; now the music is almost fragmented enough for us to carry around our own sub-genres, sharing nothing.

'This got me to wondering what would happen if we suddenly needed to reassemble our shattered popular culture. And I mean, we really needed to . . . The result is "Weep for the Moon".'

* * * *

T

he engines coughed into life. The little plane shuddered, then settled into a steady buzz as the props turned. The passenger cabin started to heat up; there was an oily warmth that slowly banished the damp chill.

The AAF captain huddled into his greatcoat and peered out of the cabin's tiny, grubby porthole. He could barely see the end of the wing through the swirling December fog, and the light of the short English afternoon was already fading.

He shivered.

He took off his wire-framed glasses and polished them on a handkerchief; short-sightedly he sneaked a glance at the plane's only other passenger - a colonel whose name he'd already forgotten, a solid-looking citizen who was going through an attaché case, oblivious to his surroundings.

Fear knotted the captain's stomach; he clenched his jaw to keep from whimpering like a boy.

Maybe he ought to just up and off this damn plane.

He hated flying at the best of times. And to take off now, in this fog? His orderly mind listed the dangers. Crashing into a tree in the fog. Getting shot down by some Luftwaffe patrol over the Channel. Damn it, getting punctured by English ack-ack - the flight was unscheduled, he remembered.

He could just stand up, give his apologies to the colonel, break for the door . . .

He took a deep breath and pushed himself back into his seat; and he told himself to grow up.

Before he'd joined up a couple of years earlier, he'd got used to getting things done - he'd run his own bands for five years, after all. But in the AAF there was always some desk-pilot to block whatever he wanted to do, and he seemed to spend his whole time fighting just to stand still. Well, this time he'd cut through the red tape by talking his way on to this flight; he was on his way to Paris to set up the band's arrival there, and he was damned if he was going to compromise that for a schoolboy funk.

He closed his eyes and thought about Helen. It was then that he heard the voice.

*'Weep for the moon, for the moon has no reason to glow now,
Weep for the rose, for the rose has no reason to grow now -'*

He recognised the lyric; Eddie Heyman had written it for 'Now I Lay Me Down to Weep', the tune that had become 'Moonlight Serenade'. Al Bowlly used to sing that lyric for Ray Noble, he remembered. Well, it sure as hell wasn't Bowlly now. For a moment his own arrangement of his tune sounded in his ears, with the clarinet lead and the ooh-wah brass . . . Funny how he could hear the singing over the props. In fact, he realised, suddenly

he couldn't hear the props at all. Maybe it was something to do with the fog.

*'The river won't flow now,
As I lay me down to weep . . .'*

He opened his eyes.

'Hi, bro.'

The captain turned. In the seat next to him sat his brother Herb...Herb? Confused, he looked around the plane's dingy fuselage; but the studious colonel wasn't to be seen.

'Herb? What the hell are you doing here? I thought you were in the States.'

Herb's thin face split into a grin. 'You aren't glad to see me? Some welcome, my man.'

The captain's confusion broke up under a wave of affection. 'It was the singing, boy. I could have sworn it was Sinatra; you threw me off. . .' He reached over and hugged his brother, awkwardly, confined by the plane seats and his greatcoat. Within his embrace Herb felt stiff and strangely cold. Herb was in civvies, a suit under a brown overcoat; the captain found himself staring. 'Herb, I don't know how the hell you got in here. This is an AAF field. And the damn plane's about to take off; we're on our way to France -'

But the props were still silent. He turned to see if they were still twisting, but the windows had fogged over even more.

Herb put a hand on his shoulder; the captain was startled by the intensity of the grip. 'Glenn,' Herb said. 'Don't think about the props. Don't think about how I got here.' His voice was heavy, uncharacteristically serious.

'Herb?'

Herb bit his lip, obviously hesitant. Then a thought seemed to strike him, and he sat up in his chair and rummaged through his pockets. 'Damn it.'

'What is it?'

'Glenn, can you bum me a Strike?'

'... sure.' The captain pulled a crumpled green packet from the inside pocket of his jacket and thumbed out a Lucky Strike for Herb; using one of the captain's matches his brother lit up and drew a great drag on the cigarette - then exhaled and stared at the Strike, looking oddly disappointed. 'Glenn, are these stale, maybe?'

The captain frowned. 'New today . . . Herb, what's going on?' Herb was an organised kind of a guy; the captain couldn't recall a time when he'd been caught short of a smoke. 'Did you dress in a hurry today?'

Herb smiled, somehow sadly. 'Something like that. Let's say I was - equipped - in a hurry.'

'Equipped?'

'Glenn, listen to me.' Again that note of heaviness. 'I've - come - to tell you something.'

'Is something wrong at home?' Panic spurted in him. 'Helen. It's Helen, isn't it?' A few years earlier his wife had been ill enough to be hospitalised. She'd come out; and the experience had brought them closer. But now - 'In God's name tell me, Herb.'

Herb was shaking his head. 'No, it's not Helen. Take it easy. Nothing's wrong with Helen.'

'Then what?'

Herb opened his mouth, hesitated, shut it again. 'I don't know how to tell you, boy.'

'Just tell me, damn it! You're frightening me.'

'Okay.' Herb leaned forward. 'It's you, Glenn. It's news about you. You've got to get off this plane, right now.'

The captain felt a chill, deep in the place where his darkest, most secret fears lurked, far under all the control, the business. 'What are you talking about?'

'Because the damn thing never makes it.' Herb, clearly mixed up and distressed, couldn't meet Glenn's stare; but his voice stayed steady. 'It's

true, Glenn; you have to believe me.

‘Nobody finds out what happened. Maybe you’re shot down; maybe you just lost your way. But *you never make it to Paris.*’

The captain sat back, still staring. The silence of the plane started to feel eerie. ‘Damn it, Herb, you’ve sure learned how to scare a man. You’re talking like it already happened.’

‘Glenn, to me it did. I remember it.’ Herb’s eyes grew misty. He turned again to his brother. ‘I remember it; I read newspapers about it. Damn it, man; I can prove it to you.’ He squirmed in his seat and from the pocket of his overcoat he drew an object about the size and shape of a dime novel; it was bound in leather, and set in its upper surface was a piece of glass three inches square. ‘Watch,’ Herb said strongly. He poked at small lettered squares inset into the leather cover, and to the Captain’s amazement the glass square filled abruptly with light; a series of grainy black-and-white images flickered across it, and from somewhere tiny voices spoke, insect music played.

‘Herb. What the hell is this?’

‘Don’t worry about it,’ Herb said with a crap-cutting chop of his left hand. ‘It’s a pocket television. Okay?’

‘So where’s the tube? Up your sleeve?’

‘Yeah,’ said Herb sarcastically. ‘Now will you forget it and just concentrate on the pictures?’

The captain leaned forward and peered into the little screen. He saw pictures of himself and the band - mostly old stock, from before the war - images of a plane like the one he was sitting in. There was a commentary he couldn’t quite make out. ‘It looks like a newsreel,’ he said.

Herb nodded vigorously. ‘That’s just what it is. A newsreel. Hang on to that, Glenn. Now listen to me; this is a newsreel, not of what has happened in the past - *but what will happen in the future.*’

Herb’s words seemed to slide away from the captain’s understanding. ‘What are you telling me, Herb?’

Now his brother was speaking with a kind of weight, an authority, that was alien to the Herb he’d grown up with. ‘Just forget about the whys and

hows for a minute, and think about the pictures. What's the story here?'

The captain peered into the window to the future, trying to comprehend the parade of little figures, the tinny voiceover.

'It's your death, Glenn. Isn't it? They're reporting your death. If you don't get off this plane, it's a fact as real as apple pie; Glenn, it's as real to me as anything else that ever happened. Damn it, the President himself calls a national Miller Day, in July, not long after the end of the war. Not bad for a horn-player -'

'The war ends in July? Next July?' Could it really be as close as that?

Herb tapped another part of the little box and the pictures faded. 'Glenn, I've come back to warn you. I can't make you get off this plane and save your life; you have to do that for yourself. . .'

'Slow up, Herb.' He closed his eyes, tried to find a piece of calmness. 'You're going too fast.'

It couldn't be a trick. Herb wouldn't play a trick like this.

But, of course, this mightn't be Herb.

He opened his eyes again, stared hard at the man beside him. 'Damn it, you sure look like Herb. You talk like him. You even sing like him.'

A cloud of doubt crossed Herb's face. 'I'm not going to lie to you. I'm Herb inside, Glenn. I know myself. I am Herb; that's all I am; that's all I'll ever be. But - ' And now Herb himself looked scared, and that frightened the captain more than anything. 'But,' Herb went on, 'even while we're sitting here I know there's another Herb, back in the States. This minute. I've got his memories, Glenn. If I was smart enough I could tell you what I was doing right now. What he *is* doing right now. Maybe he's eating doughnuts. I was always crazy for doughnuts, wasn't I?' A thought struck him. 'Hey, Glenn, you got any doughnuts?'

The captain snorted. 'Do I look like I have?'

Herb seemed disappointed. 'Maybe it's as well. I couldn't taste a damn thing when I smoked that Strike ... I guess I've not been sent here to enjoy myself.'

The captain wanted to shrink away from this person ... But this was his

brother. He could *feel* it. 'Herb, all of this sounds crazy. You're not making any sense.'

Herb spread his hands and stared at them, as if they were unfamiliar objects. 'No more to me, guy. Glenn, I'm a - like a photograph. Or a movie image.' He nodded. 'Yeah; that's what I am.' He looked scared again. 'But I'm Herb inside.'

The captain wondered what to say. 'Why are you here? Did someone send you?'

'Yeah.' Herb nodded. 'Men from the future, Glenn; from the next century, a hundred years from now.'

'They made you up and sent you back here? How?'

'Glenn, I'm only Herb. How the hell do you expect me to be able to tell you that?' He pointed at the little television. 'I couldn't even tell you how this thing works.'

The captain didn't want to smile. 'Then just tell me why you're here.'

'I've told you. To tell you to get the hell off of this plane.'

The captain sighed; somehow his fear was fading, to be replaced by a kind of irritation. 'Okay, Herb, let's go at this another way. I'm not a general. I'm not the President. I'm not even Walt Disney. I'm a goddamn bandleader. Why the hell would these - these guys from the future - go to all this trouble to save me? What do I do, invent penicillin?'

Herb shook his head. 'You don't believe me, do you? Then you won't believe this next bit.'

Try me.'

'It's not just you, Glenn. It's the western world; it's Christianity, and democracy. It's to save all of that.'

The captain snorted in disgust. 'I haven't got time for this.'

Herb held up his hands. 'Believe me, you have. Just listen for a minute. Okay?' He glared back. 'Okay?'

The captain shook his head. 'One minute, Herb; then I get on with my

job.'

Herb started to speak.

* * * *

'I want you to get hold of this, Glenn,' he began. 'Ideas are *alive*. Have you ever thought that? The good ones seem to come out of nowhere; and they latch on, they grow, they spread. They propagate.

Think about it. Look at - oh, "Pennsylvania Six Five Thousand". Remember where that came from? Jerry Gray took a riff from, what the hell was it -'

"Dipsy Doodle",' said Glenn. 'Larry Clinton.'

'Sure. That one little riff was like a seed, see; that's what I'm telling you. And Jerry's head was like the sweet earth, where that seed took hold and grew.' Herb mimed the action of plants. 'And you, you're like the gardener who picks out the good stuff and cultivates it -'

The captain laughed. 'What's your job, Herb? Spreading the horseshit?'

Herb smiled, but he kept going. 'Just listen. So ideas are living things. They grow, and compete with each other for space to grow - which is the space between our ears. And the younger ones, the stronger ones, push out the weak.' Herb looked into his brother's face. 'All right?'

The captain thought about all of that. It made him feel uneasy - not just the sheer craziness of it, but the fact that it reminded him of something else. But he said, 'You've still got my attention. I'm looking forward to you getting to the point.'

'Now,' Herb said patiently, 'the strongest breed of idea, the toughest strain of all, is *music*. You know? There's something fundamental about music, something that sits in your head, underneath all the words, the logic, the business. Like when you can't get a melody out of your head, even when you hate the damn thing -'

'Or you hate the guy who wrote it. Sure.'

'Okay.' Herb sat straighter in his seat. 'Let's leave that for a minute.

'Second thing. Glenn, in a hundred years - in the time of the guys who sent me - the earth gets Visited.'

The captain shook his head. 'Herb, you really are talking like a crazy man.'

'You promised to hear me out.'

'I said a minute.'

'Glenn, I'm your brother; you owe me this.'

The captain frowned, studying Herb's tense, earnest face. There was a light around Herb now, a kind of soft focus which disconcerted the captain even more. 'Are you my brother?' he asked softly.

Herb said, 'We've discussed this, Glenn. I am. And, at the same time, I'm not.'

'*Why* would these guys from the future send *you*?'

'Why good old Herb?' A mocking snort cut through the strange aura of saintliness. 'I guess they picked someone who you might listen to. And believe. Who would you rather they picked? The President? Donald Duck?'

The captain shook his head. 'Tell me what you have to tell me.'

'Visitors,' said Herb.

'From where? Mars? Orson Welles did that before the war. Herb.'

Herb didn't even smile. 'Nobody knows where they came from. They know it wasn't Mars, though; the people there would have died first -'

The captain blinked. 'There are people on Mars? Martians?'

'No, Glenn; men like you and me. They'll live on Mars, in cities, ah, under glass.'

'You're kidding.' He felt tendrils of fear returning to his heart. 'Did you say people die?'

Herb pursed his lips. 'The Visitors are different from us. Very different. They don't even recognise us; not as living, breathing creatures

with souls, anyhow. They think we're - I don't know, cattle maybe. Less than that; like worms in the ground, or the ground itself. Dirt.

'People start dying, Glenn; in great swathes. Like footfalls.'

'Why?'

Herb shrugged. 'The Visitors don't have a reason. They don't need a reason. Glenn, we can't even see them; maybe they can't see us.'

'They don't know we're alive. They think ideas are alive.' Herb looked into his face. 'Are you understanding me? The Visitors are like ideas, too. Maybe. Maybe they can talk to the ideas; I don't know . . . Anyway they respond to the biggest ideas, the strongest. And, if you don't happen to have the Biggest Idea in your head, the Visitors will wipe you out without even thinking about it.'

Baffled, frightened, the captain pulled his greatcoat closer around him. It didn't seem to be getting any darker, funnily enough, but it sure as hell was cold. 'Tell me what it's got to do with me, Herb.'

'Okay.' Herb wet his lips. 'Let me tell you what happens if you get off this damn plane.' He poked at the little television box again, and a fresh newsreel started. Images of bands, of the captain himself, in uniform and out of it. 'You live,' said Herb. 'You don't get lost in the Channel. The war finishes; the AAF let you out; you go home. You're a war hero.'

'The bands form up again. All the old guys are still around. Billy May on the horn. Trigger Alpert. Dorothy Claire. The Modernaires - not the same ones...'

The captain watched the flickering images. Now he saw a montage of towns, of glittering venues, splashed newspaper headlines. It was a tale of success piled on success, but he felt distant, chastened somehow.

Herb said, 'Glenn, you were the biggest before. Right? But, man, after the war you are *huge*. I can't tell you . . .'

'You start to step back from the band, though. Jerry Gray does a lot of the arranging -'

'Like before the war.'

'But you keep close to it; nobody else has your ear for the riff, Glenn;

and you know it.

'Nineteen fifty, you have your biggest hit yet. "Amazing You".' A compelling little riff wafted out of the television box. The captain didn't recognise it. 'Sinatra and Day duet on the vocals -'

Glenn couldn't help but smile. 'I get to work with Doris?'

'Still with that unique voicing of yours,' said Herb. 'With the clarinet lead and the sax as a fifth voice in the reeds ... But you're spreading your wings. You get into song publish-ing. Personal management. You produce shows on the radio, the television. Man, you've still got that business sense. It's not just your own stuff - you're doing it for everyone else as well. You keep swing alive; you're provid-ing the framework the rest can work in.'

'And the world's whistling your songs, man: you're a legend.'

The newsreel images, in colour now, had reached 1960. The captain, following the fragmented story, learned that he would be worth a lot of money. Ten million; a hundred million maybe. There would be a new writer, a young guy from Texas, name of Holley. The captain would hear his songs on some crackly old station during a business sweep through the South...Inspired by Holley, Miller would decide to get closer to the music again, realising what he'd been missing with all the business stuff. But he'd changed; he'd learned new things. With his swing over Holley's riffs he became bigger than ever.

And all the bands played on and on ...

'Your music is the sound of America, Glenn,' Herb said.

'They're still playing "GI Patrol" as they sweep through 'Nam in their helicopter gunships . . .'

'Nam?'

'Vietnam.'

'Where the hell's that?'

Herb shrugged. 'Another war, man; what does it matter?'

'It goes on and on. Even after you die in '77, a ripe old seventy-three, in your bed ...'

‘Glenn, you come to symbolise something; you, and your music, and your mood. Something that keeps alive and growing; something at the heart of America, and democracy.’

The captain felt tears prickle; he took off his glasses and dabbed at his eyes. The plane was a myopic blur. Strangely enough Herb still looked quite sharp; a preternatural clarity added to his aura of unreality. ‘Shut up, Herb. Damn it; you always did know how to push my buttons.’

‘I’m telling you the truth, man. And when these Visitors come, in a hundred years’ time, and they seek out the Big Idea - you know what they find?’

‘Tell me.’

Herb slapped his leg. ‘Music. Your music’

‘You’re telling me they’ll still be playing my crummy tunes in the year two thousand and forty-four? You expect me to believe that?’

‘They are, Glenn; but not just yours. All the other guys, who came after you. You made it possible for them; all the new, brilliant bandleaders. Riddle. Mancini. McCartney. Watts.

‘You’re the leader, the one with the business sense *and* the ear for what the punters want to hear. To dance to. The music grows. There are people who use the bands the way, I don’t know, Beethoven used the symphony orchestra. There’s great music, Glenn; the greatest. But, because of you and your instincts, it never loses touch with the people.’

Herb pushed another button on his box, now, and music billowed out of it. Recognisably swing, the captain realised, but of a depth and complexity that staggered him; the notes seemed to swirl around Herb’s unreal, crystal-clear face, against the blurred backdrop of the plane.

Herb said, ‘Glenn, after a hundred years it’s the American Big Idea; it’s sunk in so deep you could never get rid of it. Americans live through the Visit, Glenn; and it’s thanks to you . . .’

The captain replaced his glasses. Strangely he felt dis-turbed now by Herb’s account rather than moved; there was something not quite right about this Big Idea stuff - some-thing that was making him uneasy. He said, ‘It’s a neat story. Now tell me the other side. What if I don’t get off the

plane?' He swallowed, forced himself to say it. 'What if I don't live through this?'

Herb took a deep breath. 'What do you want me to say? Instant sainthood, man, if that's what you want. The band keeps going; your Army band, I mean. They play France, the rest. But it's not the same.

'After the war the guys try to keep it going.'

The captain felt morbidly curious. 'Who?'

'Try Tex Beneke.'

He laughed. 'Tex holds down a neat tenor-sax, but he couldn't manage a smile.'

'Sure. But Tex is just the front man. Don Haynes runs the show, behind the scenes.

'But it doesn't work. Don has the business but he just doesn't have your - what, your ear? Your intuition? Tex and Don are like the two halves of you, Glenn, but they don't add up to the whole.

'They fight. Tex wants to move on, try new things. Don wants to keep it just the same as it always was . . .

'It falls apart. Tex leaves; the band starts to break up. The vultures come down, imitators.'

He frowned. 'What vultures?'

'Ralph Flanagan.'

'Who?'

'Ray Anthony. Even Jerry Gray. Imitators; they add nothing new. It's like a long funeral, Glenn. It's dreadful.

'The music stops changing. People remember it, with affection, but the life just goes away.' Herb tapped at his television box and a fresh newsreel started up in the little window. 'Glenn. Look at these headlines. Nineteen forty-six, Christmas. Just two years from now, right? Listen who's retired. Dorsey. Goodman. Teagarden. Les Brown -'

'I can't believe it.'

'If s true, man. Some of them keep trying, but the music gets too hard. They lose the audience. Kenton, for instance -'

Glenn shook his head. 'You got to produce music they can dance to.'

'You can see that,' said Herb. 'Kenton doesn't have the ear; he loses people.'

'The singers take over. Sinatra, Cole. The bands become too expensive to ship around the country, damn it, especially as no one wants to hear them any more.'

'People stay home, watch television. There are new kinds of music; the young take it up because there's nothing else. But there's no class to it, no swing. You should hear it, Glenn; it's like jungle drums. People like you and me can't even listen to it.' Herb frowned, sadly. 'Can you imagine that? Parents and kids who can't share their music any more . . .' Now a scratchy image filled the little screen: some guy in a tux talking directly to the camera against a cheap backcloth. Herb brightened. 'Here's something funny, or maybe sad. The Dorseys keep going, in a way. This is their television show; not big, but a show. And you know who starts getting his first breaks on this show? Presley, that's all.'

'Presley? What kind of a name is that?'

Herb shrugged. 'Never mind. Look, Glenn, it's all frag-ments. Splinters. Twenty, thirty years later you wouldn't call it music any more. The kids take drugs to write it; you wouldn't believe it.'

'People are sick of it. There's nothing they can understand any more; nothing they can dance to.'

'By the end of the century they don't buy music; not en masse, not together. Two hundred million Americans buy two hundred million different songs, it seems like. There's no *identity*, Glenn. That's what you provided.'

'And when the Visitors come -'

'They look for the Big Idea. You know what they find? Islam. Mohammedans; the Arabs.'

'Americans - simply die, Glenn. Europe, Australia too . . . a hundred

years from now America's a wasteland.'

Herb fell silent again; he snapped off his television and stowed it in his overcoat pocket.

The captain settled back in the tight plane seat and folded his arms. 'I don't know what to say, Herb.'

'Don't say anything. Just get off the damn plane!'

Miller tried to take it all in. Could it really be true, that ideas were like living things which populated people's heads? And if that were so ...

Suddenly he realised what had been making him so uneasy about the whole concept.

'Herb,' he said softly. These living ideas.'

'Yeah?'

'How much room do they leave for democracy?'

Herb stared at him. 'What are you talking about?'

The captain rubbed at his temples. 'I think I'm talking about freedom, Herb. About the freedom of the individual. After all, doesn't Mr Hitler think he has a big idea, a living idea?'

'Glenn, this isn't relevant. Forget Hitler. At the bottom of it, we're talking about whether you live or die.'

The captain looked out at the fog, which seemed to be frozen against the dingy porthole. He found himself wondering just how important that really was. 'What about Helen?'

'If you die?' Herb reached out and touched his brother's arm. 'She does okay, Glenn. Your stuff keeps selling; the estate keeps her comfortable.'

The captain sat in the odd stillness of the plane. Herb waited patiently. The captain tried to accept all Herb had told him, tried to imagine this bizarre world of the future, with glass cities on Mars and yet lit up by band music he'd recognise . . . but darkened by the deadly footfalls of the Visitors.

Then he thought of Helen. Of the feel of the trombone in his hands. Of the hordes of khaki-clothed GIs, here in England and the States, who threw their caps into the air and whooped as the trumpets and trombones blasted at them in all their roaring purity, as the saxes welled up below and the rhythm section let loose with those clear, crisp, swinging beats -

Herb studied him. 'Well? Have you decided?'

There's nothing to decide, Herb. Not if Helen's going to be okay. Remember the statement I put out when I joined up?'

Herb nodded and closed his eyes. "I, like every American, have an obligation to fulfil. . ."

Glenn opened the top few buttons of his coat, pointed to the pips on his shoulder. 'I'm a serviceman, Herb. I have to do my duty, even if it means I risk my life. Just like every American serviceman in this damn war. And, Herb...maybe all this "living idea" stuff really could save the world. But, damn it, there's something about it that just isn't *American*.'

Herb narrowed his eyes. 'Glenn, I don't know what to say to that. You know I always looked up to you, for your sense of honour, of duty. But...Glenn, you have a duty to all those Americans in the future. The Visitors -'

'Herb, across that Channel there are young Americans who, not six months ago, were preparing to lay down their lives in Normandy . . . And they could still die, before Europe is free. Right now they're expecting me to go over there and bring them some real, live American music. To let them go home for a few hours, in their heads.

'That's where my duty is.' Glenn closed his eyes, let his own words sink in. It was right; he knew it was right. 'That's all there is, Herb.'

Herb held his arm for a long minute. Then he stood up. 'Maybe the future guys were wrong to send me back. I understand, Glenn. I won't argue with you any more.'

The captain heard the noise of the props return, faintly, as if from a tremendous distance.

'You know,' Herb said as he pulled his overcoat closed, 'I'm not sure

what happens now.'

'What do you mean?'

'I know I'm not Herb. Not really. But inside I'm me, with two sets of Herb memories . . . What happens to me now? Will I know about it?'

The captain stared up at him. He had no idea how to answer. He wanted to get up, hug his brother and calm his fears, but Herb was already heading down the aisle, receding into a darkness the captain hadn't noticed before. The captain called after him, 'Herb, wait. Do you want to take these Strikes?'

Herb shrugged. 'I can't taste them anyway. Hey,' he said. Now it was really hard to see him in the gloom. 'They make a movie about you, in 1953.'

'Sure they do. Who plays me?'

'You won't believe it.' Herb's voice was faint now, almost drowned by the props.

Try me.'

'Jimmy Stewart.'

'You're kidding. He's a hero . . . I'm proud.'

'No, Glenn. Stewart should be proud . . .'

'Herb?'

But Herb had left the plane, although Glenn hadn't seen him open the door. And the Air Force colonel with the attaché case was back where Herb had sat, just as if nothing had happened.

The prop noise rose to a growl. The plane bumped forward.

The captain peered out through the port, looking for Herb; but there was only the fog.

* * * *