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DRAMATIS PERSONAE

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10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 21

Berkowicz, Stefan BLAIR, ERIC

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I CHURCHILL, WINSTON

COMPTON, ARTHUR

Cooley, Mary

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FERMI, ENRICO PERmi, LAURA Fiore, Bobby

Ι

Leader of Jewish fighters in Poland Captain, U.S. Army

Cavalry Flight engineer, RAF Tavern keeper in Split, Independent State of Croatia Landlord in Lodz BBC talks producer, Indian Section, London Wehrmacht captain and interpreter in Pskov Wehrmacht lieutenant general, 122nd Infantry, in Pskov Prime Minister, Great Britain Nuclear physicist with the Metallurgical Laboratory Waitress in Idaho Springs, Colorado Sergeant, U.S. Army, in Illinois; former minorleague manager Nuclear physicist, Hechingen, Germany U.S. Army private in Illinois Pilot, RAF Nuclear physicist with the Metallurgical Laboratory Enrico Fermis wife Lizard experimental subject; former baseball player

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       WORLDWAR: TILTING THE BALANCE
  FLEROV, GEORGI
  Fritzie
  Fukuoka, Yoshi
  GERMAN, ALEKSANDR
  Goldfarb, David
  Gorbunova, Ludmila
   GROVES, LESLIE
  Harvey
  HEISENBERG, WERNER
  Henry
  Hexham
  Hicks,
           Chester
  Higuchi
  flipple, Fred
  HO-T'ING, NIEH
  Horton, Leo
  HULL, CORDELL
   Isaac
  Jacobi, Nathan
  Ager, Heinrich
  Jones, Jerome
  Karpov, Feofan
  Kennan, Maurice
  Klein, Sid
  Klopotowski, Roman
  Klopotowski, Zofia
   Soviet nuclear physicist
   Cowboy in Chugwater
   %,~oming
   Japanese soldier in China
               ,,Z
Commander of Secoj d
   Partisan Brigade in
   Pskov
  Radarman, RAF
  Pilot, Red Air Force
Engineer, U.S. Army
   colonel
  Civilian guard in Idaho
    Springs, Colorado
Nuclear physicist in
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Hechingen, Germany Wounded U.S. soldier in Chicago U.S. Army colonel in Denver U.S. Army lieutenant in Chicago Japanese scientist RAF group captain in Bruntingthorpe Chinese Communist guerrilla officer

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RAF radarman in
   Bruntingthorpe
   U.S. Secretary of State
   Jew in Leczna, Poland
   BBC broadcaster in London
   Wehrrnacht panzer colonel
   RAF radarman
   Red Air Force colonel
RAFflight lieutenant in
   Bruntingthorpe
U.S. Army captain in
   Chicago
Townsman in Leczna,
    Poland
Daughter of Roman
   Klopotowski
   KONIEV, IVAN
   KURCHATOV, IGOR
   Laplace, Freddie
   Larssen, Barbara
   Larssen, Jens
   Leon
   Lidov, Boris
   Liu Han
   Lo
   Maczek
   Meineckt, Klaus
   MOLOTOV, VYACHESLAV
   Morozkin, Sergei
   MURROW, EDWARD R.
   Nakayama
   NisHINA, YOSHIO
   Okamoto
   Olson, Louise
   Olson,
            Thorkil
   Oscar
   Peary, Julian
   Petrovic, Marko
   Potter, Lucille
   RIBBENTROP, JOACHIM
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Harry Turtledove Red Army general Soviet nuclear physicist U.S. Army private in Illinois see Yeager, Barbara Nuclear physicist with the Metallurgical Laborato Jewish fighter in Lodz NKVD lieutenant-colonel i Moscow Chinese peasant woman; Lizard experimental subject Communist Chinese partisan U.S. Army captain in Illinois Sergeant, gunner on Heinrich Jdger's panzer Foreign Commissar, USSR Red Army interpreter in Pskov Radio news broadcaster Japanese scientist Japanese nuclear physicist Japanese Army major, interpreter and translato Inhabitant of New Salem, North Dakota Irhabitant of New Salem, North Dakota U.S. Army bodyguard in Denver RAF wing commander in Bruntingthorpe Captain, Independent State of Croatia Nurse in Illinois German foreign minister President of the United States

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WORLDWAR: TILTING THE BALANCE
   4
  Roundbush, Basil
  RuMKOWSKI, MORDECHAI
   CHAIM
  Russie, Moishe
  Russie, Reuven
  Russie, Rivka
  Sawatski, Emilia
  Sawatski, Ewa
  Sawatski, Jozef
  Sawatski, Maria
  Sawatski, Wladyslaw
  Schultz, Georg
  Sharp, Hiram
  Shmuel
  Sholudenko, Nikifor
  Shura
  SKORZENY, OTTO
  Sobieski, Tadeusz
  STALIN, IOSEF
  Sumner, Joshua ("Hoot")
  Szabo, Bela ("Dracula")
  SZILARD, LEO
  Tatiana
  TOGO, SHIGENORI
  Tolya
  Tsuye
  RAFflight officer in
   Bruntingthorpe
  Eldest of the Jews in the
   Lodz ghetto
Former medical student,-
   leader among Polish
   Jews; fugitive
  Son of Moishe and Rivka
   . Russie
  Moishe Russies wife
  Wife of Wladyslaw Sawatski
  Daughter of Wladyslaw and
   Emilia Sawatski
  Son of Wladyslaw and
   Emilia Sawatski
  Daughter of Wladyslaw and
   Emilia Sawatski
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Polish farmer Former Welarnacht panzer gunner; Red Air Force mechanic Physician in Ogden, Utah Jewish fighter in Lodz NKVD man in the Ukraine Whore in Shanghai SS colonel Grocer in Leczna, Poland General Secretary of the Communist Party of the

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Soviet Union
   Justice of the peace in
    Chugwater, Wyoming
  U.S. Army private in
    Illinois
  Nuclear physicist with the
   Metallurgical Laboratory
  Sniper and companion of
   Jerome Jones in Pskov
   Japanese foreign minister
   Groundcrew man, Red Air
   Force
   Japanese scientist
  Ussishkin, Judah
  Ussishkin, Sarah
  van Alen, Jacob
  VASILIEV, NIKOLAI
  Vernon, Hank
  Victor
  Whyte, Alf
  Wittman, Rolf
  Yeager, Itarbara
  Yeager, Sam
   ZHUKOV, GEORGI
  Atvar
   Bunim.
  Drefsab
  Forssis
  Hessef
   Ianxx
  Kassnass
   ; ~, lGrel
  Harry Turtledove
  THE RACE
  Doctor in Leczna, Poland
Wife of Judah Ussishkin;
   midwife in Leczna,
   Poland
U.S. Coast Guard
    lieutenant in Oswego,
   New York
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Commander First Partisan Brigade in Pskov Ship's engineer in the Duluth Queen Wounded U.S. soldier in Chicago RAF navigator Driver in Heinrich Jdgers panzer Fortner graduate student in medieval literature; Sam

Yeager's wife U.S. Army corporal; liaison with Lizard POWs; former baseball player Marshal of the Soviet Union Fleetlord, conquest fleet of the Race Official in Lodz Intelligence agent and ginger addict Landcruiser gunner in BesanVon, France Landcruiser driver in BesanVon, France Officer in Shanghai Landcruiser unit commander in BesanCon, France Shiplord of the 127th Emperor Hetto

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Nejas

Nossat Ristin

Sherran

Skoob

Ssamraff Starraf Straha

Teerts Tessrek

Ttomalss Tvenkel

Ullhass

Ussmak

Landcruiser commander in Besan~on, France Psychologist Lizard POW with the Metallurgical Laboratory The first male to circumnavigate Home, Landcruiser gunner in BesanCon, France Investigator in China Researcher in China Shiplord of the 206th Emperor Yower POW in Japan Psychologist Researcher in China Landcruiser gunner in BesanCon, France Lizard POW with the Metallurgical Laboratory Landcruiser driver in BesanCon, France

I *

For nostalgia's sake, Fleetlord Atvar called up the hologram of the Tosevite warrior he had often studied before the invasion fleet actually reached the world of Tosev 3. Nostalgia was an emotion that came easily to the Race: with a unified history of a hundred diousand years, with an empire that stretched over three solar systems and now reached out to a fourth, the past seemed a safe, comfortable place, not least because it was so much like the present. file:///C|/2590% 20Sci-Fi% 20 and % 20 Fantasy% 20 E-books/Harry% 20 Turtled ove% 20-% 20 Worldwar% 2002% 20-% 20 Tilting% 20 the% 20 Balance.txt the state of the state of

The hologram sprang into being before the fleetlord: a stalwart savage, his pinkish face sprouting yellowish hairs, clad in soft iron mail and woven animal and plant fibers, armed with spear and rust-flecked sword, and mounted on a Tosevite quadruped that looked distinctly too scrawny for the job of carrying him.

Sighing, Atvar turned to the shiplord Kirel, who commanded the 127th Emperor Hetto, bannership of the invasion fleet. He stabbed a fingerclaw at the image. "If only it had been so easy," he said with a sigh.

"Yes, Exalted Fleetlord." Kirel sighed, too. He turned both eye turrets toward the hologram. "It was what the probe led us to expect."

"Yes," Atvar said sourly. Preparing in its methodical way for another conquest, the Race had sent a probe across the interstellar void sixteen hundred years before (years of the Race, of course; Tosev 3 orbited its primary only about half as fast). The probe dutifully sampled the planet, sent its images and data back Home. The Race prepared the invasion fleet and sent it out, certain of easy victory: how much could a world change in a mere sixteen hundred years?

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Atvar touched a control in the base of the holographic projector. The Tosevite warrior disappeared. New images took the Big Ugly's place: a Russki landcruiser, red star painted on its turret, lightly armed and protected by the Race's standards but well-designed, with sloped armor and wide treads for getting[over the worst ground; an American heavy machine gun, with a belt full of big slugs that tore through body armor as if it were fiberboard; a Deutsch killercraft, turbojets slung under swept wings, nose bristling with cannon.

Kirel pojnted toward the killercraft. "That one concerns mel more than either of the others, Exalted Fleetlord. By the Emperor"--both he and Atvar briefly cast down their eyes at the mention of the sovereign--"the Deutsche did not have that aircraft less than two years ago, when our campaign began." "I know," Atvar said. "All their aircraft-all Tosevite aircraft then-were those slow, awkward things propelled by rapidly rotating airfoils. But now the British are flying jets ' too' " He summoned an image of the new British killercraft. It didn't look as menacing as the machine the Deutsche made: its wings lacked sweep and its lines were more graceful, less predatory. From the reports Atvar had read, it didn't perform quite as well as the Deutsch killercraft, either. But it was a quantum leap better than anything the British had put into the air before.

Fleetlord and shiplord stared glumly at the hologram. The trouble with the natives of Tosev 3 was that they were, by the Race's standards, insanely inventive. The social scientists attached to the fleet were still trying to figure out how the Big Uglies had gone from barbarism to a full-grown industrial civilization in the blink of an historical eye. Their solutions---or rather, conjectures-had yet to satisfy Atvar.

Pan of the answer, he suspected, lay in the squabbling multiplicity of empires that divided up Tosev 3's meager land surface. Some of them weren't even empires in the strict sense of the word; the regime of the SSSR, for instance, openly boasted of liquidating its former ruling dynasty. The idea of impericide was enough to make Atvar queasy.

Empires and not-empires had competed fiercely among themselves. They'd been fighting a planetwide war when the Race arrived. Doctrine from earlier conquests said the Race ought to have been able to take advantage of their factionalism, play off one side against another. The tactic had worked

Harry Turdedove

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and again, but not as well and not as often as doctrine ggested it would. Atvar sighed and told Kirel, "Before I came to Tosev 3, 1 was like any sensible male: I was sure doctrine held all the answers. Follow it and you'd obtain the results it predicted. The

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maJes who designed our doctrines should have seen this world first; it would have broadened their horizons."

'This is truth, Exalted Fleetlord," the shiplord said. "One thing Tosev 3 has taught us is the difference between precept and experience."

"Yes, Well put," Atvar said. The last world conquest the Race had undertaken lay thousands of years in the past. The fleetlord had pored over the manuals of what had worked then, and in the Race's previous victory, even more thousands of Years before that. But no one living had any practice using what was in the manuals.

The Tosevites, by contrast, conquered one another and dickered with one another all the time. They made deception and deceit into an art, and were perfectly willing to educate the Race as to their use. Atvar had learned the hard way how much-or rather, how little-Big Ugly promises were worth,

'The other trouble is, they make war the same way they conduct the rest of their dealings with us: they cheat," Atvar grumbled.

"Truth again, Exalted Fleetlord," Kirel said.

The fleetlord knew it was truth. Machine against machine, the Big Uglies could not match the Race: one landcruiser Atvar commanded, for instance, was worth anywhere between ten and thirty of its Tosevite opponents. The Big Uglies fought back with everything from mine-carrying animals trained to run under landcruiser tracks to set off their explosives to attacks that concentrated so many of their inferior weapons against the Race's thin-stretched resources that they achieved breakthrough in spite of lower technology.

Kirel might have plucked that thought from Atvar's head. "Will we resume our assault on the city by the lake in the northern section of the smaller continental mass? Chicago, the local name is."

"Not immediately," Atvar answered, trying to keep from his voice all the frustration he felt at the failure. Taking advantage of Tosev 3's truly abominable winter weather, the Americans had broken through the flanks of the assault force, cut off the

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lead element, and wrecked most of it. It was the worst-and most expensive-embarrassment the Race had suffered on Tosev 3.

"We do not enjoy as many resources as we would like," Kirel observed.

Now Atvar had to say, "Truth." The Race was careful and thorough: the weapons they'd brought from Home would have conquered a hundred times over the Tosev 3 they thought they would find, very possibly without losing a male. But on the industrialized planet they discovered, they'd taken major losses. They'd inflicted far worse, but the Big Uglies' factories kept turning out weapons.

"We need to keep working to co-opt as much of their industrial capacity as we can," Kirel said, "and to wreck that part which persists in producing arms used against us."

"Unfortunately, the two goals often contradict each other," Atvar said. "Nor is our progress in destroying their fuel sources as great as they would wish us to believe,. though we persist in those efforts."

The three males who had bombed the refineries at Ploesti, which supplied the Deutsche with much of their fuel, were convinced they'd wrecked the place. Since then, a pall of smoke had continuously lain over it, making reconnaissance difficult.

For as long as he could-for longer than he should have-Atvar believed with his pilots that that smoke meant the Deutsche could not control the refinery fires. But it wasn't so he couldn't make himself think it was any more. The Big Uglies were shipping refined petroleum out of Ploesti every way they knew how: by water, by their battered rail network, by motorized conveyance, even by animal-drawn wagon.

The story wasn't much different at the other refinery complexes scattered across Tosev 3. They were easy to damage, hard to eliminate; since they were huge fire hazards just by existing, the Big Uglies had built them to minimize danger from explosions. They ferociously defended them and repaired bomb damage faster than the Race's alleged experts had thought possible.

Atvar's phone squawked at him. He welcomed the distraction from his own gloomy thoughts. "Yes?" he said into te speaker.

Harry Turdedove

"Exalted Fleetlord, the male Drefsab awaits your pleasure in the antechamber," an aide reported. "I am still conferring with the shiplord Kirel," Atvar said. '7ell Drefsab I shall see him directly when I'm finished." "It shall be done, Exalted Fleetlord." The aide switched off. Being reminded of Drefsab did nothing to improve Atvar's mood.`Tberels something else that hasn't worked as well as I'd hoped," he complained. "What's that, Exalted Fleetlord?" Kirel asked.

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"The whole problem with that vile Tosevite herb, ginger," Atvar said. "Drefsab recently tracked down and eliminated the Big Ugly who was a major supplier of the horrid drug, and I had hoped that would help us control our addicted males' demand for it. Unfortunately, a thicket of smaller dealers has sprung up to take the exterminated major supplier's place." "Frustrating," Kirel observed, "to say nothing of dangerous to our cause.,,

Atvar swung one eye turret toward Kirel in a sidelong glance of suspicion. The commander of the bannership was the second highest ranking male in the fleet, his body paint less elaborate only than Atvar's own. If Atvar's policies led to disaster, he was the next logical choice as fleetlord. He was stable and conservative and had always acted loyal, but who could say when the fangs of ambition would begin to gnaw? Any remark that sounded like criticism made Atvar wary. Not that ginger wasn't a problem. One more thing we didn't leam from the probe, Atvar thought. The cursed herb made males feel they were brighter and stronger than they really were; it also made them want to recapture that feeling as often as they could. They'd do almost anything to get ginger, even trade weapons and information to the Big Uglies.

"With the problem ginger poses to our security, it occurs to me that we may have been lucky the Big Ughes succeeded in blowing up the ship which carried the bulk of our nuclear weapons," the fleetlord said. "Otherwise, some male seeking pleasure for his tongue might have sought to convey one to the Tosevites in exchange for his precious herb."

'There's a pleasant thought!" Kirel exclaimed. "The Tosevites are barbarians without care for tomorrow-they would not hesitate to ruin their own planet if it meant defeating us." 'Truth," Atvar said glumly. After initial in-atmosphere

bursts to wreck Tosevite communications with electromagnetic

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pulse (unsuccessfully, because the Big Uglies' electronic devices were too primitive to use solid-state components), the Race had expended only two nuclear devices: against Berlin and Washington, centers of local resistance. But resistance had continued anyhow.

"Ironic that we have a greater obligation to maintain this world as nearly intact as possible than does the species that evolved on it," Kirel said. "Of course, the Tosevites are not aware our colonization fleet is on the way behind us."

"Indeed," Atvar said. "If it arrives and finds Tosev 3 uninhabitable, we will have failed here, no matter what else we accomplish."

"We also have to bear in mind that the Big Uglies are engaging in nuclear weapons research of their own, certainly with the material their guerrillas captured from us in the SSSR and, the evidence would suggest, with projects altogether their own as well," Kirel said. "Should one of those projects succeed, our problems here will become measurably more difficult."

"Immeasurably, you mean," Atvar said- The, Big Uglies would not worry about what they did to Tosev 3, as long as that meant getting rid of the Race. "Deutschland, the SSSR, the United States, maybe those little island empires, too-Nippon and Britain-we have to keep both eye turrets on every one of them. The trouble is, a planet is a very large place. Their projects will not be easy to track down. But it must be done." He spoke as much to remind himself as to tell Kirel. "It shall be done," the shiplord echoed loyally, It had better be done, they thought together.

The horse-drawn wagon pulled to a stop in New Salern, North Dakota. Sam Yeager looked around. As a seventeen-year veteran of bush-league baseball and its endless travel, he was a connoisseur of small towns. New Salem might have had a thousand people in it; then again, it might not.

He scrambled out of the wagon. Barbara Larssen handed him his Springfield. He took the rifle, slung it over his shoulder, then held out a hand to help Barbara down. They clung to each other for a moment. He kissed the top of her head. The ends of her dark blond hair still showed traces of permanent wave. Most of it was straight, though; a long time had gone by since she'd got a permanent.

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He didn't want to let her go, but he had to. He grabbed the rifle again, pointed it at the wagon. Military routine, he thought, and then, military fiddlesticks. But since he wore a corporal's stripes these days, he played the game by the rules. "Come on out, boys," he called.

Ristin and Ullhass, the two Lizard POWs who accompanied the 'Metallurgical Laboratory's wagon train on the way from Chicago to the Lab's planned new home in Denver, poked their heads up over the side of the wagon. "It shall be done, superior sir," they chorused in hissing English. They dropped down in front of Yeager and Barbara.

"Hard to think-things--so small could be so dangerous," Barbara murmured. Neither of the Lizards came up even to her shoulder.

"They aren't small with guns in their hands, or inside tanks, or inside planes, or inside their spaceships," Yeager answered. "I fought against them, remember, before my unit captured these boys."

"We thought you kill us," Ullhass said.

"'We thought you kill us, then eat us," Ristin agreed. Yeager laughed. "You'd been reading too much science ficdon, both of you." He laughed again, more reflectively. If he hadn't been in the habit of reading science fiction himself to pass the time on trains and buses, he never would have volunteered-or been accepted-as the Lizards' principal guard, translator, and explainer of matters Earthly.

He'd been with them continuously for better than six rnonths now, long enough to come to see them as individuals rather than mere creatures. They never had been much like the bug-eyed monsters he used to read about. They were short and skinny and, even dressed in multiple layers of warm clothes that hung on them like sacks, complained all the time about how cold it was (it wasn't just midwinter on the northern Great Plains, either; they'd complained about all but the hottest days back in Chicago, too).

By now, Yeager took for granted their turreted eyes that, chameleonlike, moved independently of each other, the greenbrown scales they used for skin, their clawed hands and feet, their wide mouths full of little pointed teeth. Even the bifurcated tongues they sometimes used to lick their hard, immobile lips were just part of them, although he'd needed quite a while to get used to those.

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"We will be warm tonight?" Ristin asked. Though he spoke English, at the end of the sentence he tacked on the little cough the Lizards used: sort of an audible question mark.

"We will be warm tonight," Sam answered in the Lizards' language, punctuating his sentence with a different cough, the one that put emphasis on his words.

He had reason for his confidence. The Lizards' bombers[hadn't hit North Dakota badly: not much up here needed hitting, Yeager thought. The flat farming country reminded him of the flat farming country in eastern Nebraska where he'd grown up. New Salem could easily have been one of the little towns between Lincoln and Omaha.

The wagon had stopped not far from a snow--covered boulder with an unnaturally flat top. Barbara brushed off the snow with her sleeve. "Oh, it has a plaque on it," she said, and brushed away more snow so she could read the words on the bronze. She started to laugh.

"What's so funny?" Yeager asked. He absentmindedly tacked the interrogative cough onto that question, too. "This is the Wrong Side Up Monument," she answered "Mat's what the plaque says, anyhow. Seems one of the early farmers had just started breaking the ground so he could plant for the first time when an Indian came along, looked at a chunk of sod, set it back the right way, and said, 'Wrong side up.' The farmer thought about it, decided he was right, and went into dairying instead. This is part of a big dairy area now...

"We should eat well tonight, then." Yeager's mouth watered at the thought of milk, cheese, probably big steaks, too-the folk around here might well be inclined to do some slaughtering for their guests, because they wouldn't be able to keep feeding all their livestock now that the Lizards had made moving grain and hay on a large scale impossible.

More wagons from the convoy came into town, some carrying people but more loaded down with the equipment that had filled much of Eckhart Hall back at the University of Chicago. Not all the wagons would stop here tonight; they were spread out for miles along the highway and back roads that ran parallel to it, both to avoid looking interesting to the Lizards and to keep from taking too much destruction from an air attack if they did.

Enrico Fermi helped his wife Laura down from their wagon,

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then waved to Yeager. He waved back. He still felt a rush o pride at hanging around with scientists and even helping the when they had questions for the Lizard prisoners. Till a fe months ago, his closest brush with scientists had been with th near-supermen who populated the pages of Astounding.

The real ones, while bright enough, weren't a lot like the fictional counterparts. For one thing, a lot of the best one Fermi, Leo Szilard, Edward Teller, Eugene Wigner-we dumpy foreigners with funny accents. Fermi talked like Bobby

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Fiore's father (he wondered what had happened to his ol roommate, the second baseman on the Decatur Commodores) For another, just about all of them, foreign and American, w much more human than their fictional analogs: they'd have drink (or more than one), they'd tell stories, and they'd argue with their wives. Yeager liked them more for it, not less. Steaks there proved to be, cooked over open flames and eaten by the fireside-no gas and no electricity in New Salem Yeager cut his into very small pieces as he ate it: though he woui&'t be thirty-six for another couple of months, he had ful upper and lower plates. He'd almost died in the influenza epidemic of 1918, and his teeth had rotted in his head. The only teeth of his own he had were the ones that gave everybody else trouble: seven or eight years after the epidemic, his wisdom teeth had come in fine.

Ullhass and Ristin, by contrast, held big chunks of meat up to their mouths and worried bites off them. The Lizards didn' chew much; they'd get a gobbet in and then gulp it down. The locals watched with undisguised curiosity-these were the firs Lizards they'd ever seen. Yeager had watched that at every stop all the way across Minnesota and North Dakota.

"Where you going to put those critters tonight?" a man asked him. "We sure as hell don't want them getting loose."

"They're not critters. Tbey're people-funny kind of people but people," Yeager said. With small-town politeness, the man didn't argue, but obviously didn't believe him, either. Yeager shrugged; he'd seen that happen before, too. He asked, "Do you have a jail here?"

The local hooked a thumb into the strap of his denim overalls. "Yah, we do," he said. Yeager hid a smile-he'd heard 'Iyah" for "yes" at every stop in North Dakota. Grinning, the local went on, "We'll put a drunk Indian in there every now

16 WORLDWAR: TILTING THE BALANCE and again--or sometimes a drunk squarehead, too. Hell, I'mian eighth Sioux myself, even if my name is Thorkil Olson." "Mat'd be perfect," Yeager said, "especially if you can put a board or a blanket or something over the window, if there is one. Lizards can't take as much cold as people can. Can you take us there, let me look it over?"

With Ristin and Ullhass safely behind bars, Yeager figured he had the night off. A lot of times, he'd had to stay alert because they were in the next room of a private house. He didn , t think they'd try to escape; they risked both freezing and getting shot on a world not their own. You couldn't afford to take chances, though.

He and Barbara went home with Olson and his wife Louise, a pleasant, red-cheeked woman in her late forties. "Take the spare bedroom for the night, and welcome," Louise said. "We've rattled around the house since our boy George and his wife headed down to Kansas City so he could work in a defense plant." Her face clouded. "The Lizards are in Kansas City. I pray he's all right."

"So do 1, ma'am," Yeager said. Barbara's hand tightened on' his; her husband Jens, a Met Lab physicist, had never come back from a cross-country trip that had skirted Lizard-held territory.

"Plenty of blankets on the bed, folks, and Grandma's old thundermug under it," Thorkil Olson boomed as he showed them the spare room. "We'll feed you breakfast when you up in the morning. Sleep tight, now."

There were plenty of blankets, heavy wool ones from Se with a goose-down comforter on top. "We can even dressed," Yeager said happily. "I'm sick of sleeping i four layers of clothes."

Barbara looked at him sidelong. "Stay undressed, you mean," she said, and blew out the candle Olson had set on the: nightstand. The room plunged into darkness.

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Afterwards, Sam peeled off his rubber, then groped around under the bed till he found the chamber pot. "Something for them to cluck over after we leave," he said. He dove back under the covers as fast as he could; without them, the bedroom was a chilly place.

Barbara clung to him, for warmth, but for reassurance too He ran a hand down the velvety skin of her back. "I love ~011, he said softly.

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"I love you, too." Her voice caught; she shoved herself against him. "I don't know what I would have done without

you. I'd have been so lost. 1-2' Her face was buried in the hollow of his shoulder. A hot tear splashed down on him. After a few seconds, she raised her head. "I miss him so much sometimes. I can't help it."

"I know. You wouldn't be who you are if you didn't." Yeager spoke with the philosophy of a man who had spent his entire adult life playing bush-league ball and never come close to the majors: "You do the best you can with the cards you get dealt, even if some of them are pretty rotten. Me, I never got an ace before." Now he squeezed her.

She shook her head; her hair brushed softly across his chest. "But it's not fair to you, Sam. Jens is dead; he has to be dead. If I'm going to go on-if we're going to go on, I have to look ahead, not backwards. As you said, I'll do the best I can." 'Can't ask for more than that," Yeager agreed. Slowly, he went on, "Seems to me, honey, that if you hadn't loved your Jens a lot, vid if he hadn't loved you, too, you wouldn't have been anybody I'd've wanted to fall in love with. And even if I had, just on account of you're such a fine-looking woman"-he poked her in the ribs, because he knew she'd squeak-"you wouldn't have loved me back. You wouldn't have known how to."

"You're sweet. You make good sense, too. You seem to have a way of doing that." Instead of clutching, now Barbara snuggled against him; he felt her body relax. The tip of her nipple brushed his arm, just above the elbow. He wondered if she felt like making love again. But before he could try to find out, she yawned enormously. Voice still blurry, she said, "If I don't get some sleep, God only knows what kind of wreck I'll be tomorrow." In the darkness, her lips found his, but only for a moment. "Good night, Sam. I love you." She rolled over onto her side of the bed.

"I love you, too. Good night." Sam found himself yawning, too. Even if she had been interested, he wasn't sure he could have managed two rounds so close together. He wasn't a kid any more.

He rolled over onto his left side. His behind brushed against Barbara's. They chuckled and moved a little farther apart. He popped out his dentures, set them on the nightstand. Inside a minute and a half, he was snoring.

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Jens Larssen most cordially cursed the United States first in English and then in the fragmentary Norwegian he'd picked up from his grandfather. Even as the oaths fell from h lips, he knew he was being unfair: if the Army hadn't scooped him up as he was making his way across Indiana, he might well have got himself killed trying to sneak into Chicago as the Lizard attacks on the city rose to a climax.

And even now, after General Patton and General B had pinched off the neck of that attack, nobody would I fly out to join the rest of the Met Lab team in Denver. the brass had their reasons-save for combat missions, a had almost disappeared in the United States. Human aviation had almost disappeared, anyhow. The Lizards dominated the skies.

"Hellfire," he muttered, clinging to the rail of the steamer Duluth Queen, "the damn Army wouldn't even tell me where they'd gone. I had to go into Chicago and find out for myself." That rankled; it struck him as security gone mad. So did everyone's refusal to let him send on any word to the Met Lab crew. He couldn't even let his wife know he was alive. Once more, though, the mucky-mucks had a point he couldn't honestly deny: the Met Lab was America's only hope of producing an atomic bomb like the ones the Lizards had used on Berlin and Washington, D.C. Without that bomb, thewar against the aliens would probably fail. Nobody, then, could afford to draw any sort of attention toward the Metallurgical Laboratory oi communicate with it in any way, for fear the Lizards would intercept a message and draw the wrong --- or rather, the rightconclusions from it.

The orders he'd been given made just enough sense for him not to try disobeying. But oh, how he hated them!

"And now I can't even get into Duluth," he grumbled.. He could see the town, which lay by the edge of Lake Su-

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perior where it narrowed to its westernmost point. He could see the gray granite bluffs that dwarfed man's houses and buildings, and felt he could almost reach out and touch some of the homes atop these bluffs, the taller business buildings that climbed the steep streets toward them. But the feeling was an illusion; a sheet of blue-gray ice held the Duluth Queen away from the Minnesota town that had given it its name.

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Jens turned to a passing sailor. "How far out on the lake are weT'

The man paused to think. His breath came out thick as smoke as he answered, "Can't be more than four, five miles. Up to less than a month ago, it was open water all the way in." He chuckled at Larssen's groan. "Some years the port stays open all winter long. More often, though, it'll freeze for twenty miles out, so this ain't so bad." He went on his way, whistling a cheery tune.

He'd misunderstood why Jens groaned. It wasn't at the cold weather, Jens had grown up in Minnesota, and spent enough time skating on frozen lakes to take for granted that watereven as massive a body of water as Lake Superior--tumed to ice when winter came. But a month before, he could have gone straight into town. That ate at him. Probably the same blizzard that let Patton launch his attack against the Lizards had also finally frozen the lake.

In any other year, the Duluth Queen would have stopped sailing forahe winter. The Lizards, though, had paid much

more attention to knocking out road and rail traffic than to knocking out ships. Jens wondered what that meant about their home planet-maybe it didn't have enough water for them to take shipping seriously as a way of getting things from one place to another.

If that was so, the aliens were missing a trick. The Duluth Queen carried ball bearings, ammunition, gasoline, and motor ojI to keep resistance to the Lizards strong in Minnesota; it would take back steel from Duluth and n-Oed grain from Minneapolis to forge into new weapons and feed the people who fought and built.

Lots of little boats-boats small enough to haul across the ice, some of them even rowboats--clustered around the steamship. Deck cranes lowered crates to them and picked up others, with a lot of shouted warriings going back and forth with the goods. A quasi-harbor had sprung into being at the edge of the ice: crates from the Duluth Queen went back and forth toward town on man-hauled sledges, while others, outbound, were muscled onto the boats for transport out to the Queen.

Jens doubted the system was even a tenth as efficient as a proper harbor. But the proper harbor was icebound, and what the locals had worked out was a lot better than nothing. From his point of view, the only real trouble was that cargo was so

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much more important than passengers that he couldn't get the steamship.

The sailor came back down the deck, still whistling. Larssei felt like throttling him. "How much longer before you'll N able to start moving actual real live people om." he asked.

"Shouldn't be more than another day or two, sir," the fellov answered.

"A day or two!" Jens exploded. He wanted to dive in Lake Superior and swim the mile or so over to the edge of N ice. He knew perfectly well, though, that he'd freeze to deA if he tried it.

"We're doing the best we can," the sailor said. "Everything's screwed up since the Lizards came, that's all. Wherevef you need to get to, people will understand that you've bee' held up."

That this was true made it no easier to bear. Unconsciously, Larssen had assumed that because the Lizards had been beaten back from Chicago and he was free to travel again without the Army trying to tie him down, the world would automatically unfold at his feet. But the world was not in the habit of w ing that way.

The sailor went on, "Long as you're stuck on board, sir, might as well enjoy yourself. The grub's good here, and aren't many places ashore where you'll find steam heat, ru ning water, and electric lights."

"Isn't that the sad and sorry truth?" Jens said. The Lizards' invasion had badly disrupted the complex web the United States had become, and pointed out the hard way how much every part of the country depended on every other-and h""' ill-equipped most parts were to go it alone. Burning wood to keep warm and depending on muscles-animal or human-to move things about made America feel as if it had slipped back a century from 1943.

And yet, if Jens ever made it to Denver, he'd get back to work on a project that seemed to belong at least a hundred

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years in the future. The world to come would spring into being amidst the obtrusive reemergence of the past. And where was the present? The present, thought Jens, who had a weakness; for puns, is absent.

He went below, to get out of the cold and to rernind himself the present still existed. The Duluth Queen's galley boasted not only electric lights but a big pot of hot coffee (a luxury that_11

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grew rarer as stocks dwindled) and a radio. Jens remembered his parents saving up to buy their first set in the late twenties.

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It had felt like inviting the world into their parlor. Now, most places, you couldn't invite the world in even if you wanted to. But the Duluth Queen didn't depend on distant power plants, now likely to be either wrecked or out of fuel, for electricity. It made its own. And so, static squawked and muttered as Hank Vernon spun the tuning knob and the red pointer slid across the dial. Music suddenly came out. The ship's engineer turned to Larssen, who was getting a mug of coffee. "The Andrews Sisters suit you?"

"They're okay, but if you can find some news, that would be even better." Jens poured in crearn. The Duluth Queen had plenty of that, but no sugar.

"Let's see what I can do. I wish this was a shortwave set."

Vernon worked the knob again, more slowly now, pausing to listen to every faint station he brought in. After three or four tries, he grunted in satisfaction. "Here you go." He turned up the volume. &

Larssen bent his head toward the radio. Even through the waterfall of static, he recognized the newscaster's deep, slow voice: '~-three days of rioting reported from Italy, where people went into the streets to protest the government's cooperation with the Lizards. Pope Pius XII's radio appeal for calm, monitored in London, seems to have had little effect. Rioters are calling for the return of Benito Mussolini, who was spirited to Germany after being placed under arrest by the Lizards-"

Hank Vernon shook his head in bemusement. "Isn't it a hell of a thing? A year ago, Mussolini was the enemy with a capital E because he was buddies with Hitler. Now he's a hero because the krauts got him away from the Lizards. And Hitler's not such a bad guy any more, since the Germans are still fighting hard. Just because you're fighting the Lizards doesn't make you a good guy in my book. Was Joe Stalin a good guy just on account of he was fighting the Nazis? People say so, yeah, but they can't make me believe it. What do you think?"

"You're probably right," Larssen answered. He agreed with most of what the engineer had said, but wished Vernon hadn't chosen just then to say it-his loud, nasal tones drowned out Edward R. Murrow, to whom Jens was trying to listen. Vernon, however, kept right on talking, so Jens got the news

in disconnected snatches: ration cuts in England, fighting be-

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tween Smolensk and Moscow, more fighting in Siberia, a ard push toward Vladivostok, a passive resistance campaign in India.

"Is that against the English or the Lizards?" he asked. "If it's all the way over in India, what the devil difference! does it make?" the engineer said. On a cosmic scale, Larssen supposed he had a point, but for someone who was trying to catch up with what was going on in the world, losing any fact felt frustrating.

From the radio, Murrow said, "And for those who think the Lizard devoid of humor, consider this: outside of Los Angeles the Army Air Force recently had occasion to build a durnrrr~' airport, complete with dummy planes. Two Lizard aircrat are said to have attacked it-with dummy bombs. This is U. ward R. MurTow, somewhere in the United States."

"Nobody on the radio admits where they are any more, you notice that?" Vernon said. "From FDR on down, it's 'somewhere in the United States.' It's like if anybody knows where you are, you can't be a bigshot, 'cause if you were a bigshot and the Lizards knew where you are, they'd go after you. An I right or am I right?"

"You're probably right," Jens said again. "You don't happen to have a cigarette, do you?" Now that he didn't get the chance to chink coffee often, one cup kicked the way three or four hadl in the good old days. The same was even more true of tobacco.

"Wish to hell I did," Vernon answered. "I smoked cigars myself, but I wouldn't turn down anything these days. I to work on the rivers in Virginia, North Carolina, and we'd g right past the tobacco farms, never even think a thing abou lem. But when it can't get from where they grow it to w you want to smoke it---2'

"Yeah," Larssen said. It was true of more than tobacco. Th was why the Lizards didn't have to conquer the whole coun

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to make the United States stop working. It was why the Dulut~ Queen sat off the ice and unloaded: anything to keep wheels turning.

He stayed stuck for the next three days, biding his time and biting his nails. When he finally did get to descend into one ofl, the small boats that was unloading the Duluth Queen, he Amost wished he'd stayed stuck longer. Clambering down a

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cargo net with a knapsack and a rifle slung over his shoulder was not his notion of fun. One of the sailors lowered his Schwinn on a line. It banged file:///C//2590%20Sci-Fi%20and%20Fantasy%20E-books/Harry%20Turtledove%20-%20Worldwar%2002%20-%20Tilting%20the%20Balance.txt

against the side of the steamship a couple of times on the way down. Jens grabbed it and undid the knot. The line snaked back up to the Duluth Queen.

The small boat had a crew of four. They all looked at the bicycle. "You're not going anywhere far by yourself on that, are you, mister?" one of them said at last.

"What if I am?" Larssen had ridden a bicycle across most of Ohio and Indiana. He was in the best shape of his life. He'd always look skinny, but he was stronger than most people with bulging biceps.

"Oh I won't say you couldn't do it---don't got me wrong," -'~man said. "It's just that-this is Minnesota, after all." the ere

He patted himself. He was wearing boots with fur tops, an overcoat over a jacket over a sweater, and earmuffs on top of a knitted wool cap. "You don't want to get stuck in a snowstorni, is what I mean. You do and you won't even start to stink till spring---and spring comes late around Duluth." -"I know what Minnesota's like. I was raised here," Jens said.

'Then you ought to have better sense," the sailor told him. He started to come back with a hot reply, but it didn't get past his lips. He remembered all the winter days he'd had to stay home ftom school when snow made the going impossible. And his grammar school had been only a couple of miles from the farm where he'd grown up, the high school less than five. If a bad storm hit while he was in the middle of nowhere, he'd be in trouble and no doubt about it. He said, "Things must move, or else you guys wouldn't be out here working in the middle of winter. How do you do it?" "We convoy," the sailor answered seriously. "You wait until there's a bunch of people going the same way you are, and then you go along with 'em. Where you headin' for, mister?" "Denver, eventually," Jens said. "Any place west of Duluth now, I guess." In a pocket of his overcoat he had a letter from General Patton that essentially ordered the entire civilized world to drop whatever it was doing and give him a hand. It had got him his cabin on the Duluth Queen ... but the Duluth Queen was going from Chicago to Duluth anyhow. Even a sizzfing letter from Patton probably couldn't call a land convoy file:///C//2590%20Sci-Fi%20and%20Fantasy%20E-books/Harry%20Turtledove%20-%20Worldwar%2002%20-%20Tilting%20the%20Balance.txt

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into being at the drop of a hat. But that sparked a thought. "Any trains still running?"

"Yeah, we try to keep 'em going, best we can, anyhow. I tell you, though, it's like playing Russian roulette. Maybe you'll get through, maybe you'll get your ass bombed off. If it was me, I woul&A fide one, not now. The Lizards go after 'em on VUTV(~-- M" iuc *m 'hell ot it Ylke tlrte-y do sbilp% " -X -M kz)- -N v kv,--

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pit 'A Ta couphe m. a vou,*, o~ UXQ&*~S. it lie tried not to worry about that.

The boat drifted to a stop at the edge of the ice. Gunnysacks made the treacherous surface easier to walk on. The crew handed Larssen his gear, wished him good luck, and headed back to the Duluth Queen.

He headed over toward a dog-drawn sledge that didn't havt too many crates in it. "Can I get a ride?" he called, and the driver nodded. He felt like a character out of Jack London as he got in behind the man.

The trip across the ice gave him more time to think. it also convinced him that if he was going to live in the twentieth century, he'd use its tools where he could. He'd do better even if the Lizards did bomb him while he Was just partway to Denver. When at last he got into Duluth, he went looking for the truin station.

The hauler aircraft rolled to a stop. Ussmak stared out the window at the Tosevite landscape. It was different from the flat plains of the SSSR where the landcruiser driver had served before, but that didn't make it any better, not as far as he was concerned- The plants were a dark, wet-looking green under sunlight that seemed too white, too harsh.

Not that the star Tosev adequately heated its third world Ussmak felt the chill as soon as he descended from the hauler onto the concrete of the runway. Here, though, at least water wasn't falling frozen from the sky. That was something.

"Landcruiser crew replacements!" a male bawled. Ussmak and three or four others who had just deplaned tramped over to him. The male took their names and identity numbers, then waved them into the back of an armored transporter. "Where are we?" Ussmak asked as the machine jounced

into life. "Whom are we fightingT' That was a better question;

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the names the Big Uglies gave to pieces of Tosev 3 meant little to him.

"This place is called France," a gunner named Forssis answered. "I served here for a while shortly after we landed, before the commander decided it was largely pacified and transferred my unit to the SSSR."

All the males let their mouths fall open in derisive laughter

at that. Everything had seemed so easy in the days right after the landing. Ussmak remembered being part of a drive that had smashed Soviet landcruisers as if they were made of cardboard.

Even then, though, he should have had a clue. A sniper had picked off his commander when Votal, like any good landcruiser leader, stuck his head out the cupola to get a decent view of what was going on. And Krentel, the commander who replaced him, did not deserve the body paint that proclaimed his rank.

Well, Krentel was dead, too, and Telerep the gunner with him. A guerrilla-Ussmak did not know whether he was Russki or Deutsch-had blown the turret right off the landcruiser while they were trying to protect the crews cleaning up nuclear material scattered when the Big Ughes had managed to wreck the starship that carried the bulk of the Race's atomic weapons.

From his driver's position, Ussmak had bailed out of the landcruiser when it was stricken--out of the landcruiser and into radioactive mud. He'd been in a hospital ship ever since ... fill now.

"So whom are we fighting?" he repeated. "The Frangais?" "No, the Deutsche, mostly," Forssis answered. "They were ruling here when we arrived. I hear the weapons we'll be facing are better than the ones they threw at us the last time I was here."

Silence settled over the transporter's passenger compartment. Fighting the'Big Uglies, Ussmak thought, was like poisoning pests: the survivors kept getting more resistant to what you were trying to do to them. And, like any other pests, the 13ig Uglies changed faster than you could alter your methods ,of coping with them.

The heated compartment, the smooth ride over a paved highway, and the soft purr of the hydrogen-burning engine helped most of the males doze off before long: veterans, they

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knew the value of snatching sleep while they had the chance. Ussmak tried to rest, too, but couldn't. The longing for ginger gnawed at him and would not let go.

An orderly had sold him some of the precious herb in the hospital ship. He'd started tasting as much out of boredom as for any other reason. When he was full of ginger, he felt wise and brave and invulnerable. When he wasn't-that was when he discovered the trap into which he'd fallen, Without ginger, he seemed stupid and fearful and soft-skinned as a Big Ugly, a contrast just made worse because he so vividly remembered how wonderful he knew himself to be when he tasted the powdered herb.

He didn't care how much he gave the orderly for his ginger: he had pay saved up and nothing he'd rather spend it on. The orderly had an ingenious arrangement whereby he got Ussmak's funds even though they didn't go directly into his computer account.

In the end, it hadn't saved him. One day, a new orderly came in to police up Ussmak's chamber. Discreet questioning (Ussmak could afford to be discreet then, with several tastes hidden away) showed that the only thing he knew about ginger was the fleetlord's general order prohibiting its use. Ussmak had stretched out the intervals between tastes as long as he could. But finally the last one was gone. He'd been gingerless-and melanchoty--ever since.

The road climbed up through rugged mountains. Ussmak got only glimpses out the transporter's firing ports. After the monotonous flatlands of the SSSR and the even more bon*ng sameness of the hospital ship cubicle, a jagged horizon was welcome, but it didn't much remind Ussmak of the mountains of Home.

For one thing, these mountains were covered with frozen water of one sort or another, a measure of how miserably cold Tosev 3 was. For another, the dark conical trees that pecked out through the mantling of white were even more alien to his eye than the Big Uglies.

Those trees also concealed Tosevites, as Ussmak discovered a short while later. Somewhere up there in the woods, a machine gun began to chatter. Bullets spanged off the transpo er's armor. Its own light cannon returned fire, filling the passenger compartment with thunder.

The males who had been dozing were jerked rudely back to

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ven muzzle flashes.

awareness. They tumbled for the firing ports to see what happening, Ussmak among them. He couldn't see anything,

scary, 1, Forssis Observed "I'm used to sitting insidt landcruiser where the armor Sh'ields you from anything. I c help thinking that if the Tosevites had a real gun up the file:///C|/2590% 20 Sci-Fi% 20 and % 20 Fantasy% 20 E-books/Harry% 20 Turtled ove% 20-% 20 Worldwar% 2002% 20-% 20 Tilting% 20 the% 20 Balance.txt

we'd be cooked.,, Ussmak knew only too well guaranteed Protection against t that not even Jandcruiser arm could say as much, the he Big Uglies. But before transporter driver came on the in ,c0,tM,:'SOrry about the racket, my males, but we haven't roott es." don't rutheogvueerrrainflyasmient. They're just a nuisance as long as w The driver sounded downright cheery; Ussmak wondered he was tasting ginger. "I wonder how often they do run ove mines," Forssis saiddarkly. "This male hasn't, Or he wouldn't still be driving us,,, Us Smak said. A couple of the other landcruiser crewmales their mouths at him. opene(After a while, the mount ams gave Way to wide, gently rolling vaHeys. Forssis pointed to neat rows of gnarle p, -facing slopes. He said, 1 saw that clung to stakes on south d arits those when I was in this France place before. The Tosevites ferment alcoholic brews from them." He ran his tongue over his lips. "Some have a very Interesting flavor." The passenger COMPartment had no view straight forward. The driver had to make an annOun6ement for the males he was hauling: "We are coming into the Big Ugly town of Besangon Our forward base for combat against the Deutsche. You will assigned to crews here."

All Ussmak had seen of Tosevite architecture was the Wooden farming villages of the SSSR. Besan9(n Was Certainly different from those. He didn't quite know what to make of it. Compared to the tall bl(cklike structures of steel and glass that formed the citiesoi Home, its buildings seemed toys. yet they were very Ornate toys, with columns and elaborate stoneand brickwork and steep roofs SO the frozen water that fell from the sky hereabouts would slide off.

The Race's headquarters in Besanqon was on a bluff in the Southeastern Pan Of the town. Not only was the place on high ground, Ussmak discovered on alighting from the transporter

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that a river flowed around two sides of it. "Well fense," he remarked.

"Interesting you should say that," the driver answered. "This used to be a Big Ugly fortress." He pointed to a long, low, gloomy-looking building. "Go in there. They'll process and assign you to a crew."

"it shall be done." Ussmak hurried toward the doorway; cold was nipping at his fingers and eye turrets.

Inside, the building was heated to the point of comfort for civilized beings-Ussmak hissed gratefully. Otherwise, thoughi the local males were mostly using the furnishings theyl found. A planet was a big place, and the Race hadn't brought enough of everything to supply all its garrisons. And so a personnel officer seemed half swallowed by the fancy red velvet chair in which he sat, a chair designed to fit a Big Ugly. The male had to stretch to reach the computer on the heavy, dark wood table in front of him; the table was higher off the ground than any the Race would have built.

The personnel officer turned one eye toward Ussmak. "Name, specialization, and number," he said in a bored voice, "Superior sir, I am Ussmak, landcruiser driver," Ussmak answered, and gave the number by which he was recorded, paid, and would be interred if he aot unlucky.

The personnel officer entered the information, used his free eye to read UssmaVs data as they came tip. "You were serving in the SSSFI, against the Soviets, is that correct, until your landcruiser was destroyed and you were exposed to excess radiation?"

"Yes, superior sir, that is correct."

"Then you've not had combat experience against the DeutscheT'

"Superior sir, I am told the guerrilla team that wrecked my vehicle was part Deutsch, part Soviet. If you are askin whether I've faced their landcruisers, the answer is no."

"That is what I meant," the personnel officer said. "You w

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need to maintain a higher level of alertness hereabouts th was your habit in the SSSR, landcruiser driver. Tactically, Deutsche are more often clever than perhaps any other Tosevite group. Their newest landcruisers have heavier guns than you will have seen, too. Combine these factors with their superior knowledge of the local terrain and they become opponents not to be despised."

Harry Turdedove 29 nderstand, superior sir," Ussmak said. "Will my landcruiser commander be experienced?" I hope. The personnel officer punched at the computer again, waited file:///C|/2590% 20Sci-Fi% 20 and % 20 Fantasy% 20 E-books/Harry% 20 Turtled ove% 20-% 20 Worldwar% 2002% 20-% 20 Tilting% 20 the% 20 Balance.txt the state of the state of

for a response to appear on the screen. "You're going to be assigned to Landcruiser Commander Hessef's machine; his driver was wounded in a bandit attack here in Besanqon a few days ago. Hessef compiled an excellent record in Espaha, south and west of here, as we expanded out of our landing zone. He's relatively new to the northern sector."

Ussmak hadn't known Espaha from France until the moment 'the personnel officer named them. And no matter what that officer said about the superior skills of the Deutsche, to Ussmak one band of Big Uglies seemed pretty much like another. "I'm glad to hear that he has fought, superior sit. Where do I report to him?"

"The hall we are using as a barracks is out the door through which you entered and to your left. If you do not find Hessef and your gunner-whose name is Tvenkel-there, try the vehicle park down past the antiaircraft missile launcher." Ussmak tried the vehicle park first, on the theory that any commander worth his body paint took better care of his landcruiser than he did of himself. Seeing the big machines fined up in their sandbagged revetments made him eager to get back to the work for which he'd been trained, and also eager for the tight-knit fellowship that flowered among the males of a good landcruiser crew.

Crewmales working on their landcruisers directed him to the one Hessef commanded. But when he walked into its stall, he found it buttoned up tight. That presumably meant Hessef and Tvenkel were back at the barracks. Not a good sigr4 Ussmak thought as he began to retrace his steps.

He longed to feel a part of something larger than himself. T'hat was what the Race was,all about: obedience from below, obligation from above, all working together for the common good. He'd known that feeling with Votal, his first commander,

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| 4 dn 8g v days south zone. Ul he PC f icer one b glad I to h" |
| but after Votal died, Krentel proved such an incompetent that Ussmak could not bond to him as subordinate was supposed to bond to superior. 7ben Krentel had got himself killed, too, and Ussmak's orig- inal gunner with him. That worsened the driver's feeling of |

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separation, almost of exclusion, from the rest of the Race. The long stay in the hospital ship and his discovery of ginger had

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pushed him even further out of the niche he'd been intended to fit. If he couldn't have ginger any more, crew solidarity would have been a good second best. But how could he really feel part of a crew that didn't have the simple sense to treat their landcruiser as if their lives depended on it?

As he walked back past the missile launcher, bells began to ring down in the town of Besangon. He turned to one of the males. "I'm new here. Are those alarms? Where should I go? What should I do?"

"Nothing-take no notice of them," the fellow answered. 'The Big Uglies just have a lot of mechanical clocks that chime to divide up the day and night. They startled me at first, too. After a while here, you won't even notice them. One is spectacular for something without electronics. It must have seventy dials, and these figures all worked by gears and pulleys come out and prance around and then disappear back into the machine. When you get some slack time, you ought to go see it: it's worth turriing both eye turrets that way."

"Thanks. Maybe I will." Relieved, Ussmak kept on toward the barracks building. Just as he pushed the door open, the sweet metallic clangor ceased.

Even the cots the males were using had formerly belonged to the Big Uglies. The thin mattresses looked lumpy, the blankets scratchy. They were undoubtedly woven from the hair of some native beast or other, an idea that made Ussmak itch all by itself. A few males lounged around doing nothing in particular.

,'I seek the landeruiser commander Hessef," Ussmak said as some of those males tamed an eye or two toward him.

"I am Hessef," one of them said, coming forward. "By your paint, you must be my new driver."

"Yes, superior sir." Ussmak put more respect into his voice than he truly felt. Hessef was a jittery-looking male, his body paint sloppily applied. Ussmak's own paint was none too neat, but he thought commanders should adhere to a higher standard.

Another male came up to stand beside Hessef. "Ussmak, I introduce you to Tvenkel, our gunner," the landcruiser commander said.

"Be good to have a whole crew again, go out and fight," Tvenkel said. Like Hessef, he couldn't quite hold still. His body paint was, if possible, in even worse shape than the

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hurry. USSMak Wondered-smeared' blotched daubed on in landcruiser commander's 3 what he'd done to Iserve beconiin Part Of this substandard crew.

ing to do is as boring as staying awake while you go into 0 Hessef said, "Sitting around the barracks all day with rcolhd

sleep."

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Aen why aren't you out tending to your landcruiser? Ussmak thought. But that wasn't something he could say, not to his new commander. Instead ' he answered, "Boredom I know all about, superior sit. I just spent a good long while in a hospital ship, recovering from radiation sickness. There were times when I thought I'd been in that cubicle forever." "Yes, that could be bad, just staring at the metal was", Hessef agreed. "Still, though, I think I'd sooner stay in a hospital ship than in this ugly brick shed that was never made for our kind." He waved to show what he meant. Ussmak had to agree: the barracks was indeed a dismal place. He suspected even Big Uglies would have found themselves bored here.

"How did you get through the days?" Tvenkel asked. "Recovering from sickness makes time pass twice as slowly."

"For one thing, I have every video from the hospital ship's library memorized," Ussmak said, which drew a laugh from his new crewmales. "For another-" He stopped short. Ginger was against regulations. He didn't want to make the comniander and gunner aware of his habit.

"Here, drop your gear on this bed by ours," Hessef said. "We've been saving it against the day when we'd be whole again.,,

Ussmak did as he was asked. Ile Other two males crowded close around him, as if to create the unity that held a good landcruiser crew together. The rest of the males in the barracks looked on from a distance, politely allowing Ussmak to bond with his new comrades before they came forward to introduce themselves. Quietly, Tvenkel said, "You may not know it, driver, but the Big Uglies have an herb that makes life a lot less boring. Would you care to try a taste, see what I naean?" Ussmak's eyes both swung abruptly, bored into the gunner, He lowered his voice, too. "You have-ginger?" He hesitated

before he named the precious powder. Now Tvenkel and Hessef stared at him. "You know about

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ginger?" the landcruiser commander whispered. His mouth fell open in an enormous grin.

"Yes, I know about ginger. I'd love a taste, thanks." Ussmak wanted to caper like a hatchling. Instead, the three males looked at each other for a long time none of them saying anything, Ussmak broke the silence: , ' I '~uprior sirs, I think we're going to be an outstanding crew. Neither commander nor gunner argued with him.

The big Maybach engine coughed, sputtered, died. Colonel Heinrich Jager swore and flipped up the Panther D's cupola. "More than twice the horsepower of my old Parizer III," he grumbled, "and it runs less than half as often." He pulled himself out, dropped down to the ground. The rest of the crew scrambled out, too. The driver, a big Sandy-traired youngster named Rolf Wittman, grinned impu dently. "Could be worse, sir," he said. "At least it hasn't caught fire the way a lot of them do." said, acid in '10h, for the blithe spirit of the young," Jager his voice. He wasn't young himself. He'd fought in the trenches in the First World War, stayed in the Weimar Republic's Reichswehr after it was over. He'd switched over to Panzers as soon as he could after Hitler began rearming Germany, and was commanding a company of Parizer Ills in the Sixteenth Panzer Division south of Kharkov when the Lizards came.

Now, at last, the Reich had made a machine that might make the Lizards sit up and take notice when they met it. J- er had killed a Lizard tank with his Panzer in, but he was admit he'd been lucky. Anybody who came on victorious, after a run-in with Lizard armor w

The Panther he now stood beside seemed I-As old machine. It incorporated all the best features of the Soviet T-34-thick sloped armor, wide tracks, a powerful 75mm. gun--into a German design with a smooth suspension, an ex-

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decades ahead of

cellent transmission, and better sights and gun control than Jager had ever imagined before. The only trouble was, it was a brand-new German design. Bumping up against the T-34 and the even heavier KV-1 in

1941 had been a nasty surprise for the Wehrmacht. The panzcr divisions had held their own through superior tactics and nni their Panzer His and IVs, but getting better

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started upgu ng

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tanks became urgent. When the Lizards arrived, urgent turned mandatory.

And so development had been rushed, and the Panther, powerful machine that it was, conspicuously lacked the mechanical reliability that characterized older German models. Jager kicked at the overlapping road wheels that carried the tracks. "This panze'r might as well have been built by an Englishman," he growled. He knew no stronger way to condemn an armored fighting vehicle.

The rest of the crew leaped to their panzer's defense. "It's not as bad as that, sit," Wittman said.

"It has a real gun in it, by Jesus," added Sergeant Klaus Meinecke, "not one of the peashooters the English use." The gun was his responsibility; he sat to Jager's right in the turret, on a chair that looked Ile a black-leather-covered hockey puck with a two-slat back.

"Having a real gun doesn't matter if we can't get to where we're supposed to use it," Jager retorted. "Let's fix this beast, shall we, before the Lizards fly by and strafe us."

That got the men moving in a hurry. Attack from the air had been frightening enough when it was a Shturmovik with red stars painted on wings and fuselage. It was infinitely worse now; the rockets the Lizards fired hardly ever missed.

"Probably the fuel lines again," Wittman said, "or maybe the fuel pump." lie rummaged in one of the outside stowage bins for a wrench, attacked the bolts that held the engine louvers onto the Panther's rear deck.

The crew was a good one, Jager thought. Only veterans, and select veterans at that, got to handle Panthers: no point in frittering away the important new weapon by giving it to men who couldn't get the most out of it.

Klaus Meinecke grunted in triumph. "Here we go. This gasket in the pump is kaput. Do we have a spareT' More rummaging in the bins produced one. The gunner replaced the damaged part, screwed the top back onto the fuel pump case, and said, "All right, let's start it up again."

The crew had to take off the jack to get at the starter dog clutch. "That's poor design," Jager said, and pulled a piece of paper and pencil out of a pocket of his black panzer crewman's tunic. Why not stow jack vertically between exhausts, not horizontally below them? he scribbled.

Cranking up the Panther was a two-man job. Wittman and

11W110",

34 WORLDWAR: TILTING THE BALANCE Meinecke did the honors. The engine belched, farted, and carne back to life. After handshakes all around, the crew climbed back into the machine and rolled on down the roA "We'll want to look for a good patch of woods where

can take cover for the night," Jager said. Such a patch might be hard to find. He checked his map. They were somewhere between Thann and Belfort, heading down to try to hold the Lizards away from the latter strategic town.

Jager stuck his head out of the drum-shaped cupola. If he was where he thought he was- He nodded, pleased with his navigation. There ahead stood Rougement-le-Chateau, a Romanesque priory now in picturesque ruin. Navigating through the rugged terrain of Alsace and the Franche-Comt6 was a very different business from getting around on the Ukrainian steppe,. where, as on the sea, you picked a compass heading and followed it. If you got lost here, heading across country wasn't so easy. More often than not, you had to back up and retrace your path by road, which cost precious time.

The woods were still leafless, but Jager found a spot where bare branches interlaced thickly overhead. Behind scattered clouds, the pale winter sun was low in the west. "Good enough," he said, and ordered Wittman to pull off the road and conceal the Panther from prying eyes in the sky.

Within the next half hour, four more tanks-another Panther, two of the new Panzer IVs with relatively light protection but a long 75mm gun almost as good as the Panther's, and a huge Tiger that mounted an 88 and armor poorly sloped but so thick and heavy that it made the panzer slower than it should have been-joined him there. The crews swapped rations, spare parts, and lies. Somebody had a deck of cards. They played skat and poker till it got too dark to see.

Jager thought back to the splendid organization of Sixteenth Panzer when the division plunged into the Soviet Union. Back then, the thought of getting tanks into action by these dribs and drabs would have caused apoplexy in the High Command That was before the Lizards had started plastering the German rail and road networks. Now any movement toward the front was counted a success.

He squeezed butter and meat paste from their tu s onto chunk of black bread. As he chewed, he reflected that a lot things had happened jg,~im that he never would have e. before the Lizards ". He'd fought against the alien inivaden

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side by side with a band of Russian partisans, most of them Jews.

He hadn't had much use for Jews before then. He still didn't have a whole lot of use for them, but now he understood why the Jews of Warsaw had risen against the town's German occupiers to help the Lizards take it. Nothing the aliens did to them could'come close to what they'd suffered at the hands of file:///C|/2590% 20 Sci-Fi% 20 and % 20 Fantasy% 20 E-books/Harry% 20 Turtled ove% 20-% 20 Worldwar% 2002% 20-% 20 Tilting% 20 the% 20 Balance.txt

the Reich.

And yet those same Polish Jews had let him cross their territory, and hadn't even confiscated from him all the explosive metal that had been his booty from the joint German-Soviet raid on the Lizards. True, they'd taken half to send it to the United States, but they'd let him deliver the rest to his own superiors. Even now, German scientists were working to avenge Berlin.

He took another bite. Even that wasn't the strangest. Had anyone told him on June 22, I-P41, that he would-have an affair with? fall in love with? (he still wasn't sure about that himself)-a Soviet pilot, his most likely reaction would have been to punch the teller in the eye for calling him a fairy. On the day the war with the Soviet Union started, no one in Germany knew the'Russians would use female fliers in combat. He hoped Ludimla was all right. They'd first met in the Ukraine, where she'd plucked him and his gunner (he hoped Georg Schultz was all right, too) off a collective farm and taken them to Moscow so they could explain to the Red Army brass how they'd managed to kill a Lizard panzer. He'd written to her after that-she had some German, he a little Russianbut got no answer.

Then they'd come together at Berchtesgaden, where Hitler had pinned on him the German Cross in gold (a medal so ugly he wore only the ribbon these days) and she'd flown in Molotov for consultation with the FiArer He smiled slowly. That had been as magical a week as he'd ever known.

But what now? he wondered. Ludmila had flown back to the Soviet Union, where the NKVD would not look kindly upon her for sleeping with a Nazi ... any more than the Gestapo was pleased with him for sleeping with a Red. "Screw 'em all," he muttered, which drew a quizzical glance from Rolf N.ittman. Jager did not explain.

A motorcycle came put-putting slowly down the road, its headlight dimmed almost to extinction by a blackout slit can-

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With the Lizards' detectors, even that could be dangerous, but not so dangerous as driving a winding French road in pitch darkness.

The motorcycle driver spotted the panzers off under the trees. He stopped, throttled down, and called, "Anyone know where I can find Colonel Heinrich JdgeO"

"Here I am," Jdger said, standing up. "Was ist los?" "I have here orders for you, Colonel." The driver pulled them out of his tunic pocket.

Jdger unfolded the paper, stooped down and held it in front of the motorcycle headlamp so he could read it. "Scheisse, " he exclaimed. "I've been recalled. They just put me back in frontline service, and now I've been recalled."

"Yes, sir," the driver agreed- "I am ordered to take you back with me."

"But why?" Jdger said. "It makes no sense. Here I am an experienced fighter for Rihrer and Vaterland against the Lizards. But what good will I do in this Hechingen place? I've scarcely even heard of it."

But he had heard of it, and fairly recently, too. Where? When? He stiffened as memory came. Hechingen was where Hitler had said he was sending the explosive metal. Without another word, Riger walked over to his Panther, got on the radio, and turned command over to the regimental lieutenantcolonel. Then he slung his pack onto his shoulders, went back to the motorcycle, climbed on behind the driver, and headed back toward Germany.

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Ludmila Gorbunova did not care for Moscow. She was from Kiev, and thought the Soviet capital drab and dull. Her impression of it was not improved by-the endless grilling she'd had from the NKVD. She'd never imagined the mere sight of green collar tabs could reduce her to fearlW incoherence, but it did. And, she knew, things could have been worse. The chekists were treating her with kid gloves because she'd flown Comrade Molotov, second in the Soviet Union only to the Great Stalin, and a man Ao loathed flying, to Germany and brought him home in one piece. Besides, the rodina-the motherlandneeded combat pilots. She'd stayed alive through most of a year against the Nazis and several months against the Lizards. That should have given her value above and beyond what she got for ferrying Molotov around.

Whether it did, however, remained to be seen. A lot of very able, seemingly very valuable people had disappeared over the past few years, denounced as wreckers or traitors to the Soviet Union or sometimes just vanished with no explanation at all, as if they had suddenly ceased to exist ...

The door to the cramped little room (cramped, yes, but infinitely preferable to a cell in the Lefortovo prison) in which she sat came open. The NKVD man who came in wore three crimson oblongs on his collar tabs. Ludmila bounced to her feet. "Comrade Lieutenant-Colonel!" she said, saluting. file:///C|/2590% 20Sci-Fi% 20 and % 20 Fantasy% 20 E-books/Harry% 20 Turtled ove% 20-% 20 Worldwar% 2002% 20-% 20 Tilting% 20 the% 20 Balance.txt

He returned the salute, the first time that had happened since the NKVD started in on her. "Comrade Senior Lieutenant," he acknowledged. "I am Boris Lidov." She blinked in surprise; none of her questioners had bothered giving his name till now, either. Lidov looked more Re a schoolmaster than an NKVD file:///C//2590%20Sci-Fi%20and%20Fantasy%20E-books/Harry%20Turtledove%20-%20Worldwar%2002%20-%20Tilting%20the%20Balance.txt

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man, not that that meant anything. But he surprised her again, saying, "Would you like some tea?"

"Yes, thank you very much, Comrade Lieutenant-Colonel," she answered-quickly, before he changed his mind. The German attack had deranged the Soviet distribution system , that of the Lizards all but destroyed it. These days, tea was rare and precious.

Well, she thought, the NKVD will have it if anyone does. And sure enough, Lidov stuck his head out the door and bawled a request Within moments, someone fetched him a tray with two gently steaming glasses. He took it, set it on the table in front of Ludmila. "Help yourself," he said. "Choose whichever you wish; neither one is drugged, I assure you."

He didn't need to assure her; that he did so made her suspicious again. But she took a glass and drank. Her tongue found nothing in it but tea and sugar. She sipped again, savoring the taste and the warmth. "Thank you, Comrade Lieutenant-Colonel. It's very good," she said.

Lidov made an indolent gesture, as if to say she didn't need to thank him for anything so small. Then he said idly, as if making casual conversation, "You know, I met your Major Jager-no, you've said he's Colonel Jager now, correct?-your Colonel Jager, I should say, after you brought him here to Moscow last summer."

"Ah," Ludmila said, that being the most noncommittal noise she could come up with. She decided it was not enough. "Comrade Lieutenant-Colonel, as I have said before, he is not my colonel by any means."

"I do not necessarily condemn," Lidov said, steepling his fingers. "The ideology of the fascist state is corrupt, not the German people. And!'-he coughed dryly~the coming of the Lizards has shown that progressive economic systems, capitalist and socialist alike, must band together lest we all fall under the oppression of the ancient system wherein the relationship is slave to master, not worker to boss."

"Yes," Ludrnila said eagerly. The last thing she wanted to do was argue about the dialectic of history with an NKVD man, especially when his interpretation seemed to her advantage.

Lidov went on, "Further, your Colonel Jager helped perform a service for the people of the Soviet Union, as he may have mentioned to you."

"No, I'm afraid he didn't. I'm sorry, Comrade Lieutenant-

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Colonel, but we talked very little about the war when we saw each other in Germany. W&-2' Ludmila felt her face heat. She knew what Lidov had to be thinking. Unfortunately-from her point of view-he was right. He looked down his long, straight nose at her. "You like Germans well, don't you?" he said sniffily. "This Jager in Berchtesgaden, and you attached his gunnee!--he pulled out a scrap of paper, checked a name on it-"Georg Schultz, da, to the ground crew at your airstrip."

"He is a better mechanic than anyone else at the airstrip. Germans understand machinery better than we do, I think. But as far as I am concerned, he is only a mechanic," Ludmila insisted.

"He is a German. They are both Germans." So much for Lidov's words about the solidarity of peoples with progressive economic systems. His flat, hard tone made LudnAa think of a trip to Siberia on an unheated cattle car, or of a bullet in the back of the neck. The NKVD man went on, "It is likely that Comrade Molotov will dispense wiAh the services of a pilot who forms such un-Soviet attachments."

"I am sorry to hear that, Comrade Lieutenant-Colonel," Ludmila said, though she knew Molotov would have been glad to dispense with the services of any pilot, given his attitude about flying. But she insisted, "I have no attachments to Georg Schultz save those of the struggle against the Lizards."

"And to Colonel JAgerT' Lidov said with the air of a man calling checkmate. Ludmila did not answer; she knew she was checkmated. The lieutenant-colonel spoke as if pronouncing sentence: "Because of this conduct of yours, you are to be returned to your foriner duties without promotion. Dismissed, Comrade Senior Lieutenant." Ludmila had been braced for ten years in the gulag and another five of internal exile. She needed a moment to take in what she'd just heard. She jumped to her feet. "I serve the Soviet state, Comrade Lieutenant-Colonel!" Whether you believe me or not, she added to herself.

"Prepare yourself for immediate departure for the airport," Lidov said, as if her mere presence polluted Moscow. An NKVD flunky must have been listening outside the door or to a concealed microphone, for in under half a minute a fellow in green collar tabs brought in a canvas bag full of her worldly goods.

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Before long, a troika was taking her from the Kremlin to the airport on the edge of Moscow, The sleigh's runners and the hooves of the three horses that drew it kicked up snow gone from white to gray thanks to city soot. Only when her beloved little U-2 biplane came into view on the runway did she realize she'd been returned to this duty, which she wanted more than any other, as if it were a punishment. She chewed on that a long time, even'after she was in the air.

"I'm bloody lost," David Goldfarb said as he pedaled his RAF bicycle through the countryside south of Leicester. The radarman came to an intersection, He looked for signs to tell him where he was-and looked in vain, because the signs taken down in 1940 to hinder a feared German invasion had never gone back up.

He was trying to get to the Research and Development Test Flying Aerodrome at Bruntingthorpe, to which he'd been ordered to report. South fio?r the village of Peatling Magna, his directions read. The only trouble was, nobody had bothered to tell him (for all he knew, nobody was aware) two roads ran south from Peatling Magna. He'd taken the right-hand track, and was beginning to regret it.

Peatling Magna hadn't looked magna enough to boast two roads when he rolled through it; he wondered if there could possibly be a Peatting Minima, and, if so, whether it was visible to the naked eye.

Ten minutes of steady pedaling brought him into another village, He looked around hopefully for anything resembling an aerodrome, but nothing he saw matched that description. A matronly woman in a scarf and a heavy wool coat was trudging down the street. "Begging your pardon, madam," he called to her, "but is this Bruntingthorpe9"

The woman's head whipped around-his London accent automatically made him out to be a stranger. She relaxed, a little, when she saw he was in RAF dark blue and thus had an excuse for poking his good-sized nose into a place where he didn't belong. But even though she used the broader vowels of the East Midlands, her voice was sharp as she answered, "Bruntingthorpe? I should say not, young man. This is Peatling Parva. Bruntingthorpe lies down that road." She pointed east.

"Thank you, madam," Goldfarb said gravely. He bent low over his bicycle, rode away fast so she wouldn't hear him start

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to snicker, Not Peatling Minima-Peatling Parva. The name fit; it had looked a pretty parva excuse for a village. Now, though, he was on the right track and-he looked at his watch-near enough on time that he could blame his tardiness on the train's getting into Leicester late, which it had. He hadn't gone far toward Bruntingthorpe when he heard a screarriing roar, saw an airplane streak across the sky at what seemed an impossible speed. Alarin and fury coursed through him-had he come here just in time to see the Lizards bomb and wreck the aerodrome?

Then he played in his mind the film of the aircraft he'd just seen. After the Lizards destroyed the radar station at Dover, he'd been an aircraft spotter the old-fashioned way, with binoculars and field telephone, for a while. He recognized the Lizards' fighters and fighter-bombers. This aircraft, even if it flew on jets, didn't match any of them. Either they'd come up with something new or the plane was English.

Hope replaced anger. Where was he more likely to find English jet aircraft than at a research and development aerodrome? He wondered why the powers that & wanted him there. He'd find out soon.

The village of Bruntingthorpe was no more prepossessing than either of the Peatlings. Not far away, though, a collection of tents, corrugated-iron Nissen huts, and macadamized runways marred the gently rolling fields that surrounded the hamlets. A soldier with a tin hat and a Sten gun demanded to see Goldfarb's papers when he pedaled up to the barbed-wire fence and gate around the RAF facility.

He surrendered them, but could not help remarking, "Seems a fairish waste of time, if anyone wants to know. Not bloody likely I'm a Lizard in disguise, is it?"

"Never can tell, chum," the soldier answered. "Besides, you might be a Jerry in disguise, and we're not dead keen on that even if the match there won't be played to a finish."

"CaD't say I blame you." Goldfarb's parents had got out of

Russian-ruled Poland to escape pogroms against the Jews. By all accounts, the Nazis' pogroms after they conquered Poland had been a hundred times worse, bad enough for the Jews there to make common cause with the Lizards against the Germans. Now, from the reports that leaked out, the Lizards were beginning to make things tough on the Jews, Goldfarb sighed. Being a Jew wasn't easy anywhere.

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The sentry opened the gate, waved him through. He rode over to the nearest Nissen hut, got off his bicycle, pushed down the kickstand, and went into the hut. Several RAF men were gathered round a large table there, studying some drawings by the light of a paraffin lamp hung overhead. "Yes?" one of them said.

Goldfarb stiffened to attention: the casual questioner, though just a couple of inches over five feet tall, wore the four narrow stripes of a group captain. Saluting, Goldfarb gave his name, specialization, and service number, then added, "Reporting as ordered sir!"

ne officer returned the salute. "Good to have you with us, Goldfarb. We've had excellent reports of you, and we're confident you'll make a valuable member of the team. I am Group Captain Fred Hipple; I shall be your commanding officer. My speciality is jet propulsion. Here we have Wing Commander Peary, Flight Lieutenant Kerman, and Flight Officer Roundbush."

The junior officers all towered over Hipple, but he dominated nonetheless. He was a dapper little fellow who held himself very erect; he had slicked-down wavy hair, a closely trimmed mustache, and heavy eyebrows. He spoke with almost professional precision: "I am told that you have been flying patrols aboard a radar-equipped Lancaster bomber in an effort to detect Lizard aircraft prior to their reaching our shores."

"Yes, sir, that's correct," Goldfarb said.

"Capital. We shall make great use of your experience, I assure you. What we are engaged in here, Radarman, is developing a jet-propelled fighter aeroplane to be similarly equipped with radar, thus facilitating the acquisition and tracking of targets and, it is to be hoped, their destruction."

"That's---splendid, sir." Goldfarb had always thought of radar as a defensive weapon, one to use to detect the enemy and send properly armed planes after him. But to mount it on a fighter already formidably armed in its own right ... He smiled. This was a project in which he would gladly take part.

Flight Officer Roundbush shook his head. He was as big and blond and blocky as Hipple was spare and dark. He said, "It'd be a lot more splendid if we could make the bloody thing fit in the space we have for it."

"Which is, at the moment, essentially nil," Hipple said with a rueful nod. "The jet fighter you may have seen taking off a

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few moments ago, that little Gloster Pioneer, is not what one would call lavishly equipped with room. It was, in fact, in the air more than a year before the Lizards came." Bitterness creased his face. "As I had produced a working jet engine as far back as 1937, 1 find the delay unfortunate, but no help for it now. When the Lizards descended, the Pioneer, though intended only as an experimental aircraft, was rushed into production to give us as much of an equalizer as was possible."

"Might as well be tanks," Roundbush murmured. Both the German invasion of France and the fighting in the North Afri-

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can desert had shown severe deficiencies in British armor, but the same old obsolescent models kept getting made because they did work, after a fashion, and England had no time to too] up to build anything better.

Group Captain Hipple shook his head. "It's not as bad as that, Basil. We have managed to get the Meteor off the ground, after all," He turned back to Goldfarb. "The Meteor is more a proper fighter than the Pioneer. ne latter carries a single jet engine placed in back of the cockpit, whereas the former has two, of an improved design, mounted on the wings ~ The improvement in performance is considerable."

"We also have a considerable production program laid on for the Meteor," Flight Lieutenant Kennan said. "With luck, we should be able to put large numbers of jet fighters into the air by this time next year."

"Yes, that's so, Maurice," Hipple agreed. "Of all the great powers, we and the Japanese have proved most fortunate, in that the Lizards did not invade either island nation. From the depths of space, I suppose we seemed too small to be worth troubling over. We've endured a worse blitz than the Jerries gave us, but life does go on despite a blitz. You should know that, eh, Goldfarb?"

"Yes, sir," Goldfarb said. "It got a bit lively at Dover now and again, but we came through." Though only a firstgeneration Englishman, he had a knack for understatement. "Exactly," Hipple's nod was vehement, as if Goldfarb had

said something important. The group captain went on, "As Flight Lieutenant Kerman and I have noted, our industrial capacity is still respectable, and we shall be able to get considerable numbers of Meteors airborne within a relatively short period. What point to it, however, if, once airborne, they are shot down again in short order?"

"Which is where you come in, Goldfarb," Wing Commander Peary said. He was a slim fellow of medium height with sandy hair starting to go gray; his startling bass voice seemed better suited to a man of twice his bulk. "Exactly," Hippie said again. "Julian-the wing command-A~,v er-means we need a chap with practical experience in airborne radar to help us plan its installation in Meteors as quickly as possible. Our pilots must be able to detect the enemy's presence at a distance comparable to that at which he can ,see' us. D'you follow?" "I believe so, sir," Goldfarb said. "From what you say, I gather you intend the Meteor to have a two-man cockpit, pilot and radar observer. With the sets we have, sir, a pilot would be hard-pressed to tend to them and fly the aircraft at the same time." The four RAF officers exchanged glances. Goldfarb wondered if he'd just stuck his foot in it. That would be lovely, a lowly radarman affronting all his superiors within five minutes of arriving at a new posting. Then Julian Peary rumbled, "This is a point which was much debated during the design of the aircraft. You may be interested to know that the view you just expressed is the one which prevailed." "I'm-pleased to hear that, sir," Goldfarb said, with such transparent relief that Basil Roundbush, who seemed not overburdened with military formality, broke into a large, toothy grin. Group Captain Hippie said, "Having established your level of expertise with such dispatch, Radarman, you give me hope you will also be able to assist us in reducing the size of the radar set to be carried. The fuselage of the Meteor is rather less spacious than the bomb bay of the Lancaster where you were previously ensconced. Perhaps you'll have a look at these drawings with us so you can get a notion of the volume involved---Goldfarb stepped up to the table. With no more fanfare than that, he found himself a part of the team. He said, "I don't know the solution to one problem we faced in the Lane." "Which is?" Hippie asked. "Of course, the Lizards' guided rockets can knock down a plane at longer range than any guns that we have can hit back. One of those rockets definitely seems to home in on our radar Harry Turtledove 45 transniissions-probably the same sort the Lizards used to knock out our ground stations. Turning off the set made that particular rocket go wild, but it also left us blind-something I shouldn't fancy if I were in the midst of a dogfight." "Indeed not." Hipple nodded vigorously. "Even under ideal

circumstances; the Meteor does not pull us level with the Lizards; it merely reduces our disadvantage. We remain deficient in speed and, as you say, in armament as well. To have to engage enemy aircraft without being able to detect them past the range of the pilot's eye would be a dreadful handicap. I do not pretend to be an expert in radar; as I said, engines are my speciality." He turned to the other officers. "Suggestions, gentlemen?"

Basil Roundbush said, "Can your airborne radar set emit more than one frequency, Goldfarb? If so, perhaps switching between one and the next might, ah, confuse the rocket and cause it to rniss without losing radar capacity."

"That might work, sir; I honestly don't know," Goldfarb said. "We weren't any too keen on experimenting, not up above Angels Twenty, if you know what I mean." '

"No quarrel there," Roundbush assured him. "We'd have to try it on the ground first: if a transmitter there survived by shifting frequencies, the result might be worth testing in aircraft as well." He paused to scribble some notes. Goldfarb was delighted' research and development had not stopped because of wartime emergencies, and even more delighted to be a part of the effort at Bruntingthorpe. But he'd already promised himself that, when the radar-equipped Meteors flew, he'd be in the rear seat of one of them. Having become part of an aircrew, he knew he'd never again be content to stay on the ground.

Moishe Russie was tired of staying underground. The irony of his position hit him in the teeth like a rifle butt in the hands Of an SS man. When the Lizards came to Earth, he'd thought they were the literal answer to his prayers; absent their arrival, the Nazis would have massacred the Jews in the Warsaw ghetto, and in the others they'd set up throughout Poland.

The Jews had been looking for a miracle then. When Moishe declared that he'd had one, he gained enormous prestige in the ghetto; before, he'd been just another medical student slowly starving to death along with everyone else. He'd

urged the Jews to rise, to help throw the Germans out and let the Lizards in.

And so he'd become one of the Lizards' favorite humans. He'd broadcast propaganda for them, telling-truthfully----of the horrors and atrocities the Nazis had committed in Poland. The Lizards came to think he would say anything for them. They'd wanted him to praise their destruction of Washington, D.C., and say it was as just as the devastation that had fallen on Berlin.

He'd refused ... and so he found himself here, biding in a ghetto bunker that had been built with the Nazis, not the Lizards, in mind.

His wife Rivka picked that moment to ask, "How long have we been down here?"

"Foo long," their son Reuven chimed in.

He was right; Moishe knew he was right. Reuven and Rivka had been cooped up in the bunker longer than he had; they'd gone into hiding so the Lizards couldn't use threats against them to bend him to their will. After that, the Lizards put a gun to his head to make him say what they wanted. He did not think of himself as a brave man, but he'd defied them even so. They hadn't killed him. In a way, what they did was worsethey killed his words, broadcasting a twisted recording that made him seem to say what they wanted even when he hadn't.

Russie had had his revenge; he'd made a recording in a tiny studio in the ghetto that detailed what the Lizards had done to him, and the Jewish fighters had managed to smuggle it out of Poland to embarrass the aliens. After that, he'd had to disappear himself.

Rivka said, "Do you even know, Moishe, whether it's day or night up there?"

"No more than you do," he admitted. The bunker had a clock; both he and Rivka had been faithful about keeping it wound. But the clock had only a twelve-hour dial, and after a while they'd lost track of which twelve hours they were in. Even by candlelight, he could see the dial from where he stood: it was a quarter past three. But did that mean bustling afternoon or dead of night? He had no idea. All he knew was that, at the moment, everyone here was awake.

"I don't know how much longer we can stand this," Rivka said. "It's no fit life for a human being, hiding down here in the darkness like a rat in its hole."

> Harry Turtl"But if it's the only way we can go on, then go on we will, n if we are underground

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we're better off now than when the Nazis ruled the ghetto."
 "Are we?"

"I think so. We have plenty of food-" Their other child, daughter, had died during the Nazi occupation, of dysenter3 aggravated by starvation. Moishe had known what he neede(to do to save her, but without food and medicine he'd been helpless. But now Rivka said, "So what? We could see our friends before, share our troubles. If the Germans beat us on the streets, it was just because we happened to be there. If the Lizards spy us, they'll shoot us on sight."

Since that was manifestly true, Moishe chose the only ploy left to him: he changed the subject. "Even now, our people are better off under the Lizards than they were under the Germans."

"Yes, and that's thanks in large part to you," Rjvka retorted. "And what have you got for it? Your whole family, buried alive!" So much anger and bitterness clogged her voice that Reuven started to cry. Even as he comforted his son, Moishe blessed the little boy for short-circuiting the argument.

After he and Rivka got Reuven calmed down again, Moishe said carefully, "If you feel you must, I suppose you and Reuven can go back above ground. Not that many people knew you by sight; with God's help, you might go a long time before you were betrayed. Anyone who wanted to curry favor with the Lizards could gain it by turning me in. Or a Pole might do it for no better reason than that he hates Jews."

Rivka sighed. "You know we won't do that. We won't leave you, and you're right, you can't come up. But if you think we're well off here, you're meshuggeh."

"I never said we were well off," Russie answered after a brief pause to search his memory and make sure he really hadn't said anything so foolish. "I only said things could be worse, and they could." The Nazis could have shipped the whole Warsaw ghetto to Treblinka or that other extermination camp they were just finishing when the Lizards came, the one they called Auschwitz. He didn't mention that to his wife. Some things, even if true, were too horrific to use as fuel in a quarrel.

The argument petered out. Reuven got sleepy, so they put him to bed. That meant they needed to go to bed themselves not much later; they couldn't get much sleep when the boy was awake and bouncing off the walls of the cramped bunker.

Noises woke Rivka first, then Moishe. Reuven snored on, even when his parents sat up. Noises in the cellar of the block of flats that concealed the bunker were always frightening. At times, Jewish fighters whom Mordechai Anielewicz led came down with fresh supplies for the Russies, but Moishe always wondered if the next appearance would be the one that brought the knock on the plasterboard panel hiding the doorway.

Rap, rap, rap! The sharp sound echoed through the bunker. Russie started violently. Beside him, Rivka's lips pulled back from her teeth, her eyes widened, and the skin all over her face tightened down onto the bones in a mask of fear. Rap, rap, rap!

Russie had vowed he wouldn't go easily. Moving as quiet as he could, he slid out of bed, grabbed a long kitchen knife, and blew out the last lamp, plunging the bunker into darkness blacker than any above-ground midnight.

Rap, rap, rap! Shoving and scraping noises as the plasterboard panel was dislodged and pushed aside. The bunker door itself was barred from the inside. Moishe knew it wouldn't hold against anyone determined to break it down. He raised the knife high. ne first one who came through-Jewish traitor or Lizard-would take as much steel as he could give. That much he promised himself.

But instead of boated feet pounding on the door or a battering ram crashing against it, an urgent Yiddish voice called, "We know you're in there, Reb Moishe. Open this verkakte door, will you? We have to get you away before the Lizards come."

A trick? A trap? Automatically, Moishe looked toward Rivka. The darkness he'd made himself stymied him. "What to doT' he called softly.

"Open the door," she answered.

"But--2'

"Open the door," Rivka repeated. "Nobody in the company of the Lizards would have sworn at it that way." It seemed a slim reed to snatch. If it broke, it would pierce

more than his hand. But how could he hold the invaders at bay? All at once, he realized they didn't have to come in after

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mhiamc-liSup-pgonse bbellyeistist. s or started a fire and let him and his wife and child roast? He let the kitchen knife clatter to the floor, fumbled blindly for the bar, lifted it out of its rest, and pushed the door open.

One of the two Jews in the cellar carried an oil-burning lantern and a pistol. The lantern wasn't very bright, but dazzled Moishe anyhow. The fighter said, "Took you long enough. Come on. You have to hurry. Some mamzer talked where he shouldn't, and the Lizards'll be here soon." file:///C//2590%20Sci-Fi%20and%20Fantasy%20E-books/Harry%20Turtledove%20-%20Worldwar%2002%20-%20Tilting%20the%20Balance.txt

Belief took root in Russie. "Get Reuven," he called to his
Wife.
 "I have him," she answered. "He's not quite awake, but
he'll come-won't you, dear?"
 "Come where?" Reuven asked blurrily.
 "Out of the bunker," Rivka said, that being all she knew. It
was plenty to galvanize the boy. He let out a wild whoop and
bounded out of bed. "Wait!" Rivka exclaimed. "You need your
shoes. In fact, we all need our shoes. We were asleep."
 "At half past eight in the morning?" the Jew with the lantern
said. "I wish I was." After a moment, though, he added, "Not
down here, though, I have to admit."
 Moishe had forgotten he wore only socks. As he pulled on

shoes and tied the laces, he asked, "Do we have time to take

anything with usT' The books on a high shelf had become more like siblings than friends.

But the other Jew impatiently waiting outside, the one with a German Mauser slung on his back, shook his head and answered, "Reb Moishe, if you don't get moving, you won't have time to take yourself."

Even the low-ceilinged cellar seemed spacious to Moishe. He started to pant on his way up the stairs; he'd had no exercise at a] I in the bunker. The gray, leaden light at the top of the stairwell made him blink and set his eyes to watering. After so long with candles and oil lamps, even a distant hint of daylight was overwhelming.

Then he walked out onto the street. Thick clouds hid the sun. Dirty, slushy snow lay in the gutters. The air was hardly less thick and smoky than it had been in his underground hideaway. All the same, he wanted to throw his arms wide and dance like a Chasid to let loose his delight. Reuven did caper, coltlike; with a child's compressed grasp of time, he must have

felt he'd been entombed forever. Rivka walked steadily beside him, but her pale face was alight with joy and wonder, too.

Pale- Moishe looked down at his own hands. Beneath dirt, they were white and transparent as skimmed milk. His wife and son were just as pale. Everyone grew pallid through a Polish winter; but if he and his family lost any more color, they'd disappear.

"What's the date?" he asked, wondering how long he'd been cooped up in the bunker.

"Twenty-second of February," the Jew with the lantern answered. "A month till spring." He snorted. Spring seemed more likely a year away than mere weeks.

The first Lizard Moishe saw on the street made him want to run back to the bunker. The alien, though, paid him no special attention. Lizards had as much trouble telling humans apart as people did with Lizards. Moishe glanced over to Reuven and Rivka. The aliens' difficulties in that regard had helped the Jews spirit the two of them away from right under their snouts.

"In here," the fighter with the pistol said. The Russies obediently went up a stairway and into another block of flats. The halls smelled of cabbage and unwashed bodies and urine. In an apartment at the back of the third floor, more of Anielewicz's warriors waited. They whisked Moishe and his family inside.

One of them grabbed Moishe by the arm and hustled him over to a table set out with a bar of yellow-tan soap, an enameled basin, a pair of shears, and a straight razor. "The beard, Reb Moishe, has to come off," he said without preamble.

Moishe drew back in dismay. A protective hand rose to cover his chin. The SS had cut off the beards-and sometimes the ears and noses--of Jews in the ghetto for sport.

"I'm sorry," the fellow-bearded himself-said. "We're going to move you, we're going to hide you. Look at yourself now." He picked up a fragment of what might once have been a full-length mirror, thrust it in Moishe's face.

Moishe perforce looked. He saw-himself, paler than usual, his beard longer and fuzzier than usual because he hadn't bothered trimming it while in the bunker, but otherwise the same rather horse-faced, studious-looking Jew he'd always been.

The fighter said, "Now imagine yourself clean-shaven. Imagine a Lizard with a photograph of you as you are now looking at you-and walking on to look at someone else." The closest Moishe could come to seeing himself beardless

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was remembering what he'd looked like before his whiskers sprouted. He had trouble bringing the youth across the years and putting that face on the man he'd become. Then Rivka said, "They're right, Moishe. It will make you different, and we need that. Please, go ahead and shave." He sighed deeply, a token of surrender. Then he took the mirror from the fighter and leaned it on a shelf so he could see file:///C|/2590% 20Sci-Fi% 20 and % 20 Fantasy% 20 E-books/Harry% 20 Turtled ove% 20-% 20 Worldwar% 2002% 20-% 20 Tilting% 20 the% 20 Balance.txt the state of the state of

what he was doing. He picked up the shears and rapidly clipped as short as he could the beard he'd wom his whole adult life. What he knew about shaving was all theoretical. He splashed his face with water, then lathered the strong-smelling soap and spread it over cheeks and chin and neck. Reuven snickered. "You look funny, Father!"

"I feet funny." He picked up the razor. The bone grip molded itself to his hand, like the handle of a scalpel. The comparison seemed even more apt a few minutes later. He thought he'd seen less blood flow at an appendectomy. He nicked his ear, the hollow under his cheekbone, his chin, his larynx, and he made a good game try at slicing off his upper lip. When he rinsed himself, the water in the basin turned pink. "You look funny, Father," Reuven said again. Moishe peered into the scrap of mirror. A stranger stared back at him. He looked younger than he had with the beard, but not really like his earlier self. His features were sharperedged, bonier, more defined. He looked tougher than he'd expected. The dried blood here and there on his face might have had something to do with that; it gave him the air of a boxer who'd just lost a tough match.

The fellow who'd handed him the mirror patted him on the back and said, "Don't worry, Reb Moishe. They say it gets easier with practice." He wasn't speaking from experience; his own gray-brown beard reached halfway down his shirtfront.

Russie started to tied, then stopped and stared. It hadn't occurred to him that he'd have to do this more than once. But of course the fighter was right-if he wanted to keep up his disguise, he'd have to go on shaving. It struck him as a great waste of time. Even so, after he rinsed and dried the razor, he stuck it into a pocket of his long, dark coat.

The man with the pistol who'd plucked him from the bunker said, "All right, I think we can get you out of here now without too many people recognizing you."

His own mother wouldn't have recognized him ... but she

was dead, like his daughter, of intestinal disease aggravated by starvation. He said, "If I stay in Warsaw, sooner or later I'll be spotted."

"of course," the fighter said. "So you won't stay in Warsaw. "

It made sense. It was like a kick in the belly just the same. He'd spent his whole life here. Till the Lizards came, he'd been sure he would die here, too. "Where will I-where will we-go?" he asked quietly.

"Lodz," the fellow answered.

The word tolled through the room like the deep chime of a funeral bell at a Catholic church. The Germans had done their worst to the Lodz ghetto, second largest in Poland after Warsaw, s, just before the Lizards came. Many of the quartermillion Jews who had lived there were shipped to Chelmno and Treblinka, never to come out again.

Russie's newly bared face must have shown his thoughts all too clearly. The Jewish fighter said, "I understand how you feel, Reb Moishe, but it's the best place. No one, not even, God willing, a Lizard, would think to look for you there, and if you're needed, we can bring you back in a hurry." He could not fault the logic, but when he looked at Rivka,

he saw the same sick dread in her eyes that he felt himself. The Jews of Lodz had passed into the valley of the shadow of death. Going to live in a town where that shadow had fallen ...

"Some of us still survive in Lodz," the fighter said. "We'd not send you there otherwise, you may be sure of that." "Let it be so, then," Russie said with a sigh.

The fighter with the pistol drove the horse-drawn wagon out of Warsaw. Russie sat beside him, feeling horribly visible and vulnerable. Rivka and Reuven huddled in back along with several other women and children amid scraps and rags and oddshaped pieces of sheet metal: the stock of a junkman's trade.

The Lizards had a checkpoint on the highway just outside of town. One of the males there carried a photograph of Russie with his beard. His heart thuttered in alarm. But after a cursory glance, the Lizard turned to his comrade and said in his own language, "Just another boring bunch comrade waved the wagon ahead.

After a couple of kilometers, the fighter pulled over to the qide of the road. The women and children who had served to

of Big Uglies." The

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camouflage Reuven and Rivka got down and started walking back to Warsaw. The fighter flicked the reins, clucked to the horse. The wagon rattled down the road toward Lodz.

Liu Han looked mistrustfully at the latest assortment of canned goods the little scaly devils had brought into her cell.

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She wondered what was most likely to stay down this time. The salty soup with noodles and bits of chicken, perhaps, and the canned fruit in syrup. She knew she wouldn't touch the stew with the thick gravy; she'd already given that back twice. She sighed. Being pregnant was hard enough anywhere. It was even worse imprisoned here in this airplane that never

came down. Not only was she alone in the little metal room except when the scaly devils brought Bobby Fiore to her, but almost all her food was put up by foreign devils like him and not to her taste.

She ate what she could, wishing she were back in her Chinese village or even in the prison camp from which the little scaly devils had plucked her. In either place, she would have been among her own kind, not caged all alone like a songbird for the amusement of her captors. If she ever got out of here, she vowed she would free every bird she could. Not that getting out seemed likely. She shook her head-no indeed. Her straight black hair tumbled over her face, over her bare shoulders-the scaly devils, who wore no clothes themselves, allowed their human prisoners none and kept the cell too warm to make them comfortable anyhow-and across her newly tender breasts. Her hair hadn't been long enough to do that when the little devils brought her up here. It was now, and growing toward her waist.

She belched uncomfortably and got ready to dash for the plumbing hole. But what she'd eaten decided to stay where it belonged. She wasn't sure exactly how far gone she was, not in here where the little scaly devils never turned off the light to let her reckon-the passage of days. But she wasn't throwing up as much as she had at first. Her belly hadn't started to swell, though. Getting close to four months was the best guess she could make.

Part of the floor, instead of being metal like the rest, was a raised mat covered with slick gray stuff that looked more like leather than anything else but didn't smell like it. Her body, sweaty in the heat, stuck to the mat when she lay down on

it, but it was still better for resting than anywhere else in the cell. She closed her eyes, tried to sleep. She'd been sleeping a lot lately, partly because she was pregnant and partly because she had nothing better to do.

She was just dozing off when the door to her cell hissed open again. She opened one eye, sure it would be the little devil who came in to take away the cans after every meal. Sure enough, in he skittered, but several others came with him. A couple of them had body paint more ornate than she was used to seeing.

One, to her surprise, spoke Chinese after a fashion. Pointing to her, he said, "You come with us."

She quickly got to her feet. "It shall be done, superior sir," she said, using one of the phrases she'd learned of the little devils' language.

The devils fell in around her at more than arm's length. She was on the small side, an inch or so above five feet, but she towered over the scaly devils, enough so to make them nervous around her. She joined them eagerly enough; any trip out of her cell was unusual enough to count as a treat. And maybe, better still, they would take her to Bobby Fiore.

They didn't; they led her in the opposite direction from his cell. She wondered what they wanted with her. Wondering made her hopeful and anxious by turns. They might do anything at all to her, from setting her free to taking her away from Bobby Fiore and giving her to some new man who would rape and beat her. She had no say. She was just a prisoner.

What they did reached neither extreme. They took her down an oddly curved stairway to another deck. She felt lighter there than she should have; her stomach didn't like it. But much of her fear went away. She knew they'd brought Bobby Fiore here, and nothing too bad had happened to him.

The scaly devils escorted her into a chamber full of their incomprehensible gadgetry. The devil sitting behind the desk surprised her by speaking fair Chinese: "You are the female human Liu Han?"

"Yes," she answered. "Who are you, please?" Her own language tasted sweet in her mouth. Even with Bobby Fiore, she spoke a curious mixture of Chinese, English, and the little devils' tongue, eked out with much gesture and dumb show. "I am called Nossat," the scaly devil answered. "I am a-I

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do not know it, Your language has an exact word for it-I a, a male who studies how you humans think. I am colleague Tessrek, who spoke with your mate Bobby Fiore."

"Yes, I understand," Liu Han said. That was the little scal devil with whom Bobby Fiore had spoken down here. Wh had he called the devil Tessrek? English had a name for wha that devil did-psychologist, that was it, Liu Han relaxed Talking could not be dangerous.

Nossat said, "You are going to lay an egg in the fime t come? No, your kind does not lay eggs. You are going to givt

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birth? Is that what you say, 'give birth'? You will have z child?"

"I am going to have a child, yes," Liu Han agreed. Of themselves, the fingers of her right hand spread fanlike over her belly. She had long since resigned herself to being naked in front of the scaly devils, but she remained automatically protective of the baby growing inside her,

"The child is from matings between Bobby Fiore and you?" Nossat said. Without waiting for her to reply, he stuck one of his thin, clawed fingers into a recess on the desk. A screen, as if for motion pictures, lit up behind him. The picture that

moved upon it was of Bobby Fiore thrusting atop Liu Han. She sighed. She knew the little scaly devils took pictures of her while she made love, as well as any other time they chose. They had mating seasons like farm animals, and were utterly uninterested in matters of the flesh at any other time. The way people mated the whole year round seemed to fascinate and appall them.

"Yes," she answered as the picture played on, "Bobby Fiore and I made love to start this baby." Before long it would begin to kick inside her, hard enough to feel. She re~;~bered what a marvel that was from the boy she'd borne her husband before the Japanese killed him and the child.

Nossat stuck his finger into a different recess. Liu Han was not sorry to see the picture of her joined gasping to Bobby Fiore fade. A different moving picture took its place, this one of an immensely pregnant black woman giving birth to her baby. Liu Han watched the woman with more interest than the birth process: she knew about that, but she'd never before seen a black, man or woman. She hadn't known the palms of their hands and soles of their feet were so pale.

"This is how your young are born?" Nossat said as the baby's head and then shoulders emerged from between the straining woman's legs.

"What else could it possibly be?" To Liu Han, the little scaly devils were an incomprehensible blend of immense and terrifying powers on the one hand and childishly abysmal ignorance on the other.

"This is---dreadful," Nossat said. The motion picture kept running. The woman delivered the afterbirth. It should have been over then. But she kept on bleeding. The blood was hard to see against her dark skin, but it spread over and soaked into the ground where she lay. The little scaly devil went on, "This female died after the young Tosevite came out of her body. Many females in the land we hold have died bearing their young."

"fbat does happen, yes," Liu Han said quietly. It was not something she cared to think about. Not just bleeding, but a baby trying to come out while in the wrong position, or fever afterwards ... so many things could go wrong. And so many babies never lived to see their second birthday, their first outside their mother.

"But it's not tight," Nossat exclaimed, as if he held her personally responsible for the way people had their babies. "No other kind of intelligent creature we know puts its mothers in such danger just to carry on life."

Liu Han had never imagined any kind of intelligent creatures but human beings until the little scaly devils came. Even after she knew of the devils, she hadn't thought there could be still more varieties of such creatures. Irritation in her voice, she snapped, "Well, how do you have your babies, then?" For all she knew, the little devils might have been assembled in factories rather than born.

"Our females lay eggs, of course," Nossat said. "So do those of the Rabotevs and Hallessi, over whom we rule. Only you Tosevites are different." His weird eyes swiveled so that one watched the screen behind him while the other stayed accusingly on Liu Han.

She fought to keep from laughing, fought and lost. The idea of making a n6st--out of straw, maybe, like a chicken's-and then sitting on it till the brood hatched was absurd enough to tickle her fancy. Hens certainly didn't seem to have trouble

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laying eggs, either. It might be an easier way to do the job. But it wasn't the way people did it. Nossat said, "Your time to have the young come out of your body is now about a year awayT' "A year?" Liu Han stared at him. Didn't the little scaly devils know anything? But the devil said, "No--4his is my mistake, for two years of the Race, more or less, make one of yours. I should sayshould have said-you are half a year from your time?" "Half a year, yes," Liu Han said. "Maybe not quite so long."

"We have to decide what to do with you," Nossat told her. "We have no knowledge of how to help you when the young is bom. You are only a barbarous Tosevite, but we do not want you to die because we are ignorant. You are our subject, not our enemy."

Fear blew through Liu Han, a cold wind. Give birth here, in this place of metal, with only scaly devils beside her, without a midwife to help her through her pangs? If the least little thing went wrong, she would die, and the baby, too. "I will need help," she said, as plaintively as she could. "Please get some for me." "We are still planning," Nossat said, which was neither yes nor no. "We will know what we do before your time comes." "What if the baby is early?" Liu Han said. The little devil's eyes both swung toward her. 'This can

happen?"

"Of course it can," Liu Han said. But nothing was of course for the little scaly devils, not when they knew so little about how mankind-and, evidently, womankind-functioned. Then, suddenly, Liu Han had an idea that felt so brilliant, she hugged herself in delight. "Superior sit, would you let me go back down to my own people so a midwife could help me deliver the baby?"

"This had not been thought of." Nossat made a distressed hissing noise. "I see, though, from where you stand, it may have merit. You are not the only female specimen on this ship who will have young bom. We will-how do you say?consider. Yes. We will' consider."

"Thank you very much, superior sir." Liu Han looked down at the floor, as she had seen the scaly devils do when they

meant to show respect. Hope sprang up in her like rice plants in spring.

"Or maybe," Nossat said, "maybe we bring up a-what word did you use?-a midwife, yes, maybe we bring up a midwife to this ship to help you here. We will consider that, too. You go now."

The guards took Liu Han out of the psychologist's office, led her back to her cell. She felt heavier with each step up the curiously curving stairway that returned her to her deck-and also because the hope which had sprouted now began to wilt. But it didn't quite die. The little scaly devils hadn't said no.

A blank-faced Nipponese guard shoved a bowl of rice between the bars of Teerts' cell. Teerts bowed to show he was grateful. Feeding prisoners at all was, in Nipponese eyes, a mercy: a proper warrior would die fighting rather than let himself be captured. The Nipponese were in any case sticklers for their own forms of courtesy. Anyone who flouted them was apt to be beaten-or worse.

Since the Nipponese shot down his killercraft, Teerts had had enough beatings-and worse-that he never wanted another (which didn't mean he wouldn't get one). But he hated rice. Not only was it the food of his captivity, it wasn't something any male of the Race would eat by choice. He wanted meat and could not remember the last time he'd tasted it. This bla.n~, glutinous vegetable matter kept him alive, although he often wished it wouldn't.

No, that was a falsehood. If he'd wanted to die, he had only to starve himself to death. He did not think the Nipponese would force him to eat; if anything, he might gain their respect by perishing this way. That he cared whether these barbarous Big Uglies respected him showed how low he had sunk.

He lacked the nerve to put an end to himself, though; the Race did not commonly use suicide as a way out of trouble. And so, miserably, he ate, half wishing he never saw another grain of rice, half wishing his bowl held more.

He finished just before the guard came back and took away the bowl. He bowed again in gratitude for that service, though the guard would also have taken it even if he hadn't finished. After the guard left, Teerts resigned himself to another in-

definitely long stretch of tedium. So far as he knew, he was the

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only prisoner of the Race the Nipponese held here at Nagasaki. No cells within speaking distance of him held even Big Ugly prisoners, lest he somehow form a conspiracy with them and escape. He let his mouth fall open in bitter laughter at the likelihood of that.

Six-legged Tosevite pests scuttled across the concrete floor. Teerts let his eye turrets follow the creatures. He had nothing in particular against them. The real pests on Tosev 3 were the ones who walked upright. file:///C//2590%20Sci-Fi%20and%20Fantasy%20E-books/Harry%20Turtledove%20-%20Worldwar%2002%20-%20Tilting%20the%20Balance.txt

He drifted away into a fantasy where his killercraft's turbofans hadn't tried to breathe bullets instead of air. He could have been back at a comfortably heated barracks talking with his comrades or watching the screen or piping music through a button taped to a hearing diaphragm. He could have been snapping bites off a chunk of dripping meat. He could have been in his killercraft again, helping to bring the pestilential Big Uglies under the Race's control.

Though he heard footsteps coming down the corridor toward him, he did not swing his eyes to see who was approacNng. That would have returned him to grim reality too abruptly to bear.

But then the maker of those footsteps stopped outside his cell. Teerts quickly put fantasy aside, like a male saving a

computer document so he can attend to something more urgent. His bow was deeper than the one he'd given the guard who fed him. "Konichiwa, Major Okamoto," he said in the Nipponese he was slowly acquiring.

"Good day to you as well," Okamoto answered in the language of the Race. He was more fluent in it than Teerts was in Nipponese. Learning a new tongue did not come naturally to males of the Race; the Empire had had but one for untold thousands of years. But Tosev 3 was a mosaic of dozens, maybe hundreds, of languages. Picking up one more was nothing out of the ordinary for a Big Ugly. Okamoto had been Teerts' interpreter and interrogator ever since he was captured. The Tosevite glanced down the hall. Teerts heard jingling keys as a warder drew near. Another round of questions, then, the pilot thought. He bowed to the warder to show he was grateful for the boon of leaving the cell. Actually he wasn't; as

long as he stayed in here, no one hurt him. But the forms had

to be observed.

A soldier with a rifle tramped right behind the warder. He covered Teerts as the other male used the key. Okamoto also drew his pistol and held it on Teerts. The pilot would have laughed, except it wasn't really funny. He only wished he were as dangerous as the Big Uglies thought he was.

The interrogation room was on an upper floor of the prison. Teerts had seen next to nothing of Nagasaki. He knew it lay by the sea; he'd come here by ship after being evacuated from the mainland when Harbin fell to the Race. He didn't miss seeing the sea. After that nightmare voyage of storms and sickness, he hoped he'd never see-much less ride upon-another overgrown Tosevite ocean again.

The guard opened the door. Teerts walked in, bowed to the Big Uglies inside. They wore white coats rather than uniforms like Okamoto's. Scientists, not soldiers, Teerts thought. He'd come to realize the Tosevites used clothing to indicate job and status as the Race used body paint. The Big Uglies, however, were much less systematic and consistent about it-typical of them, he thought.

Nonetheless, he was glad not to face another panel of officers. The military males had been much quicker than scientists to resort to the instruments of painful persuasion in the interrogation room.

One of the men in white addressed Teerts in barking Nipponese, much too fast for him to follow. He turned both eye turrets toward Major Okamoto, who translated: "Dr. Nakayama asks whether, as has been reported, all members of the Race who have come to Tosev 3 are male."

"Hai," Teerts answered. "Honto. "Yes, that was the truth. Nakayama, a slim male on the small side for a Tosevite, asked another long question in his own tongue. Okamoto translated again: "He asks how you can hope to keep Tosev 3 with males alone."

"We don't, of course," Teerts answered. "We who are here make up the conquest fleet. Our task is to subjugate this world, not to colonize it. The colonization fleet will come. It was being organized even as we set out, and will arrive in this solar system about forty years from now."

So long a gap should have given the males of the conquest fleet plenty of time to get Tosev 3 into good running order for the colonists. It would have done just that, had the Big Uglies been the pre-industrial savages the Race thought they were.

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Teerts still thought they were savages, but, worse luck, they were anything but pre-industrial.

All three Nipponese in white started talking volubly at one another. Finally one of them put a question to Teerts. "Dr. Higuchi wants to know whether you mean your years or ours."

"Ours," Teerts said; would he waste his time leaming Tosevite measurements? "Yours is longer-I don't remember file:///C//2590%20Sci-Fi%20and%20Fantasy%20E-books/Harry%20Turtledove%20-%20Worldwar%2002%20-%20Tilting%20the%20Balance.txt

"So, then, this colonization fleet, as you call it, will arrive on our planet in fewer than forty years' time as we reckon iff Higuchi said. "Yes, superior sir." Teerts suppressed a sigh. It should have been so easy: smash the Big Uglies, prepare the planet for full exploitation, then settle down and wait till the colonists arrived and were thawed out. When at last he smelled mating pheromones again, Teerts might even have sired a couple of clutches of eggs himself. Raising hatchlings, of course, was females' work, but he liked thinking of passing on his genes so he could contribute to the future of the Race.

The way things looked now, this world might still be troublesome when the colonization fleet got here. And even if it

how much."

wasn't, his own chance of being around to join the colony's gene pool wasn't big enough to be visible to the naked eye-he couldn't see it, at any rate.

He had a while to think of such things, because the Nipponese were chattering furiously among themselves again. Finally the male who hadn't addressed him before spoke through Major Okamoto: "Dr. Tsuye wishes to know the size of the colonization fleet as opposed to that of the conquest fleet."

"The colonization fleet is not opposed to the conquest fleet," Teerts said. Clearing up the idiom took a couple of minutes. Then he said, "The colonization fleet is larger, superior sir. It has to be: it carries many more males and females as well as what they will need to establish themselves here on Tosev 3." His answer produced more sharp colloquy among the Nip-

ponese. Then the one named Tsuye said, "This colonization fleet-is it, ah, as heavily armed as your invasion fleetT' "No, of course not. There would be no need-" Teerts cor-

rected himself. "There was thought to be no need for including many weapons with the colonization fleet. It was assumed that you Tosevites would already be thoroughly subdued by the time the colonists arrived here. We hadn't counted on your re-

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sisting so ferociously." I hadn't counted on being shot down, the pilot added to himself

His words seemed to please the Nipponese. They bared their flat, square teeth in the facial gesture they used to show they were happy. Major Okamoto said, "All Tosevites are brave, and we Nipponese the bravest of the brave."

"Hai, " Teerts said. "Honto. " The interrogation broke up not long after that. Okamoto and the guard, who had waited outside, escorted Teerts back to his cell. That evening, he found small chunks of meat mixed in with his rice. That had only happened a couple of times before. Flattery, he thought as he gratefully swallowed them down, had got him something.

Mutt Daniels looked at his hand: four clubs and the queen of hearts. He discarded the queen. "Gimme one," he said.

"One," Kevin Donlan agreed. "Here you go, Sarge." The new card was a diamond. None of the other soldiers in the game would have known it from Mutt's face. He'd played countless hours of poker on trains and bus rides as a minorleague (and, briefly, major-league) catcher and as a longtime n-dnor-league manager. He'd played in the trenches in France, too, in the last war. He didn't care to risk a big roll of money when he gambled, but he won more often than he lost. Every so often he'd stolen a pot on a busted flush, too.

Not tonight, though. One of the privates in his squad, a big hunkie named Bela Szabo who was universally called Dracula, had drawn three cards and raised big when it was his turn to bet Mutt pegged him for at least three of a kind, maybe better. When the action came round to him, he tossed in his cards. "Can't win 'ern all," he said philosophically.

Kevin Donlan, who couldn't possibly have been as young as he looked, hadn't learned that yet. Calling Szabo was okay if you had two little pair, but raising back struck Mutt as foolhardy. Sure as hell, Dracula was holding three kings. He scooped up the folding money.

"Son, you gotta watch what the other guy's doin' better'n that," Daniels said. "Like I told you, you ain't gonna win 'em all." If nothing else, years of managing in the minors had pounded that home as a law of nature. Mutt chuckled. The life he'd lived beat the hell out of the one he'd have had if he hadn't played ball. Likely he'd still be watching a mule's hind end on the Mississippi farm where he'd been born and raised.

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Like trains in the distance, shells rumbled by overhead. Everybody looked up, though the roof of the barn where they sheltered held the sky at bay. Szabo cocked his head, gauging the sound. "Southbound," he said. "Those are ours."

"Probably landing on the Lizards in Decatur right now," Kevin Donlan agreed. A moment later, he added, "What's funny, Sarge?"

"I reckon I've said I was managing the Decatur team in the

Three-I League when the Lizards came," Mutt answered. "Matter of fact, I was on the train from Madison to Decatur when we got strafed right outside o' Dixon, upstate. This here's the closest I've come to makin' it to where I was goin' since, and most of a year's gone by now."

'This here'~-the barn-was on a farm just south of Clinton, Illinois, about halfway between Bloomington and Decatur. The Americans had taken Bloomington in an armored blitz. Now it was slow, tough work again, trying to push the Lizards farther back from Chicago.

More shells hissed through the sky, these from the south. "Goddarrm, the Lizards are quick with counterbattery fire," Donlan said.

"They're dead on, too," Mutt said. "I hope our boys moved

their guns before those little presents came down on 'em." The poker game went on by lantern light, shelling or no shelling. Mutt won a hand with two pair, lost expensively to a straight when he was holding three nines, didn't waste money betting on a couple of others. Another American battery opened up, this one a lot closer. The thunder of the big guns reminded Mutt of bad weather back home.

"Hope they blow all the Lizards in Decatur straight to hell," Szabo said.

"Hope one of 'em lands on second base at Fan's Field and blows the center-field fence out to where it belongs," Daniels muttered. It was 340 down each foul line at the Decatur ballpark, a reasonable poke, but dead center was only 370, a pain in the ERA to every Commodore pitcher who took the mound.

Small-arms fire rattled only a few hundred yards away, some M-Is and Springfields, some from the automatic rifles the Lizards carried. Before Mutt could say a word, everybody in the latest hand grabbed his money from the pot, stuffed it into a pocket, and reached for his weapon. Someone blew out 64 WORLDWAR: TILTING THE BALANCE the lantern. Someone else pushed the barn door open. One by one, the men emerged.

"You want to be careful," Mutt said quietly. "The Lizards have those damn night sights, let 'em see like cats in the dark."

Dracula Szabo laughed, also softly. "That's why I got me this here Browning Automatic Rifle, Sarge. Put out enough lead and some of it'll hit somebody." He wasn't much older than Donlan, young enough to be gut-sure no bullet could possibly find him. Mutt knew better. France had convinced him he wasn't immortal, and several months fighting the Lizards drove the lesson home again.

"Spread out, spread out," Daniels called in an urgent whisper. To his ear, the men sounded like a herd of drunken rhinos. Several were new recruits; by virtue of having lived through several encounters with the Lizards, Mutt was reckoned suitable for showing others how to do likewise.

"How many Lizards you think there are, Sarge?" Kevin Donlan asked. Donlan wasn't eager any more; he'd been through enough of the tough defensive fighting outside Chicago to be sure his number could come up. The question came in a tone of intelligent professional concern.

Daniels cocked his head, listened to the firing. "Damfino," he said at last. "Not a whole bunch, but I wouldn't peg it tighter'n that. Those rifles o' theirs shoot so fast, just a couple can sound like a platoon."

Off to one side lay the concrete ribbon of US 51. A couple of soldiers charged straight down it. Daniels yelled at them, but they kept going. He wondered why they didn't paint big red-and-white bull's-eyes on their chests, too. He dodged from bush to upended tractor to hedgerow, making himself as tough a target as he could.

That wasn't the only reason he fell behind most of the squad. He had fifty-odd years and a pot belly under his belt, though he was in better shape now than he had been before the Lizards came. Even in his long-gone playing days, he'd been a catcher, so he'd never moved what anybody would call fast.

He was panting and his heart thudded in his chest by the time he half jumped, half fell into a shell hole at the edge of the American firing line. Somebody not far away was screaming for a medic and for his mother; his voice was ebbing fast. Cautiously, Mutt raised his head and peered into the night to

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see if he could pick up muzzle flashes from the Lizards, rifles. Over there, a yellow-white flicker ... He raised his Springfield to his shoulder, squeezed off a round, worked the bolt, fired again. Then he threw himself flat again.

Sure enough, bullets cracked by, just above the hole where he hid. If he could pick up the Lizards' muzzle flashes, they could find his as well. And if he fired again from here, he was willing to bet some turret-eyed_ little scaly sharpshooter would punch his ticket for him. The Lizards weren't human, but they were pretty fair soldiers.

He scrambled out of the hole and crawled across cold ground over to something made of bricks-a well, he realized when he got behind it. Szabo was making a hell of a racket with that BAR; if he wasn't hitting the Lizards, he was sure making them keep their heads down. Even more warily than before, Daniels looked south again.

He saw a flash, fired at it. In the night, it was the next closest thing to shooting blind. No more flickers of light came from that spot, but he never found out whether it was because he'd scored a hit or the Lizard moved to a new firing spot, as he'd done himself.

After fifteen or twenty minutes, the firing faded. The Americans slowly moved forward to discover the Lizards had pulled file:///C|/2590% 20Sci-Fi% 20 and % 20 Fantasy% 20 E-books/Harry% 20 Turtled ove% 20-% 20 Worldwar% 2002% 20-% 20 Tilting% 20 the% 20 Balance.txt the state of the state of

out. "Just a recon patrol," said another sergeant who, like Mutt, was trying to round up his squad and not having much luck.

"Don't rightly recall the Lizards doin' a whole lot o' that, not at night and not on foot," Daniels said with a thoughtful frown. "Ain't been their style."

"Maybe they're learning," the other noncom answered. "You don't really know what the other fellow's doing till you sneak around and see it with your own eyes."

"Yeah, sure, but the Lizards, they mostly fight one way," Mutt said. "Don't know as how I like 'em learnin' how to do their job better. That'll mean they got more chance of shootin' my personal, private ass off."

The other sergeant laughed. "Somethin' to that, pal. I don't know what we can do about it, though, short of giving their patrols enough lumps to make 'em try something else instead."

"Yeah," Mutt said again. He blew air out through his lips to make a whuffling noise. This hadn't been too bad-just a little

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66 WORLDWAR: TILTING THE BALANCE skirmish. As far as he could tell, he didn't have anybody dead or even hurt. But if the Lizards were skirmishing outside of Clinton, it was liable to be a good long while yet before he saw Decatur. I *M*

Clip-clop, clip-clop. Colonel Leslie Groves hated slowness, hated delay, with the restless passion of an engineer who'd spent a busy lifetime fighting inefficiency wherever it reared its head. And here he was, coming into Oswego, New York, in a horse-drawn wagon because the cargo he had in his charge was too important to risk putting it on an airplane and having the Lizards shoot it down. Clip-clop, clip-clop.

Rationally, he knew this slow, safe trip didn't stall anything. The Met Lab team, traveling by the same archaic means he was using himself, wasn't close to Denver yet and couldn't work with the uranium or whatever it was that the British had fetched over to the United States from eastern Europe.

Clip-clop, clip-clop. Riding alongside the wagon was a squadron of horse cavalry, an antique arm Groves had long wished would vanish from the Army forever. The horsemen were useless against the Lizards, as they had been for years against any Earthly mechanized force. But they did a first-class job of overawing the brigands, bandits, and robbers who infested the roads in these chaotic times.

"Captain, will we reach the Coast Guard station by sunget?" Groves called to the commander of the cavalry unit.

Captain Rance Auerbach glanced westward, gauged the sun through curdled clouds. "Yes, sir, I believe so. Only a couple more miles to the lake shore." His Texas drawl drew looks here in upstate New York. Groves thought he should be wearing Confederate gray and maybe a plume in his hat, too; he was too flamboyant for olive drab. That he called his horse Jeb Stuart did nothing to weaken that freewheeling image. The wagon rolled past a wooden ballpark with a sign that

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read, OTIS FIELD, HOME OF THE OSWEGO NETHERLANDS, CANADIAN-AMERICAN LEAGUE. "Netherlands," Groves said with a snort. "Hell of a name for a baseball team." Captain Auerbach pointed to a billboard across the street. In faded, tattered letters it proclaimed the virtues of the Netherland Ice Cream and Milk Company. "Bet you anything you care to stake they ran the team, Sir," he said. "No thank you, Captain," Groves said. "I won't touch that one.,,

Otis Field didn't look as if it had seen much use lately. Planks were missing from the outer fence; they'd no doubt helped Oswegians stay warm during the long, miserable winter. The gaps showed the rickety grandstand and the dugouts where in happier-and warmer-times the opposing teams had sheltered. Stands and dugout roofs also had the missing-tooth effect from vanished lumber. If the Netherlands ever returned to life, they'd need somewhere new to play.

From long experience, Groves reckoned Oswego a town of twenty or twenty-five thousand. The few people out on the streets looked poor and cold and hungry. Most people looked that way these days. The town didn't seem to have suffered directly in the war, though the Lizards were in Buffalo and on the outskirts of Rochester. Groves guessed Oswego wasn't big enough for them to have bothered pulverizing it. He hoped they'd pay for the omission.

On the east side of the Oswego River stood the U.S. Military Reservation, with the earthworks of Fort Ontario. The fort dated back even further than the French and Indian War. Holding enemies at bay now, unfortunately, wasn't as simple as it had been a couple of centuries before.

The Coast Guard station was a two-story white frame building at the foot of East Second Street, down by the cold, choppy gray waters of Lake Ontario. The cutter Forward was tied up at a pier out in the lake. A seaman policing up outside the station spied the wagon and its escort approaching. He ducked into the building, calling loudly, "The U.S. Cavalry just rode into town, Sir!"

Groves smiled at that, in amusement and relief. An officer came out of the station. He wore a U.S. Navy uniform; in time of war, the Coast Guard was subsumed into the Navy. Saluting, he said, "Colonel Groves?"

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"Right here." Groves ponderously descended from the wagon. Even with wartime privation, he carried well over two hundred pounds. He returned the salute and said, "I'm afraid I wasn't given your name"-the Coast Guardsman had two broad stripes on his cuffs and shoulder blades-"Lieutenant, ah ... T'

"I'm Jacob van Alen, Sir," the Coast Guardsman said.

"Well, Lieutenant van Alen, I gather the messenger got here ahead of us."

"From what Smitty yelled, you mean? Yes, Sir, he did." Van Alen had an engaging grin. He was a tall, skinny fellow somewhere close to thirty, very blond, with an almost invisible little mustache. He went on, "Our orders are to give you whatever you want, not to ask a whole lot of questions, and never, ever put your name on the radio. I'm paraphrasing, but that's what they boil down to."

"It sounds right," Groves agreed. "You'd be better off forgetting we even exist once we're gone. Impress that on your sailors, too; if they start blabbing and any word of us gets out, they'll be arrested and tried as traitors to the United States. That comes straight from President Roosevelt, not from me. Make sure your people understand it." "Yes, Sir." Van Alen's eyes sparkled. "If they hadn't told me

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to keep my big mouth shut, I'd have at least a million questions for you; you'd best believe that."

"Lieutenant, believe me-you don't want to know." Groves had seen the slagged ruin a single Lizard bomb had made of Washington, D.C. If the Lizards had that power, the United States had to have it, too, to survive. But the idea of a uranium bomb chilled him. Start throwing those things around and you were liable to end up with an abattoir instead of a world.

"What you say has already been made very clear to me, Colonel," van Alen said. "Suppose you tell me what it is you want me to do for you."

"If the Lizards weren't in Buffalo, I'd have you sail me all the way to Duluth," Groves answered. "As it is, you're going to take me across to the Canadian side so I can continue on the overland route."

"To wherever you're going." Van Alen raised a hand. "I'm not asking, I'm just talking. One thing I do need to know, though: whereabouts on the Canadian side am I taking you? It's a biggish country, you know."

"I have heard rumors to that effect, yes," Groves said dryly. "Sail us across to Oshawa. They should be expecting me there; if a messenger got through to you, no reason to think one didn't make it to them."

"You're right about that. The Lizards haven't hit Canada as hard as they've hit us."

"By all I've heard, they don't care for cold weather." Now Groves held up a broad-palmed hand. "I know, I know-if they don't care for cold weather, what are they doing in BuffaloT'

"You beat me to it," the Coast Guardsman said. "Of course, they did get there in summertime. I hope they had themselves a hell of a surprise along around November."

"I expect they did," Groves said. "Now then, Lieutenant, much as I'd like to stand around shooting the breeze"something he loathed-1 have a package to deliver. Shall we get moving?"

"Yes, sir," van Alen answered. He glanced toward the wagon from which Groves had got down. "You won't be bringing that aboard the Forward, will you? Or the horses?" "What are we supposed to do for mounts without 'emT'

Captain Auerbach demanded indignantly.

"Captain, I want you to take a good look at that cutter," Jacob van Alen said. "It carries me and a crew of sixteen. Now there's what, maybe thirty of you folks? Okay, we can squeeze you onto the Forward, especially just for one fast run across the lake, but where the hell would we stow those animals even if we could get 'em on board?"

Groves looked from the Forward to the cavalry detachment and back again. As an engineer, he was trained in using space efficiently. He turned to Auerbach. "Rance, I'm sorry, but I think Lieutenant van Alen knows what he's talking about. What is that, Lieutenant, about an eighty-foot boat?"

"You have a good eye, Colonel. She's a seventy-eightfooter, forty-three tons displacement."

Groves grunted. Thirty-odd horses weighed maybe twenty tons all by themselves. They'd have to stay behind, no doubt about it. He watched Captain Auerbach unhappily making the same calculation and coming up with the same result. "Cheer up, Captain," he said. "I'm sure the Canadians will furnish us, with new mounts. They don't know what we're carrying, but they know how important it is."

Ι

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Auerbach reached out to stroke his mount's velvety muzzle, He answered with a cavalryman's cri de coeur: "Colonel, if they took your wife away and issued You a replacement, would you be satisfied with the exchangeT'

"I might, if they issued me Rita Hayworth." Groves let both hands rest on his protuberant belly. "Trouble is, she probably wouldn't be satisfied with me." Auerbach stared at him, let out an amazingly horsey snort, and spread his palms in surrender. file:///C|/2590% 20Sci-Fi% 20 and % 20 Fantasy% 20 E-books/Harry% 20 Turtled ove% 20-% 20 Worldwar% 2002% 20-% 20 Tilting% 20 the% 20 Balance.txt the state of the state of

Lieutenant van Alen said, "Okay, no horses. What about the wagon?"

"We don't need that either, Lieutenant." Groves walked over, reached in, and pulled out a saddlebag that had been fixed with straps so he could carry it on his back. It was heavier than it looked, both from the uranium or whatever it was the Germans had stolen from the Lizards and from the lead shielding that--Groves hoped-kept the metal's ionizing radiation from ionizing him. "I have everything required right here."

"Whatever you say, sir." What van Alen's eyes said was that the pack didn't look important enough to cause such a fuss. Groves stared stonily back at the Coast Guardsman. Here, as often, looks were deceiving. Regardless of what van Alen might have thought, he and his crew efficiently did what was required of them. Inside half an hour the Forward's twin gasoline engines were thundering as the cutter pulled away from the dock and headed for the Canadian shore.

As Oswego receded, Groves strode up and down the Forward, curious as usual. The first thing he noticed was the sound of his shoes on the deck. He paused in surprise and rapped his knuckles against the cutter's superstructure. That confirmed his first impression. "It's made out of wood!" he exclaimed, as if inviting someone to contradict him.

But a passing ere w*man nodded. "That's us, Colonelwooden ships and iron men, just like the old saying." He grinned impudently. "Hell, leave me out in the rain and I rust." "Get out of here," Groves said. But when he thought about

it, it made sense. A Coast Guard cutter wasn't built to fight other ships; it didn't need an armored hull. And wood was strong stuff. Apart from its use in shipbuilding, the Russians and England both still used it to build highly effective aircraft

(or so the Mosquito and LaGG were reckoned before the Lizards came). Even so, it had taken him aback here.

Lake Ontario had a light chop. Even Groves, hardly smooth on his feet, effortlessly adjusted to it. One of his cavalrymen, though, bent himself double over the port rail puking his guts out. Groves suspected the sailors' ribbing would have been a lot more ribald had the luckless fellow's friends not outnumbered them two to one and been more heavily armed to boot.

The Forward boasted a one-pounder mounted in front of the superstructure. "Will that thing do any good if the Lizards decide to strafe us?" Groves asked the Coast Guardsman in charge of the weapon.

"About as much as a mouse giving a hawk the finger when the hawk swoops down on it," the sailor answered. "Might make the mouse feel better, for a second or two, anyhow, but the hawk's not what you'd call worried." In spite of that coldblooded assessment, the man stayed at his post.

The way the Coast Guardsmen handled their jobs impressed Groves. They knew what they needed to do and they did it, without fuss, without spit and polish, but also without wasted motion. Lieutenant van Alen hardly needed to give orders.

The trip across the lake was long and boring. Van Alen invited Groves to take off his pack and stow it in the cabin. "Thank you, Lieutenant, but no," Groves said. "My orders are not to let it out of my sight at any time, and I intend to take them literally."

"However you like, sir," the Coast Guardsman said. He eyed Groves speculatively. "That must be one mighty important cargo."

"It is." Groves let it go at that. He wished the heavy pack were invisible and weightless. That might keep people from jumping to such accurate conclusions. The more people wondered about what he was carrying, the likelier word was to get to the Lizards.

As if the thought of the allens were enough to conjure them out of thin air, he heard the distant scream of one of their jet planes. His head spun this way and that, trying to spot the aircraft through scattered clouds. He saw the contrail, thin as a thread, off to the west.

"Out of Rochester, or maybe Buffalo," van Alen said with admirable sangfroid.

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"Do you think he saw us?" Groves demanded. "Likely he did," the Coast Guardsman said. "We've been buzzed a couple times, but never shot at. Just to stay on the safe side, we'll crowd your men down below, where they won't show, and look as ordinary as we can for a while. And if you won't leave that pack in the cabin, maybe you'll step in yourself for a bit."

It was as politely phrased an order as Groves had ever

heard. He out-ranked van Alen, but the Coast Guardsman commanded the Forward, which meant authority rested with him. Groves went inside, jammed- his face against a porthole. With luck, he told himself, the Lizard pilot would go on about his business, whatever that was. Without luck ...

The throb of the engines was louder inside, so Groves needed longer to hear the shriek the Lizard plane made. That shriek grew hideously fast. He waited for the one-pounder on the foredeck to start banging away in a last futile gesture of defiance, but it stayed silent. The Lizard plane screamed low overhead. Through the porthole, Groves saw van Alen looking up and waving. He wondered if the Coast Guard lieutenant had gone out of his mind.

But the jet roared away, the scream of its engine fading and

dopplering down into a deep-throated wail. Groves hadn't known he was holding his breath until he let it out in one long sigh. When he couldn't hear the Lizard plane any more, he went out on deck again. "I thought we were in big trouble there," he told van Alen.

"Naah." The Coast Guardsman shook his head. "I figured we were all right as long as they didn't notice all your men on deck. They've seen the Forward out on the lake a good many times, and we've never done anything that looks aggressive. I hoped they'd just assume we were out on another cruise, and I guess they did."

"I admire your coolness, Lieutenant, and I'm glad you didn't have to show coolness under fire," Groves said.

"You can't possibly be half as glad as I am, sir," van Alen answered. The Coast Guard cutter sailed on toward the Canadian shore.

In the midst of the trees-some bare-branched birches, more dark pine and fir-the ice-covered lake appeared as suddenly

as a rabbit out of a magician's hat. "By Jove," George Bagnall exclaimed as the Lancaster bomber ducked down below treetop height to make it harder for Lizard radar to pick them up. "That's a nice bit of navigating, Alf."

"All compliments gratefully accepted," Alf Whyte replied. "Assuming that's actually Lake Peipus, we can follow it straight down to Pskov."

From the pilot's seat next to Bagnall, Ken Embry said, "And if it's not, we don't know where the bloody hell we are, and we'll all be good and Pskoved."

Groans filled the earphones. on Bagnall's head. The flight engineer studied the thicket of gauges in front of him. "It had better be Pskov," he told Embry, "for we haven't the petrol to go much farther."

"Oh, petrol," the pilot said airily. "We've done enough bi-ZU11C turns in this war that flying without petrol wouldn't be that extraordinary."

"Let me check my parachute first, if you don't mind," Bagnall answered.

In fact, though, Embry had a point. The aircrew had been over Cologne on the thousand-bomber raid when Lizard fighters started hacking British planes out of the sky by the score. They'd made it back to England and gone on to bomb Lizard positions in the south of France-where they were hit. Embry had set the crippled bomber down on a deserted stretch of highway by night without smashing or flipping it. If he could do that, maybe he could fly without petrol.

After getting to Paris and being repatriated with German help (that still grated on Bagnall), they'd been assigned to a new Lanc, this one a testbed for airborne radar. Now, the concept being deemed proved, they were flying a set to Russia so the Reds would have a better chance of seeing the Lizards coming.

Ice, ice, close to a hundred miles of blue-white ice, with white snow drifted atop it. From the bomb bay, Jerome Jones, the radarman, said, "I looked up Pskov before we took off. The climate here is supposed to be mild; the proof adduced is that the snow melts by the end of March and the ice on the lakes and rivers in April."

More groans from the aircrew. Bagnall exclaimed, "If that's what the Bolshies make out to be a mild chmate, what must they reckon harsh?"

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"I'm given to understand Siberia has two seasons," Embry said: 'Third August and winter."

"Good job we have our flight suits on," Alf Whyte said. "I don't think there's another item in the British inventory that would do in this weather." Below the Lanc, Lake Peipus narrowed to a neck of water, then widened out again. The navigator went on, 'This southern bit is called Lake Pskov. We're getting close."

"If it's all one lake, why has it got two names?" Bagnall

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asked.

"Supply the answer and win the tin of chopped ham, retail value ten shillings," Embry chanted, like an announcer over the wireless. "Send your postal card to the Soviet Embassy, London. Winners-if there are any, which strikes me as unlikely-will be selected in a drawing at random." After another ten or fifteen minutes, the lake abruptly ended.

A city full of towers appeared ahead. Some had the onion domes Bagnall associated with Russian architecture, while others looked as if they were wearing witches' hats. The more modem buildings in town were scarcely worth noticing among such exotics.

"Right-here's Pskov," Embry said. "Where's the bloody airfield?"

Down in the snow-filled streets, people scattered like ants when the Lancaster flew by. Through the bomber's Perspex windscreen, Bagnall spied little flashes of light. "They're shooting at us!" he yelled.

"Stupid sods," Embry snarled. "Don't they know we're friendly? Now where's that bleeding airfield?"

Away to the east, a red flare rose into the sky. The pilot swung the big, heavy airrraft in that direction. Sure enough, a landing strip appeared ahead, hacked out of the surrounding forest. "It's none too long," Bagnall observed.

"It's what we've got." Embry pushed forward on the stick. The Lancaster descended. The pilot was one of the best. He set the bomber down at the back edge of the landing strip and used up every inch braking to a stop. The tree trunks ahead were looking very thick and very hard when the Lancaster finally quit moving. Embry looked as if he needed to will himself to let go of the stick, but his voice was relaxed as he said, "Welcome to beautiful, balmy Pskov. You have to be balmy to want to come here."

No sooner had the Lancaster's three-bladed props spun to a stop than men in greatcoats and thick padded jackets dashed out of the trees to start draping it with camouflage netting. Groundcrews had done that back in England, but never with such 61an. The outside world disappeared in a hurry; Bagnall could only hope the bomber disappeared from outside view as quickly.

"Did you see?" Embry asked quietly as he disconnected his safety belt.

"See whatT' Bagnall asked, also freeing himself.

"Those weren't all Russians out there covering us up. Some of them were Germans."

"Bloody hell," Bagnall muttered. "Are we supposed to give them the airborne radar, too? That wasn't in our orders."

Alf Whyte stuck his head out from the little black-curtained cubicle where he labored with map and ruler and compasses and protractor. "Before the Lizards came, Pskov was headquarters for Army Group North. The Lizards ran Jerry out, but then they left themselves when winter started. It's Russian enough now for us to land here, obviously, but I expect there will be some leftover Nazis as well."

"Isn't that wonderful?" By Embry's tone, it was anything but.

The cold hit like a blow in the face when the aircrew left the Lanc. They were an abbreviated lot, pilot, flight engineer (Bagnall doubled as radioman), navigator, and radarman. No bomb-aimer on this run, no bombardiers, and no gunners in the turrets. If a Lizard jet attacked, machine guns weren't going to be able to reply to its cannon and rockets.

"Zdrast'ye, " Ken Embry said, thereby exhausting his Russian. "Does anyone here speak English?"

"I do," two men said, one with a Russian accent, the other in Germanic tones. They looked suspiciously at each other. Some months of, joint battle against a common foe had not eased the memory of what they'd been doing to each other before the Lizards came.

Bagnall had done some German before he left college to join the RAF. That was only three years ago, but already most of it had vanished from his brain. Like most undergraduates taking German, he'd come upon Mark Twain's "The Awful German Language." That he remembered, especially the bit

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about sooner declining two beers 'dian one German adjective. And Russian was worse--even the alphabet looked funny.

To Bagnall's surprise, Jerome Jones started speaking Russian-halting Russian, but evidently good enough to be understood. After a brief exchange, he turned back to the air crew and said, "He--Sergei Leonidovich Morozkin there, the chap who knows a bit of English-says we're to accompany him to the Krom, the local strongpoint, I gather." "By all means let us accompany him, then," Embry said. "I didn't know you had any Russian, Jones. The chaps who put this mission together had a better notion of what they were about than I credited them for."

"I doubt that, sir," Jones said, unwilling to give RAF higherups any credit for sense. But he had reason on his side: "When I was at Cambridge, I was interested for a while in Byzantine history and art, and that led me to the Russians. I hadn't the time to do them properly, but I did teach myself a bit of the language. That wouldn't be in any of my papers, though, so no one would have known of it."

"Good thing it's so, all the same," Bagnall said, wondering if Jones was a Bolshevik himself. Even - if he was, it didn't matter now. "My German is villainous, but I was about to trot

it out when you spoke up. I wasn't what you'd call keen on trying to speak with our Soviet friends and allies in the language of a mutual foe." The German who spoke English said, "Against the Eidechsen-I am sorry, I do not know your word; the Russians call them Yashcheritsi-against the invaders from the sky, no men are foes to one another." "Against the Lizards, you mean," Bagnall and Embry said together. "Lizards." Both the German and Morozkin, the anglophone Russian, echoed the word to fix it in their minds; it was one that would be used a good deal in days to come. The German went on, "I am Hauptmann-Captain auf Englisch, ja?-Martin Borcke." As soon as the men of the aircrew had introduced themselves in turn, Morozkin said, "Come to Krom now. Get away from airplane." "But the radar--2' Jones said plaintively.

"We do. Is in box, da?"

"Well, yes, but--2'

"Come," Morozkin said again. At the far end of the airstrip--a long, hard slog through cold and snow-4hree-horse sleighs waited to take the Englishmen into Pskov. Their bells jangled merrily as they set off, as if in a happy winter song. Bagnall would have found the journey more enjoyable had his Russian driver not had a rifle slung across his back and half a dozen German potato-masher grenades stuffed into his belt.

Pskov had been built in rings where two rivers came together. The sleigh slid past churches and fine houses in the center of town, many bearing the scars of fighting when the Germans had taken it from the Soviets and when the Lizards struck north.

Closer to the joining of the two streams were a marketplace and another church. In the market, old women with scarves around their heads sold beets, turnips, cabbages. Steam rose from kettles of borscht. People queued up to get what they needed, not with the good spirits Englishmen displayed on similar occasions but glunily, resignedly, as if they could expect nothing better from fate.

Guards prowled the marketplace to make sure no one even thought of turning disorderly. Some were Germans with rifles and coal-scuttle helmets, many still wearing field-gray greatcoats. Others were Russians, carrying everything from shotguns to military rifles to submachine guns, and dressed in a motley mixture of civilian clothes and khaki Soviet uniform. Everyone, though--Germans, Russians, even the old women behind their baskets of vegetables-wore the same kind of thick felt boot.

The sleigh driver had on a pair, too. Bagnall tapped the fellow on the shoulder, pointed at the footgear. "What do you call thoseT' He got back only a smile and a shrug, and regretfully tried German: "Was sind sie?"

Comprehension lit the driver's face. "Valenki. " He rattled off a couple of sentences in Russian before he figured out Bagnall couldn't follow. His German was even slower and more halting than the flight engineer's, which gave Bagnall a chance to understand it: "Gut-gegen-Kalt. "

"Good against cold. Thanks. Uh, danke. Ich verstehe." They nodded to each other, pleased at the rudimentary communication. The valenki looked as if they'd be good against cold; they were thick and supple, like a blanket for the feet.

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The sleigh went past a square with a monument to Lenin and then, diagonally across from it, another onion-domed church. Bagnall wondered if the driver was conscious of the ironic juxtaposition. If he was, he didn't let on. Letting on that you noticed irony probably wasn't any safer in the Soviet Union than in Hitler's Germany.

Bagnall shook his head. The Russians had become allies because they were Hitler's enemies. Now the Russians and Germans were both allies because they'd stayed in the ring against the Lizards. They still weren't comfortable company to keep. file:///C//2590%20Sci-Fi%20and%20Fantasy%20E-books/Harry%20Turtledove%20-%20Worldwar%2002%20-%20Tilting%20the%20Balance.txt

The horses began to strain as they went uphill toward the towers that marked old Pskov. As the beasts labored and the sleigh slowed, Bagnall grasped why the fortress that was the town's beginning had been placed as it was: the fortress ahead, which he presumed to be the Krom, stood on a bluff protected by the rivers. Ile driver took him past the tumbledown stone wall that warded the landward side of the fortress. Some of the tumbling down looked recent; Bagnall wondered whether Germans or Lizards were to blame.

The sleigh stopped. Bagnall climbed out. The driver pointed him toward one of the towers; its witches'-hat roof had had a bite taken out of it. A German sentry stood to one side of the doorway, a Russian to the other. They threw the doors wide for Bagnall. As soon as he stepped over the threshold, he felt as if he'd been taken back through time. Guttering torches cast weird, flickering shadows on the irregular stonework of the wall. Up above, everything was lost in gloom. In the torchlight, the three fur-clad men who sat at a table waiting for him, weapons in front of them, seemed more like barbarian chieftains than twentieth-century soldiers.

Over the next couple of minutes, the other Englishmen came in. By the way they peered all around, they had the same feeling of dislocation as Bagnall. Martin Borcke pointed to one of the men at the table and said, "Here is Generalleutnant Kurt Chill, commander of the 122nd Infantry Division and now head of the forces of the Reich in and around Pskov." He named the RAF men for his commander.

Chill didn't look like Bagnall's idea of a Nazi lieutenant general: no monocle, no high-peaked cap, no skinny, hawknosed Prussian face. He was on the roundish side and badly

needed a shave. Flis eyes were brown, not chilly gray. They had an ironic glint in them as he said in fair English, "Welcome to the blooming gardens of Pskov, gentlemen. "

Sergei Morozkin nodded to the pair who sat to Chill's left. "Are leaders of First and Second Partisan Brigades, Nikolai Ivanovich Vasiliev and Aleksandr Maksimovich German." Ken Embry whispered to Bagnall, "There's a name I'd not

fancy having in Soviet Russia these days."

"Lord, no." Bagnall looked at German. Maybe it was the steel-rimmed spectacles he wore, but he had a schoolmasterly expression only partly counteracted by the fierce red mustache that sprouted above his upper lip.

Vasiliev, by contrast, made the flight engineer think of a bearded boulder: he was short and squat and looked immensely strong. A pink scar-maybe a crease from a rifle bulletfurrowed one cheek and cut a track through the thick, almost seallike pelt that grew there. A couple of inches over and the partisan leader would not have been sitting in his chair. He rumbled something in Russian. Morozkin translated: "He bid you welcome to forest republic. This we call land around Pskov while Germans rule city. Now with Lizards'~--Morozkin pronounced the word with exaggerated care-"here, we make German-Soviet council--German-Soviet soviet, daT' Bagnall thought the play on words came from the interpreter; Vasiliev, even sans scar, would not have seemed a man much given to mirth.

"Pleased to meet you all, I'm sure," Ken Embry said. Before Morozkin could translate, Jerome Jones turned his words into Russian. The partisan leaders beamed, pleased at least one of the RAF men could speak directly to them.

"What is this thing you have brought for the Soviet Union from the people and workers of England?" German asked. He leaned forward to wait for the answer, not even noticing the ideological preconceptions with which he'd freighted his question.

"An airborne radar, to help aircraft detect Lizard planes at long range," Jones said. Both Morozkin and Borcke had trouble turning the critical word into their native languages. Jones explained what a radar set was and how it did what it did. Vasiliev simply listened. German nodded several times, as if what the radarman said made sense to turn.

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And Kurt Chill purred, "You have, aber natarlich, also brought one of these radar sets for the Reich?" "No, sir," Embry said. Bagnall started to sweat, though the room in this drafty old medieval tower was anything but warm. The pilot went on, "Our orders are to deliver this set and the manuals accompanying it to the Soviet authorities at Pskov. That is what we intend to do." General Chill shook his head. Bagnall sweated harder. No

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one had bothered to tell the RAF crew that Pskov wasn't entirely in Soviet hands. Evidently, the Russians who'd told the English where to fly the set hadn't thought there would be a problem. But a problem there was.

"If there is only one, it shall go to the Reich," Chill said. As soon as Sergei Morozkin translated the German's English into Russian, Vasiliev snatched up the submachine gun from the table in front of him and pointed it at Chill's chest. "Nyet, he said flatly. Bagnall needed no Russian to follow that.

Chill answered in German, which Vasiliev evidently understood. It also let Bagnall understand some of what was going on. The Nazi had courage, or at least bravado. He said, "If you shoot me, Nikolai Ivanovich, Colonel Schindler takes command-and we are still stronger around Pskov than you." Aleksandr German did not bother gesticulating with the pistol on the table. He simply spoke in a dry, rather pedantic voice that went well with his eyeglasses. His words sounded like German, but Bagnall had even more trouble with them than he had in following Kurt Chill. He guessed the partisan was actually speaking Yiddish. To stay up with that, they should have kept David Goldfarb as crew radarman.

Captain Borcke made sense of it. He translated: "German says the Wehrmacht is stronger around Pskov than Soviet forces, yes. He asks if it is also stronger than Soviet and Lizard forces combined."

Chill spoke a single word: "Bluff."

"Nyet," Vasiliev said again. He put down his weapon and beamed at the other partisan leader. He'd found a threat the Germans could not afford to ignore.

Bagnall did not think it was a bluff, either. Germany had not endeared itself to the people of any of the eastern lands it occupied before the Lizards came. The Jews of Poland-led by, among others, a cousin of Goldfarb's-had risen against the

Nazis and for the Lizards. The Russians might do the same if this Chill pushed them hard enough.

He might, too. Scowling at the two partisan brigadiers, he said, "You may do this. The Lizards may win a victory through it. But this I vow: neither of you will live long enough to collaborate with diem. We will have that radar."

"Nyet. " This time Aleksandr German said it. He switched back to Yiddish, too fast and harsh for Bagnall to follow. Captain Borcke again did the honors: "He says this set was sent to the workers and people of the Soviet Union to aid them in their struggle against imperialist aggression, and that suffendering it would be treason to the Soviet state."

Communist rhetoric aside, Bagnall thought the partisan was dead right. But if Lieutenant General Chill didn't, the flight engineer's opinion counted for little.

And Chill was going to be hard-nosed about it. Bagnall could see that. So could everyone else in the tower chamber. Captain Borcke edged away from the RAF air crew to one side, Sergei Morozkin to the other. Both men slid a hand under their coats, presumably to grab for pistols. Bagnall got ready to throw himself flat.

Then, instead, he hissed at Jerome Jones: "You have the manuals and such for the radar, am I rightT'

"Of course," Jones whispered back. "Couldn't very well come without them, not when the Russians are going to start making them for themselves. Or they will if anyone comes out of this room alive."

"Which doesn't look like the best wager in the world. How many sets have you got?"

"Of the manuals and drawings, you mean? Just the one," Jones said.

"Bugger." That put a crimp in Bagnall's scheme, but only for a moment. He spoke up in a loud voice: "Gentlemen, please!" If nothing else, he succeeded in distracting the Germans and partisans from the bead they were drawing on each other. Everyone stared at him instead. He said, "I think I can find a way out of this dispute."

Grim faces defied him to do it. Trouble was, he realized suddenly, the Germans and Russians really wanted to have a go at each other. In English, Kurt Chill said, "Enlighten us, then."

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"I'll do my best," Bagnall answered. "fliere's only the one radar, and no help for that. If you hijack it, word will get back to Moscow-and to London. Cooperation between Germany and her former foes will be hampered, and the Lizards will likely gain more from that than the Luftwaffe could from the radar. Is this so, or not?" -

"It may be," Chill said. "I do not think, though, there is much cooperation now, when you give the Russians and not us

this set." Captain Borcke nodded emphatically at that. There was much truth in what the German general said. Bagnall was anything but happy about sharing secrets with the Nazis, and his attitude reflected that of British leaders from Churchill on down. But setting the Wehnnacht and the Red Army back at each other's throats wasn't what anyone had had in mind, either.

The flight engineer said, "How is this, then? The radar itself and the manuals go on toward Moscow as planned. But before they do"-he sighed-"you make copies of the manuals and send them to Berlin."

"Copies?" Chill said. "By photograph?"

"If you have that kind of equipment here, yes." Bagnall had been thinking of doing the job by hand; Pskov struck him as a burnt-out backwater town. But who could say what sort of gear the division intelligence unit of the 122nd Infantry--or whatever other units were in the area-had available?

"I'm not sure the higher-ups back home would approve, but they didn't anticipate this situation," Ken Embry murmured. "As for me, I'd say you've managed to saw the baby in half. King Solomon would be proud."

"I hope so," Bagnall said.

Sergei Morozkin was still translating his suggestion for the partisan leaders. When he finished, Vasiliev turned to Aleksandr German and said with heavy humor, "Nu, Sasha?" It had to be more Yiddish-Bagnall had heard that word from David Goldfarb *

Aleksandr German peered through his spectacles at Chill the German. Having Goldfarb in the aircrew for a while had made Bagnall more aware of what the Nazis had done to Eastern European Jews than he otherwise would have been. He wondered what went on behind German's poker face, how much hatred seethed there. The partisan did not let on. After a while, he sighed and spoke one word: "Da. "

"We shall do this, then." If Chill was enthusiastic about Bagnall's plan, he hid it very well. But it gave him most of what he wanted, and kept alive the fragile truce around Pskov. As if to underline how important that was, Lizard jets streaked overhead. When bombs began to fall, Bagnall felt something near panic: a hit anywhere close by would bring all the stones of the Krom down on his head.

Through the fading wail of the Lizards' engines and the ground-shaking crash of the bombs came the rattle of what sounded like every rifle and submachine gun in the world going off at once. Pskov's defenders, Nazis and Communists alike, did their best to knock down the Lizards' planes.

As usual, their best was not good enough. Bagnall listened hopefully for the rending crash that would have meant a fighter-bomber destroyed, but it never came. He also listened for the roar that would wam of a second wave of attackers. That didn't come, either.

"Anyone would think that flying more than a thousand miles would take us out of the bloody blitz," Alf Whyte complained. -

"They called it a world war even before the Lizards came," Embry said.

Nikolai Vasiliev shouted something at Morozkin. Instead of translating it, he hurried away to return a few minutes later with a tray full of bottles and glasses. "We drink to this-how you say?-agreement," he said.

He was pouring man-sized slugs of vodka for everyone when a partisan burst in, shouting in Russian. "Uh-oh," Jerome Jones said. "I didn't catch all of that, but I didn't care for what I understood."

Morozkin turned to the RAF air crew. "I have-bad news. Those-how you say?-Lizards, they bomb your plane. Is wreck and ruin-is that what you say?"

"That's what we say," Embry answered dully.

"Nichevo, tovarishchi," Morozkin said.

He didn't translate that, maybe because it was so completely Russian that doing so never occurred to him. "What did he say?" Bagnall demanded of Jerome Jones.

" 'It can't be helped, comrades'-something like that," the radarman answered. " 'There's nothing to be done about it,' ~ be a better rendering."

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Bagnall didn't care a pin for fine points of translation. "We're stuck here in bloody Pskov and there's bloody nothing to be done about it?" he burst out, his voice rising to a shout. "Nichevo, " Jones said.

Science Hall was a splendid structure, a three-story red brick building on the northwest comer of the University of Denver campus. It housed the university's chemistry and physics defile:///C|/2590% 20Sci-Fi% 20 and % 20 Fantasy% 20 E-books/Harry% 20 Turtled ove% 20-% 20 Worldwar% 2002% 20-% 20 Tilting% 20 the% 20 Balance.txt the state of the state of

partments, and would have made a fine home for the transplanted Metallurgical Laboratory from the University of Chicago. Jens Larssen admired the facility intensely. There was only one problem: he had no idea when the rest of the Met Lab team would show up.

"All dressed up with no place to go," he muttered to himself as he stalked down a third-floor corridor. From the northfacing window at the end of that corridor, he could see the Platte River snaking its way south and east through town, and beyond it the state capitol and other tall buildings of the civic center. Denver was a pretty place, snow still on the ground here and there, the air almost achingly clear. Jens delighted in it not at all.

Everything had gone so perfectly. He might as well have

been riding the train in those dear, vanished pre-Lizard days. He wasn't bombed, he wasn't strafed, he had a lower Pullman berth more comfortable than any bed he'd slept in for months. He had heat on the train, and electricity; the only hint there was a war on was the blackout curtain on the window and a sign taped alongside it: USE IT. IT'S YOUR NECK.

An Army major had met him when the train pulled into Union Station, had taken him out to Lowry Field east of town, had arranged a room for him at the Bachelor Officers' Quarters. He'd almost balked at that-he was no bachelor. But Barbara wasn't with him, so he'd gone along.

"Stupid," he said aloud. Going along even once had got him tangled up again in the spiderweb of military routine. He'd had a taste of that in Indiana under George Patton. The local commanders were less flamboyant than Patton, but no less inflexible.

"I'm Sony, Dr. Larssen, but that will not be permitted," a bird colonel named Hexham had said. The colonel hadn't sounded Sony, not one bit. By that he meant Larssen's going

out of town to find out where the rest of the Met Lab team was.

"But why?" Jens had howled, pacing the colonel's office like a newly caged wolf. "Without the other people, without the equipment they have with them, I'm not much good to you by myself."

"Dr. Larssen, you are a nuclear physicist working on a highly classified project," Colonel Hexharn had answered. He'd kept his voice low, reasonable; Jens supposed he'd got on the fellow's nerves as well as the other way round. "We cannot let you go gallivanting off just as you please. And if disaster befalls your colleagues, who better than you to reconstruct the project?"

Larssen hadn't laughed in his face, but he'd come close. Reconstruct the work of several Nobel laureates-by himself? He'd have to be Superman, able to leap tall buildings at a single bound. But there was just enough truth in it-he'd been part of the project, after aill-to keep him from taking off on his own.

"Everything is fine," Hexham had told him. "They're heading this way; we know that much. We're delighted you're here ahead of them. That means you can help get things organized so they'll be able to hit the ground running when they arrive."

He'd been a scientist at the Met Lab, not an administrator. Administration had been a headache for other people. Now it was his. He went back to his office, wrote letters, filled out forms, tried the phone three or four times, and actually got through once. The Lizards hadn't hit Denver anywhere near the way they'd plastered Chicago; to a large degree, it still functioned as a modem city. When Jens turned the switch on the gooseneck lamp on his desk, the bulb lit up.

He worked a little longer, then said the hell with it and went downstairs. His bicycle waited there. So did a glum, unsmiling man in khaki with a rifle on his back. He had a bike, too. "Evening, Oscar," Jens said.

"Dr. Larssen." The bodyguard nodded politely. Oscar wasn't his real name, but he answered to it. Jens thought it amused him, but his face didn't show much. Oscar had been detailed to keep him safe in Denver-and to keep him from leaving town. He was depressingly good at his job. Larssen rode north up University, turned right toward Lowry

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Field. Oscar stuck to the physicist like a buff. Jens was in good shape. His bodyguard, he was convinced, could have made the Olympic team. All the way back -to BOQ, he sang, "I'm Only a Bird in a Gilded Cage." Oscar joined in the choruses. But in the next morning, instead of biking back to the University of Denver, Larssen (Oscar in his wake) reported to Colonel Hexham's office. The colonel looked anything but delighted to see him. "Why aren't you at work, Dr. Larssen?" he said in a tone that probably turned captains to Jell-O. Jens, however, was- a civilian, and a fed-up civilian at that. "Sir, the more I think about my working conditions here, the more intolerable they look to me," he said. "I'm on strike." "You're what?" Hexham chewed toothpicks, maybe in lieu of scarce cigarettes. The one he had in his mouth jumped. "You can't do that!"

"Oh yes I can, and I'm going to stay on strike until you let me get in touch with my wife."

"Security---2' Hexharn began. Up and down, up and down went the -toothpick.

"Stuff security!" Jens had wanted to say that-he'd wanted to scream it-for months. "You won't let me go after the Met Lab. Okay, I guess I can see that, even if I think you're push-

ing it too far. But you as much as told me the other day you know where the Met Lab wagon train is, right?" "What if I do?" the colonel rumbled. He was still trying to intimidate Larssen, but Larssen refused to be intimidated any more. 'This if you do: unless you let me send a letter-just an ordinary, handwritten letter-to Barbara, you get no more work out of me, and that's that." "Too risky," Hexham said. "Suppose our courier is captured --- 2' "Suppose he is?" Jens retorted. "I'm not going to write about uranium, for God's sake. I'm going to let her know I'm alive and in one piece and that I love her and I miss her. That's all. I won't even sign my last name." "No," said Hexham. "No," said Larssen. They glared at each other. The toothpick twitched. Oscar escorted Larssen back to BOQ. He lay down on his cot. He was ready to wait as long as it took.

fat man in the black Stetson paused in the ceremony first to spit a brown stream into the polished brass spittoon near his feet (not a drop clung to his handlebar mustache) and then to sneak another glance at the Lizards who stood in one comer of his crowded office. He half shrugged and resumed: "By the authority vested in me as justice of the peace of Chugwater, Wyoming, I now pronounce you man and wife. Kiss her, boy."

Sam Yeager tilted Barbara Larssen's-Barbara Yeager'sface up to his. The kiss was not the decorous one first postwedding kisses are supposed to be. She molded herself against him. He squeezed her tight.

Everybody cheered. Enrico Fermi, who was serving as best man, slapped Yeager on the back. His wife Laura stood on tiptoe to kiss Sam's cheek. Seeing that, the physicist made a Latin production out of kissing Barbara on the cheek. Everybody cheered again, louder than ever.

Just for a second, Yeager's eyes went to Ullhass and Ristin. He wondered what they made of the ceremony. From what they said, they didn't mate permanently-and to them, human beings were barbarous aliens.

Well, to hell with what they think of human beings, he thought. As far as he was concerned, having Fermi as his best man was almost-not quite-as exciting as getting married to Barbara. He'd been married once before, unsuccessfully, and he'd sometimes thought about marrying again. But never in all the hours he'd spent reading science fiction on trains and buses between one minor-league game and the next had he thought he'd really get to hobnob with scientists. And having a Nobel Prize winner as your best man was about as hob a nob as you could find.

The justice of the peace-the sign on his door said he was Joshua Sumner, but he seemed to go by Hoot-reached into a drawer of the fancy old rolltop desk that adomed his office. What he pulled out was most unjudicial: a couple of shot glasses and a bottle about half full of dark amber fluid.

"Don't have as much here as we used to. Don't have as much here as we'd like," he said as he poured each glass full. "But we've still got enough for the groom to make a toast and the bride to drink it."

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Barbara eyed the full shot dubiously. "If I drink all that, I'll just go to sleep."

"I doubt it," the justice of the peace said, which raised more whoops from the predominantly male crowd in his office. Barbara turned pink and shook her head in embarrassment but took the glass.

Yeager took his, too, careful not to spill a drop. He knew what he was going to say. Even though he hadn't expected to have to propose a toast, one leaped into his mind the moment Sumner said he'd need it. That didn't usually happen with him; more often than not, he'd come up with snappy comebacks a week too late to use them.

Not this time, though. He raised the shot glass, waited for quiet. When he got it, he said, "Life goes on," and knocked back the shot. The whiskey burned its way down his throat, filled his middle with warmth.

"Oh, that's good, Sam," Barbara said softly. "That's just right." She lifted the shot glass to her lips. She started to sip, but at the last moment drank it all down at once as Sam had. Her eyes opened very wide and started to water. She turned much redder than she had when the justice of the peace flustered her. What should have been her next breath became a sharp cough instead. People laughed and clapped anyhow. Joshua Sumner said, "Don't do that every day, you tell me?" He had the deadpan drollness that goes with many large men who are sparing of speech.

As the wedding party filed out of the justice of the peace's office, Ristin said, "What you do here, Sam, you and Barbara? You make"-he spoke a couple of hissing words in his own language-"to mate all the time?"

"An agreement, that would be in English," Yeager said. He squeezed Barbara's hand. "That's just what we did, even if I am too old to mate 'all the time.' "

"Don't confuse him," Barbara said with a cluck in her voice. They went outside. Chugwater was about fifty miles north of Cheyenne. Off against the western horizon, snow-cloaked mountains loomed. The town itself was a few houses, a general store, and the post office that also housed the sheriff's office and that of the justice of the peace. Hoot Sumner was also postmaster and sheriff, and probably none too busy even if he did wear three hats.

The sheriff's office (fortunately, from Yeager's point of

view) boasted a single jail cell big enough to hold the two Lizard POWs. That meant he and Barbara got to spend their wedding night without Ristin and Ullhass in the next room. Not that the Lizards were likely to pick that particular night to try to run away, nor, being what they were, that they would make anything of the noises coming from the bridal bed. Nevertheless ...

"It's the principle of the thing," Sam explained as he and the new Mrs. Yeager, accompanied by cheering well-wishers from the Met Lab and from Chugwater, made their way to the house where they'd spend their first night as man and wife. He spoke a little louder, a little more earnestly, than he might have earlier in the day: when they found they were going to host a wedding, the townsfolk had pulled out a good many bottles of dark amber and other fluids.

"You're right," Barbara said, also emphatically. Her cheeks glowed brighter than could be accounted for by the chilly breeze alone.

She let out a squeak when Sam picked her up and carried her over the threshold of the bedroom they'd use, and then another one when she saw the bottle sticking out of a bucket on a stool by the bed. The bucket was ordinary galvanized iron, straight out of a hardware store, but inside, nestled in snow-"Champagne!" she exclaimed.

Two wineglasses-not champagne flutes, but close enoughrested alongside the bucket. "That's very nice," Yeager said. He gently lifted the bottle out of the snow, undid the foil wrap and the little wire cage, worked the cork a little-and then let it fly out with a report like a rifle shot and ricochet off the ceiling. He had a glass ready to catch the champagne that bubbled out, then finished filling it the more conventional way.

With a flourish, he handed the glass to Barbara, poured one for himself. She stared down into hers. "I don't know if I ought to drink this," she said. "If I have a whole lot more, I will fall asleep on you. That wouldn't be right. Wedding nights are supposed to be special."

"Any night with you is special," he said, which made her smile. But then he went on more seriously, "We ought to drink it, especially now that we've opened it. Nobody has enough of anything any more to let it go to waste."

"You're right," she said, and sipped. An eyebrow rose.

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"That's pretty good champagne. I wonder how it got to the great metropolis of Chugwater, by God, Wyoming."

"Beats me." Yeager drank, too. He didn't know much about champagne; he drank beer by choice and whiskey every so often. But it did taste good. The bubbles tickled the inside of his mouth. He sat down on the bed, not far from the stool with the bucket.

Barbara sat down beside him. Her glass was already almost empty. She ran a hand along his arm, let it rest on his corpofile:///C//2590%20Sci-Fi%20and%20Fantasy%20E-books/Harry%20Turtledove%20-%20Worldwar%2002%20-%20Tilting%20the%20Balance.txt

ral's chevrons. "You were in uniform, so you looked fine for the wedding." She made a face. "Getting married in a gingham blouse and a pair of dungarees isn't what I had in mind." He slid an arm around her waist, then drained his glass of champagne and pulled the bottle from its bed of snow. It held just enough to fill them both up again. "Don't worry about it. There's only one proper uniform for a bride on her wedding night." He reached behind her, undid the top button of her

"That's the proper uniform for bride and groom both," she said. Her fingers fumbled as she worked at one of his buttons. She laughed. "See-I told you I shouldn't have had that champagne. Now I'm having trouble getting you out of soldier's uniform and into bridegroom's."

blouse.

"No hurry, not tonight," he said. "One way or another, we'll manage." He drank some more, then looked at the glass with respect. "That takes me to a happier place than I usually go when I've had a few. Or maybe it's the company." "I like you, Sam!" Barbara exclaimed. For some reasonmaybe it was the champagne-that made him feel better than if she'd said I love you. Presently, he asked, "Do you want me to blow out the candlesT' Her eyebrows came together in thought for a moment. Then she said, "No, let them bum, unless you really want it to be dark tonight." He shook his head. "I like to look at you, honey." She wasn't a Hollywood movie star or a Vargas girl: a little too thin, a little too angular, and, if you looked at things objec-

tively, not pretty enough. Sam didn't give two whoops in hell about looking at things objectively. She looked damn good to him.

He ran his hands over her breasts, let one of them stray

down her belly toward where her legs joined. She stretched luxuriously and made a noise like a purring cat, down deep in her throat. His tongue teased a nipple. She grabbed the back of his head, pulled him against her.

After his mouth had followed his hand downward, she rubbed at the soft flesh of her inner thighs. "I wish there were more razor blades around," she said in mock complaint. "Your face chafes me when you do that."

He touched her, gently. Her breath sighed out. She was wet. "I thought you liked it while it was going on," he said, grinning. "Shall I get that rubber now?"

"Wait." She sat up, bent over him, and lowered her head. It was the first time she'd ever done that without being asked. Her hair spilled down and tickled his hipbones.

"Easy, there," he gasped a minute later. "You do much more and I won't need to bother with a rubber."

"Would you like that?" she asked, looking up at him from under her bangs. She still held him. He could feel the warm little puffs of breath as she spoke.

He was tempted, but shook his head. "Not on our wedding night. Like you said, it ought to be perfect. And it's for something else."

"All right, let's do something else," she said agreeably, and lay back on the bed. He leaned over the side and pulled a rubber out of the back pocket of his chinos. But before he could peel it open, she grabbed his wrist and repeated, "Wait." He gave her a quizzical look. She went on, "I know you don't like those all that much. Don't bother tonight-if we're going to make it perfect, that will help. It should be okay."

He tossed the rubber onto the floor. He wasn't fond of them. He wore them because she wanted him to, and because he could see why she didn't want to get pregnant. But if she felt like taking a chance, he was eager to oblige.

"It does feel better without overshoes," he said. He guided himself into her. "Oh, God, does it!" Their mouths met, clung. Neither of them said anything then, not with words.

"I always said you were a gentleman, Sam," Barbara told him as he rolled off her: "You keep your weight on your elbows." He snorted. She said, "Don't go away now."

"I wasn't going anywhere, not without you." He put an arm around her, drew her close. She snuggled against him. He liked that. In some ways, it seemed more intimate than making love.

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You could make love with a stranger; he'd done it in a fair number of minor-league whorehouses in minor-league towns. But to snuggle with somebody, it had to be somebody who really mattered to you.

As if she'd picked the thought out of his head, Barbara said, "I love you."

"I love you, too, hon." His arms tightened around her. "I'm

glad we're married." That seemed just the right thing to say on a wedding night.

"So am L" Barbara ran the palm of her hand along his cheek. "Even if you are scratchy," she added. He tensed, ready to grab her; sometimes when she made jokes in bed, she'd poke him in the ribs. Not tonight-she turned serious instead. "You made exactly the right toast this afternoon. 'Life gczs on' . . . It has to, doesn't itT'

"That's what I think, anyhow." Yeager wasn't sure whether she was asking him or trying to convince herself. She still couldn't be easy in her mind about her first husband. He had to be dead, but still ...

"You have the right way of looking at things," Barbara said, serious still. "Life isn't always neat; it's not orderly; you can't always plan it and make it come out the way you think it's supposed to. Things happen that nobody would expect---2' "Well, sure," Yeager said. "The war made the whole world crazy, and then the Lizards on top of that--2'

"Those are the big things," she broke in. "As you say, they change the whole world. But little things can turn your life in new directions, too. Everybody reads Chaucer in high-school English, but when I did, he just seemed the most fascinating writer I'd ever come across. I started trying to learn more about his time, and about other people who were writing then ... and so I ended up in graduate school at Berkeley in medieval literature. If I hadn't been there, I never would have met Jens, I never would ' have come to Chicago-2' She leaned up and kissed him. "I never would have met you."

"Little things," Sam repeated. "Ten, eleven years ago, I was playing for Birmingham down in the Southern Association. That's Class A-1 ball, the second highest class in the minor leagues. I was playing pretty well, I wasn't that old-if things had broken right, I might have made the big leagues. Things broke, all right. About halfway through the season, I broke my ankle. It cost me the rest of the year, and I wasn't the same ballplayer afterwards. I kept at it-never found anything I'd rather do--but I knew I wasn't going anywhere any more. Just one of those things."

"Mat's just it." She nodded against his chest. "Little things, things you'd never expect to matter, can turn up in the most surprising ways."

"I'll say." Yeager nodded, too. "If I hadn't read science fiction, I wouldn't have gotten chosen to take our Lizard POWs back to Chicago or turned into their liaison man-and I wouldn't have met you."

To his relief, she didn't make any cracks about his choice of reading; someone who dove into Chaucer for fun was liable to think of it as the literary equivalent of picking your nose at the dinner table. Instead, she said, "Jens always had trouble seeing that the little things could make-not a big difference, but a surprising difference. Do you see what I'm saying?"

"Min-hirim." Yeager kept his answer to a grunt. He didn't have anything against Jeps Larssen, but he didn't want his ghost coming between them on their wedding night, either.

Barbara went on, "Jens wanted things just so, and thought they always had to be that way. Maybe it was because his work was so mathematically precise-I don't know-but he thought the world operated that way, too. That sort of need for exactitude could be hard to live with sometimes."

"Mm-hmm." Sam grunted again, but something loosened in his chest even so. He never remembered her criticizing Jens before.

No sooner had that thought crossed his mind than she said, "I guess what I'm trying to tell you, Sam, is that I'm glad I'm with you. Taking things as they come is easier than tying to fit everything that happens into some pattern you've worked out."

"Mat calls for a kiss," he said, and bent his head down to hers. She responded eagerly. He felt himself stirring, and knew a certain amount of pride: if you couldn't wear yourself out on your wedding night, when were you supposed to?

Barbara felt him stirring, too. "What have we here?" she said when the kiss finally broke. She reached between them to find out. Yeager's lips trailed down her neck toward her breasts again. Her hand tightened on him. His found the dampness between her legs.

After a while, he rolled onto his back: easier to stay hard for

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a second round that way, especially if you weren't in your twenties any more. He'd learned Barbara didn't mind getting on top every so often.

"Oh, yes," he said softly as she straddled him. He was glad she hadn't made him put on a rubber tonight; you could feel so much more without one. He ran his fingers lightly down the smooth curve of her back. She shivered a little. Afterwards, she didn't pull away, but sprawled down on top of him. He kissed her cheek and the very comer of her mouth. "Nice," she said, her voice sleepy. "I just want to stay right here forever."

He put his arms around her. "That's what I want, too, hon."

Oscar appeared in the doorway of Jens Larssen's BOQ room. "Colonel Hexham wants to see you, sir. Right away."

"Does he?" Larssen had been sprawled out on the cot, reading the newest issue of Time-now getting on toward a year old-he could find. He got up in a hurry. "I'll come." He hadn't been "sir" to Oscar since he'd gone on strike, not till now. Maybe that was a good sign.

He didn't think so when the guard escorted him back into the colonel's office. Hexham's toothpick was going back and forth like a metronome, his bulldog face pinched and sour. "So you won't do any work unless you write your miserable letter, eh?" he ground out, never opening his mouth wide enough for the toothpick to fall out.

"That's right," Jens said-not defiantly, but more as if stating a law of nature.

"Then write it." Hexham looked more unhappy than ever. He shoved a sheet of paper and a pencil across the desk at Jens.

"Thank you, sir," Larssen exclaimed, taking them gladly. As he started to write, he asked, "What made you change your mind?"

"Orders." Hexharn bit the word off. So you've been overruled, have you? Jens thought as he let the pencil race joyously across the paper. Trying to get a little of his own back, the colonel went on, "I will read that letter when you're done with it. No last names, no other breaches of security will be permitteid."

"That's fine, sir. I'll go back to Science Hall the minute I'm done here." Larssen scrawled Love, Jens and handed the paper

back to Colonel Hexham. He didn't bother waiting for Hexham to read it, but started out to keep his end of the bargain. If you worked at it, he thought, you could make things go the way they were supposed to.

* IV *

Bobby Fiore almost wished he was still on the Lizards' spaceship. For one thing, as far as he was concerned, the food had been better up there. For another, all the human beings on the spaceship had been aliens, guinea pigs. Plopped down in the middle of God only knew how many Chinamen, he was the alien in this refugee camp.

His lips quirked wryly. "I'm the only guinea here, too," he said out loud.

Speaking English, even to himself, felt good. He didn't get much chance to do it these days, even less than he'd had when he was up in space. Some of the Lizards there had understood him. Here nobody did; if the Lizard camp guards spoke any human language-not all of them did-it was Chinese. Only Liu Han knew any English at all.

His face set in a frown. He hated depending on a woman; it made him feel as if he were eight years old again, and back in Pittsburgh with his mama. He couldn't help it, though. Except for Liu Han, nobody for miles around could speak with him.

He rubbed his chin. He needed a shave. The first thing he'd done when the Lizards dumped him here was get a razor and get rid of his beard. Not only did shaving make him stand out less from everybody else, a razor was a handy thing to have in a fight. He'd seen enough barroom brawls to know that; he'd been in a few, too.

The funny thing was how little notice he drew. He wore wide-legged pants and baggy shirts that reminded him of pajamas, the same as the Chinese (even with them, he was cold a lot of the time-and he wasn't used to that after the spaceship, 97 either), which helped him fit in. A lot of the locals were too busy to pay him any mind, too; they made stuff for the Lizards out of straw and wicker and leather and scrap metal and God only knew what all else, and they worked hard.

But what really surprised him was that his looks weren't so far out of place. Sure, he still had his big Italian nose; his eyes were too round and his hair was wavy. But eyes and hair were dark; a blond like Sam Yeager would have stood out like a sore thumb. And his olive skin wasn't that different from the color of the people around him. As long as he stayed cleanshaven, he wasn't that remarkable.

"I'm even tall," he said, smiling again. Back in the States, five-eight was nothing. Even here he wasn't huge, but for a change he was bigger than average.

Sudden shouts not far away--even-when he didn't speak the language, Fiore knew fury and outrage when he heard them. He turned toward the sudden racket. Being taller than most let him see over the crowd. A man was running his way with a hen under each arm. Behind him, screeching like a cat with its tail stuck in a door, dashed a skinny woman. The chicken thief gained ground with every stride.

Fiore looked down to the dirt of the street. A nice-sized rock lay there, just a couple of feet away. He snatched it up, took a couple of shuffling steps sideways to get a clear shot at the man, and let fly.

When he was playing second base for the Decatur Commodores, he'd had to get off accurate throws to first with a runner bearing down on him with spikes high. Here he didn't even need to pivot. He hadn't done any throwing since the Lizards took him up into space, but he'd played pro ball for a lot of years. The smooth motion was still there, automatic as breathing.

The rock caught the fellow with the chickens right in the pit of the stomach. Fiore grinned; he couldn't have placed it any better with a bull's-eye to aim at. The would-be thief dropped the chickens and folded up like an accordion. His face was cornically amazed as he fell-he had no idea what had hit him.

The two chickens ran away, squawking. The screeching woman started kicking the fellow who'd swiped them. She might have been better advised to chase diem, but she seemed to put revenge ahead of poultry. The chicken thief couldn't

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even fight back. He'd had the wind knocked out of him, and had to he there and take it.

One of the chickens darted past Fiore. It disappeared between two huts before he could decide to grab it for himself. "Damn," he said, kicking at the dirt. "I should've brought that home for Liu Han." Somebody else-almost certainly not its proper owner-would enjoy it now.

"Too bad," he muttered. He'd eaten some amazing things since the Lizards stuck him here. He'd thought he knew what Chinese food was 0 about. After all, he'd stopped at enough chop suey joints on the endless road trips that punctuated his life. You could fill yourself up for cheap, and it was usually pretty good.

The only familiar thing here was plain rice. No chop suey, no crunchy noodles, no little bowls of ketchup and spicy mustard. No fried shrimp, though that made sense, because he didn't think the camp was anywhere near the ocean. Not even fried rice, for God's sake. He wondered if the guys who ran the chop suey places were really Chinese at all. The vegetables here looked strange and tasted stranger, and Liu Han insisted on serving them while they were still crunchy, which meant raw as far as he was concerned. He wanted a string bean-not that there were any string beans-to keep quiet between his teeth, not fight back. His mama had cooked vegetables till they were soft, which made it Gospel to him.

But Liu Han's mama had had different ideas. He wasn't about to cook for himself, so he ate what Liu Han gave him.

If the vegetables were bad, the meat was worse. Papa Fiore had known hard times in Italy; every once in a while, he'd slip and call a cat a roof rabbit. Roof rabbit seemed downright tempting compared to some of the things for sale in the camp marketplace: dog meat, skinned rats, elderly eggs. Bobby had quit asking aboutthe bits and strips of flesh Liu Han served along with her half-raw vegetables: better not to know. That was one of the reasons he regretted not grabbing the chickenfor once, he would have been sure of what he was eating.

The woman quit kicking the chicken thief and started after the bird that hadn't come near Fiore. That hen had sensibly decided to go elsewhere. The woman stopped screeching and started wailing. What with all the racket she made, Fiore decided he was on the chicken's side. That wouldn't help the

bird; if it stayed anywhere in camp, it would end up in somebody's pot pretty damn quick.

Fiore picked his way through the crowded, narrow streets back toward his hut. He was glad he had a good sense of direction. Without it, he wouldn't have gone out past his own front door. Nobody here had ever heard of street signs, and even if signs hung on every comer, they wouldn't have been in a language he could read.

Liu Han was chattering away in Chinese with a couple of other women when he walked in. They turned and stared at him, half in curiosity, half in alarm. He bowed, which was good manners here. "Hello. Good day," he said in his halting Chinese.

The women giggled furiously, maybe at his accent, maybe just at his face: as far as they were concerned, anybody who wasn't Chinese might as well have been a nigger. They spoke rapidly to each other; he caught the phraseforeign devil, which they applied to those not of their kind. He wondered what they were saying about him.

They didn't stay long. After good-byes to Liu Han and bows to him-he had been polite, even if he was a foreign devilthey headed back to wherever they lived. He hugged Liu Han. You still couldn't tell she was pregnant when she wore clothes, but now he felt the beginning of a bulge to her belly when they embraced.

"You okay?" he asked in English, and added the Lizards' inter-rogative cough at the end,

"Okay," she said, and tacked on the emphatic cough. For a while, the Lizards' language had been the only one they had in common. Nobody but the two of them understood the mishmash they spoke these days. She pointed to the teapot, used the interrogative cough.

"M'goi-thanks," he said. The pot was cheap and old, the cups even cheaper, and one of them cracked. The Lizards had given them the hut and everything in it; Fiore tried not to think about what might have happened to whoever was living there before.

He sipped the tea. What he wouldn't have given for a big mug of coffee with sugar and lots of cream! Tea was okay once in a while, but all the time every day? Forget it. He started to laugh.

"Why funny?" Liu Han asked.

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"Up there"--their shorthand for the spaceship-"you eat my kind food." Most of the canned goods the Lizards fed them with came from the States or from Europe. Fiore made a horrible face to remind her how well she'd liked them. "Now I eat your kind food." He made the face again, but this time he pointed to himself.

A mouse scuttled across the floor, huddled against the baked-

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clay hearth to get warm. Liu Han didn't carry on the way a lot of American women would have. She just pointed at it. Fiore picked up a brass incense burner and flung it at the mouse. His aim was still good. He caught the rodent right in the ribs. It lay there twitching. Liu Han picked it up by the tail and threw it out. She said, "You"-she made a throwing ge!ture-"good." 'Yeah," he said. Arith their three languages and a lot of

dumb show, he told her how he'd nailed the chicken thief. "The arm still works." He'd tried explaining about baseball. Liu Han didn't get it.

She made the throwing gesture. "Good," she repeated. He nodded; this wasn't the first mouse he'd nailed. The camp was full of vermin. It had been a jolt, especially after the metallic sterility of the spaceship. It was also another reason not to want to know too much about what he ate. He'd never worried about what health departments back in the U.S.A. did. But seeing what things were like without them gave him a new perspective.

"Should make money, arm so good," Liu Han said. "Not do like here."

"God knows that's so," Fiore answered, responding to the second part of what she'd said. Most Chinamen, he thought scornfully, threw like girls, shortarming it from the elbow. Next to them, he looked like Bob Feller. Then he noticed the key word from the first part. "Money?"

He didn't need ' much, not in camp. He and Liu Han were still the Lizards' guinea pigs, so they didn't pay rent for the hut and nobody dared haggle too hard in the marketplace. But more cash never hurt anybody. He'd made a little doing the hard physical work-hauling lumber and digging trencheshe'd started playing ball to avoid. And he won more than he lost when he gambled. Still ...

Mountebanks did well here, among people starved for any other entertainment: jugglers, clowns, a fellow with a trained

monkey that seemed smarter than a lot of people Fiore knew. All the baseball skills he had-throwing, catching, hitting, even sliding-were ones the people here didn't use. He'd never thought about turning baseball into a vaudeville act, but you could do it.

He bent to kiss Liu Han. She liked that-not just that he did it, but that he made a production of it. She needed to know he kept caring for her. "Baby, you're brilliant," he said. Then he had to stop and explain what brilliant meant, but it was worth it.

Ussmak was unenthusiastic about leaving the nice warm barracks at Besangon. The cold outside made his muzzle tingle. He hurried toward his landcruiser, whose crew compartment had a heater.

"We'll kill all the stupid Deutsch Big Uglies as far as the eye can see, then come back here and relax some more. Shouldn't take long," Hessef said. The landcruiser commander let the lid to his cupola fall with a clang.

That's the ginger talking, Ussmak thought. Hessef and Tvenkel had both tasted just before they started this mission: ginger was cheap and easy to come by here in France. They'd both laughed at him for declining-he'd used even more than they had while sitting around waiting for something to happen.

But he still thought combat was different. The Big Uglies were barbarous, but he knew they could fight. He'd had landcruisers wrecked around him; he'd lost crewmales. And the Deutsche were supposed to be more dangerous than the Russki had been. That was plenty to make him want to go at them undrugged.

Tvenkel had sneered, "Don't worry about it. The landcruiser just about fights itself."

"Do what you want," Ussmak had answered. "I'll taste plenty when we get back, I promise you that." He missed the confidence and exuberance ginger gave him, but he didn't think he really was smarter when he tasted-he only felt that way. A lot of tasters failed to draw the distinctiM but he thought it was there.

At Hessef's blithe order, he started the landcruiser's engine. Part of a long column, the big, heavy machine rumbled out of the fortress and through the narrow streets of Besanqon. Big Uglies in their ridiculous clothes stared as it went past. Some

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of the Big Uglies yelled things. Ussmak hadn't learned any Franqais, but the tone didn't sound friendly.

Males of the Race, aided here and there by Tosevites in low, flat-topped cylindrical hats, held back local trff-ic until the colunin passed by. Most of the traffic was Big Uglies on foot or on the two-wheeled contraptions that used their own body energy for propulsion. Others sat atop animal-drawn wagons that file:///C//2590%20Sci-Fi%20and%20Fantasy%20E-books/Harry%20Turtledove%20-%20Worldwar%2002%20-%20Tilting%20the%20Balance.txt

seemed to Ussmak something straight out of an archaeology video.

One of the animals let a pile of droppings fall to the street. None of the Big Uglies rushed to clean it up; none of them seemed to notice it was there. Hessef spoke to Ussmak from the landcruiser's intercom: "Filthy creatures, aren't they? They deserve to be conquered, and we're going to do it." An unnatural confidence filled his voice.

But for the landcruisers, only a couple of motorized vehicles moved in Besanqon. Both of them had big metal cylinders rising from the rear like tumors. "What are those things?" Ussmak asked. "Their engines?"

"No," Tvenkel answered. The gunner went on, "They're built to bum petroleum by-products, like Tosevite landcruisers.

But they can't get those by-products any more. The gadgets you see extract burnable gas from wood. They're ugly makeshifts like most of what the Big Uglies do, but they work after a fashion."

"Oh." Up in the fortress that overlooked Besangon, Ussmak had grown used to smells he'd never smelled before. Now that he saw what produced some of those smells, he wondered what they were doing to his lungs.

The operations order said the landcruisers were to proceed northeast from Besanqon. Through the town, however, they rumbled northwest. Ussmak wondered if that was right, but didn't say anything about it. All he was doing was following the male in front of him. You couldn't possibly get in trouble if you did that.

The male in front of him-and all the males in the column, right up to the lead driver, who had to make his own decisions-proved to know what they were doing. They rattled across a bridge (to the relief of Ussmak, who wasn't sure it would take his landcruiser's weight), past the earthworks of yet another fort, and then out onto a road that led in the proper direction.

Ussmak undogged his entry hatch and stuck out his head. Driving unbuttoned gave him the best view, even if the breeze in his face was chilly. Shouldn't be dangerous here, he thought. Nothing even slightly out of the ordinary had happened since he came to Besangon. He'd become convinced the area was thoroughly pacified.

Up ahead, something went whump. Ussmak recognized that noise from the SSSR: somebody had driven over a land mine. Sure enough, landcruisers started going off the road on either side to get around a disabled vehicle. From the commander's cupola, Hessef said, "Ali, will you look at that? It's blown the track right off him."

The ground to either side of the paved road was soft and soggy: not surprising, Ussmak supposed, since the highway ran parallel to the river that flowed through Besangon. He didn't think anything of it until a landcruiser, and then another one, bogged down in the muck.

From the woods to the north of the road came another sound with which Ussmak had become intimately familiar in the SSSR: a sharp, fast, harsh tac-tac-tac. He slammed the hatch with a clang. "They're shooting at us!" he screamed. "That's an egg-addled machine gun, that's what that is!" Bullets ricocheting from the landcruiser's composite armor underscored his words.

In the turTet, Hessef shouted in high excitement. "I see muzzle flashes, by the Emperor! There he is, Tvenkel, right over there! Bring the turret around-that's the way. Give him some with the machine gun, and then a round of high explosive. We'll teach the Big Uglies; to fool with us!"

Ussmak let out a slow hiss of wonder. Hessef's sloppy commands weren't anything like the ones that had been drilled into the landcruiser crews in endless days of simulator training and exercises back on Home. Ussmak realized he was listening to the ginger talking again. An adjutant monitoring Hessef would have swelled up as if he had the gray staggers.

However tmorthodox the orders, though, they accomplished their purpose. Hydraulics whirred as the turret smoothly traversed. The coaxial machine gun opened up. Heard from inside the landcruiser, it wasn't loud at all. "Fool with us, will they?" Tvenkel yelled. "I'll teach them this world belongs to the Race!" He fired a long, long burst. Not being tumed toward the Big Uglies with the machine gun, Ussmak at first had trou-

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ble judging how effective Tvenkel's shooting was. But the more bullets pattered off the landcruisers like pebbles thro at a metal roof. They did no more damage than pebbles wou have, but showed the Tosevite gunners were still in business

"Give 'ern the real thing," Hessef said. Again, thick armo muffled the cannon's roar, though the landcruiser rocke slightly on its treads as it took up the recoil. "Mere, that's done it," Tvenkel said with satisfaction. put enough rounds on that machine gun so the Big Uglies run ning it won't bother their betters again." As if to undersc his words, bullets stopped hitting the landcruiser. Ussmak peered through his forward vision slits. Some of other vehicles in the column were already moving ahead. moment later, Hessef said, "Forward."

"It shall be done, superior sir." Ussmak released the brake put the landcruiser into low gear. It rumbled forward. H steered very close to the machine that had thrown a track keeping one of his own on the paved road to makt-_ sure h didn't bog down. As soon as he was past the cripple landcruiser, he sped up to try to recapture some of the time ev eryone had lost shooting at the Big Uglies and their machi gun.

Hessef said, "Not bad at all. The column commander report only two wounds, neither serious. And we obliterated tho Tosevites."

The ginger was still talking through him, Ussmak thou Landcruiser crews shouldn't have taken any casualties from nuisance machine gun. Besides which, Hessef was ignoring t disabled fighting vehicle and the delay that sprang from the li tle firefight. If you'd tasted ginger a while before, such set backs were too small to be worth noticing. Had Ussmak tast along with the rest of the crew, he wouldn't have noticed the either. Without a particle of the herb in him, though, the bulked large. He wondered just how clever he really was afte a good taste.

From behind and to the left, bullets clattered off th landcruiser's rear deck and the back of the turret. The Big U lies at their machine gun had lived through the firesto around them after all.

"Halt!" Hessef screeched. Ussmak obediently hit the "Five rounds high explosive this time," the commander

dered. "Do you hear me, Tvenkel? I want those maniacal males blown to bloody bits."

"So do I," the gunner said. He and his commander agreed perfectly, just as training said members of a landcruiser crew should. The only trouble was that the tactic on which they agreed struck Ussmak as insane.

The landcruiser's main armament boomed, again and again. And Hessef's was not the only crew that had halted. Through his vision slits, Ussmak watched several other landcruisers stop so they could pour fire down on the Tosevites who had had the temerity to annoy them. The driver wondered if their commanders were tasting, too.

When the barrage was done, Hessef said, "Forward," in tones of self-satisfaction. Ussmak obeyed again. Not much later, the landcruiser column came to an enormous hole blown in the highway. "The Big Uglies can't stop us with nonsense like that," Hessef declared. And sure enough, the armored fighting vehicles swung off the road one by one.

The machine just in front of Ussmak's rolled over a mine and lost a track. As soon as it slewed to a stop, a concealed Tosevite machine gun opened up. The landcruisers again returned fire with cannon and machine guns.

The column was very late reaching its assigned destination.

Heinrich Jager paced through the cobblestoned streets of Hechingen. Up on a spur of the Schwabische Alb stood Burg Hohenzollern. Its turrets, seen mistily through fog, made Jager think of medieval epic, of maidens with long golden tresses and of the dragons that coveted them for their own dragonish reasons.

The trouble these days, however, was Lizards, not dragons. Jager wished he were back at the front so he could do something useful about them. Instead, he was stuck here with the best scientific ininds of the Reich.

He had nothing against diem: on the contrary. They were far more likely to save Germany-to save mankind-than he was. But they thought they needed him to help them do it, and in that, as far as he could see, they were badly mistaken.

He'd watched soldiers make the same kind of mistake. If a detachment from the quartermaster's office brought a new model field telephone to the front-line soldiers, they were an-

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tornatically seen as experts on the gadget, even if the only thing they knew about it was how to get it out of its crate. So with him now. He'd helped steal the explosive metal from the Lizards, he'd hauled it across the Ukraine and Poland. Therefore, the presumption ran, he had to know all about it. Like a lot of presumptions, that one presumed too much. Coming up the street toward him, munching on a chunk of black bread, was Werner Heisenberg. In spite of the bread, file:///C//2590%20Sci-Fi%20and%20Fantasy%20E-books/Harry%20Turtledove%20-%20Worldwar%2002%20-%20Tilting%20the%20Balance.txt

Heisenberg looked very much the academic: he was tall and serious-looking, with bushy hair combed straight back, fluffy eyebrows, and an expression mostly, as now, abstracted. "Herr Doktor Professor " Jager said, touching the brim of

his service cap. No matter how bored he was, he remained polite.

"Ali, Colonel Jager, good day. I did not see you." Heisenberg chuckled uneasily. Being taken for the traditional absentminded professor had to embarrass him, not least because he really wasn't that way. Up till now, he'd always seemed plenty sharp-and not just brilliant, which went without saying-to Jager. He went on, "I am glad to find you, though. I must thank you again for the material you have given us to work with." -116 serve the Reich is my pleasure and my duty," Jager answered, politely still. If Heisenberg had ever seen combat, he didn't show it. He could thank Jager for bringing the explosive metal, but he didn't really know what that meant, or how much blood had been spilled to get him his experimental material.

He proceeded to prove that, saying, "A pity you could not have fetched us a bit more. Theoretical calculations indicate the amount we have is marginal for the production of a uranium explosive. Another three or four kilos would have been most beneficial."

That did it. Jdger's boredom boiled away in fury. "Dr. Diebner had the ' courtesy to be grateful for what was provided rather than to complain about it. He also had the sense, sir"--Jager loaded the title with scorn-"to remember how many lives were lost obtaining it."

He'd hoped to make Heisenberg ashamed. Instead, he flicked him on his vanity. "Diebner? Ha! He has not even his Habilitation. He is, if you ask me, more tinkerer than physicist."

"He knows what war entails, which is more than you seem

to. And, by all accounts, he and his group are further along than yours in setting up the apparatus to produce more of this explosive metal for ourselves after we expend what we procured from the Lizards."

"By no means is his work theoretically sound," Heisenberg said, as if he were accusing the other physicist of embezzlement.

"I don't care about theory. I care about results." Jager automatically reacted like a soldier. "Without results, theory is irrelevant."

"Without theory, results are impossible," Heisenberg retorted. The two men glared at each other. Jager wished he hadn't bothered to greet the physicist. By the expression on his face, Heisenberg wished the same thing.

Jager shouted, "The metal is more real to you than the men who fell getting it." He wanted to clout Heisenberg down from his cloud, make him glimpse, however distantly, the world beyond equations. He also wanted to kick him in the teeth.

"I tried to express to you a civil good day, Colonel Jager," Heisenberg said in tones of ice. "That you return it to me with such, such recriminations I can take only as the mark of an unbalanced mind. Believe me, Colonel, I shall trouble you no further." The physicist stalked off.

Still steaming, Jager stalked, too, in the opposite direction. He jumped and almost grabbed for his sidearm when someone said, "Well, Colonel, what was that in aid of?"

"Dr. Diebner!" Jager said. "You startled me." He took his hand away from the flap of his holster.

"I shall try not to do that again," Kurt Diebner said. "I can see it might not be healthy for me." Where Heisenberg looked like a professor, Diebner at first glance seemed more likely to be a farmer. He was in his thirties, with a broad, fleshy face and a receding hairline which he emphasized by slicking down his dark hair with grease and combing it straight back. He wore his baggy suit as if he'd been out walking the fields in it. Only the thick glasses that showed how nearsighted he was argued for a different interpretation of his character.

Jager said, "I had a--disagreement with your colleague." "I saw that, yes." Behind the glasses, amusement glinted in Diebner's eyes. "I don't believe I have ever seen Dr. Heisenberg so provoked; he normally cultivates an Olympian imperturbability. I came round the comer only for the tail end

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of the--,disagreement, you said?-and was wondering wh touched it off."

The panzer colonel hesitated, since his compliments Diebner had helped set Heisenberg off. At last he said, "I w concerned that Professor Heisenberg did not, ah, fully reali the difficulties in getting this metal to you nuclear physicists you could exploit it." "Ali." Diebner turned his head, peered this way and that; u like Jager and Heisenberg, he was careful about who he him speak- His big thick spectacles and their dark rims g him the air of a curious owl. "Sometimes, Colonel Jager," said when he was sure the coast was clear, "from the top the ivory tower it is hard to see the men struggling down in mud."

"This may be so." Jager studied Diebner. "And yet-forgi me, Herr Doktor Professor-it seems to me, a colonel of p zers admittedly ignorant of all matter pertaining to nucle physics, that you, too, dwell in this ivory tower."

"Oh, I do, without a doubt." Diebner laughed; his plu cheeks shook. "But I do not dwell on the topmost floor. Be the war, before uranium and its behavior became so imp to us all, Professor Heisenberg concerned himself almost e clusively with the mathematical analysis of matter and its havior. You have perhaps heard of the Uncertainty Princip which bears his name?"

"I'm sorry, but no," Jager said.

"Ali, well." Diebner shrugged. "Put me in charge of a p zer and I would be quickly killed. We all have our areas of e pertise. My gift is in physics, too, but in experimenting to s what the properties of matter actually are. Then the theore cians, of whom Professor Heisenberg is among the best, u these data to develop their abstruse conclusions over what it means."

"Thank you' You have clarified that for me." Jager me it-now he understood why Heisenberg had sneeringly call Diebner a tinkerer. The difference was something like the o between himself and a colonel of the General Staff. Jager kn he didn't have the broad strategic vision he'd need to succe as a man with the Larnpassen-the broad red stripes th marked a General Staff officer-on his trousers. On the oth hand, a General Staff officer wasn't likely to have acquired t

nuts-and-bolts knowledge (often in the literal sense of the words) to run a panzer regiment.

Diebner said, "Do try to bear with us, Colonel. The difficulties we face are formidable, not least because we are under such desperate pressure of time and strategy."

"I follow," Jager said. "I wish I were back with my unit, so I could use what I have learned to help hold the Lizards out of the Reich and let you complete your work. I am badly out of place here."

"If you advance our building of the uranium bomb, you will have done more for the Reich than you could possibly accomplish in the field. Believe me when I say this." Now Diebner looked earnest, like a farmer solemnly explaining how excellent his beets were.

"If." Jager remained unconvinced that he could do anything useful here at Hechingen: he was about as valuable as oars on a bicycle. He came up with a plan, though, one that made him smile. Diebner smiled back; he seemed a very decent fellow. Jager felt a little guilty at going against him, but only a little.

When he got back to his quarters, he drafted a request to be returned to active duty. On the space in the form that asked his reason for seeking the transfer, he wrote, I am of no use to the physicists here. If confirmation is required, please inquire of Professor Heisenberg.

He sent the request off with a messenger and awaited results. They were not long in coming-the application got approved faster than he had thought possible. Diebner and a couple of the other physicists expressed regret that he was leaving. Professor Heisenberg said not a word. He'd no doubt had his say to the office who'd called or telegraphed about Jager.

Maybe he thought he'd had his revenge. As far as Jager was concerned, the distinguished professor had done him a favor.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil, for Thou art with me. Lodz constantly put Moishe Russie in riiind of the Twenty-third Psalm, and of that valley. Lodz, though, had only walked into the valley, not through it. The shadow of death still lay over the town. In Warsaw, thousands in the ghetto had died of starvation

and disease before the Lizards came. Starvation and disease hnd walked the streets of Lodz. too. But the Nazis hadn't let

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them work alone here. They'd started shipping Jews off their murder factories. Maybe the memory of those death tran ports was what made Lodz still seem caught in the grip of nightmare.

Russie walked southeast down Zgierska Street toward Balut Market square to buy some potatoes for his family. U $file:///C|/2590\%\,20Sci-Fi\%\,20and\%\,20Fantasy\%\,20E-books/Harry\%\,20Turtledove\%\,20-\%\,20Worldwar\%\,2002\%\,20-\%\,20Tilting\%\,20the\%\,20Balance.txt$

the street toward him came a Jewish policeman of the Service. His red-and-white armband bore a six-pointed bl star with a white circle in the center, marking him as an un officer. He had a truncheon on his belt and a rifle across back. He looked like a tough customer.

But when Russie tugged at the brim of his hat in salute, Order Service man returned the gesture and kept on walkin Emboldened, Russie turned and called after him: "How are potatoes today?"

The policeman stopped. "They're not wonderful, but F seen worse," he answered. Pausing to spit in the gutter, added, "We all saw worse last year."

"Isn't that the sad and sorry truth?" Russie said. He he

on down to the market while the Order Service man resum his beat.

more policemen roamed the Balut Market square, to ke down thievery, maintain order-and cadge what they coul Like the underofficer, they still wore the emblems of they'd got from the Nazis.

That helped make Lodz feel haunted to Russie. In Warsa the Judenrat-the Jewish council that had administered ghetto under German authority--collapsed even before the ards drove out the Nazis. Its police force had fallen with Jewish fighters, not the hated and discredited police, kept there now. The same held true in most Polish towns.

Not in Lodz. Here, the walls of the buildings that fro the market square were plastered with posters of baldin white-haired Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski. Rumkowski h been Eldest-puppet ruler--of Lodz's Jews under the N Somehow, he was still Eldest of the Jews under the Lizard Russie wondered how he'd managed that. He must ha

jumped from the departing train to the arriving one at just right instant. In Warsaw, there were stories that he'd coll rated with the Nazis. Russie had asked no questions of that since he got into Lodz. He didn't want to draw Rumkowski

attention toward him and his family. For all he knew, the Eldest would turn him over to Zolraag, the local Lizard governor. He got into line for potatoes. The lines moved fast; the Order Service men saw to that. They were fierce and fussy at the same time, a manner they must have learned from the Germans. Some of them still wore German-style jackboots, too. As with the ghetto stars on their armbands, the boots raise Russie's hackles.

When he reached the front of the line, such worries fell away. Food was more important. He held out a burlap bag and said, "Ten kilos of potatoes, please."

The man behind the table took the bag, filled it from a bin, plopped it onto a scale. He'd had endless practice; it weighed ten kilos on the dot. He didn't hand it back to Russie. Instead, he asked, "How are you going to pay? Lizard coupons, marks, zlotys, Rumkies?"

"Rumkies." Russie pulled a wad of them out of his pocket. The fighter who'd driver. him into Lodz had given him what seemed like enough to stuff a mattress. He'd imagined himself rich until he discovered that the Lodz ghetto currency was almost worthless.

The potato seller made a sour face. "If it's Rumkies, you owe me 450." The potatoes would have cost only a third as many Polish zlotys, the next weakest currency.

Russie started peeling off dark blue twenty-mark notes and blue-green tens, each printed with a Star of David in the upper left-hand comer and a cross-hatching of background lines that spiderwebbed the bills with more Magen Davids. Each note bore Rumkowski's signature, which gave the money its sardonic nickname.

The potato seller made his own count after Moishe gave him the bills. Even though it came out right, he still looked unhappy. "Next time you come, bring real money," he advised. "I don't think we're going to take Runikies a whole lot longer."

'But-" Russie waved to the ubiquitous portraits of the Jewish Eldest.

"He can do what he wants in here," the potato seller said. "But he can't make anybody outside think Rumkies are good for anything but wiping your behind." The merchant's shrug was eloquent.

Russie started back to his flat with the potatoes. It was on the comer of Zgierska and Lekarska, just a couple of blocks

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from the barbed wire that had sealed off the ghetto of Litzmannstadt, the Nazis had renamed it when they annex western Poland to the Reich-from the rest of the city.

Much of the barbed wire remained in place, though path had been cut through it here and there. In Warsaw, Liz bombs had knocked down the wall the Germans made. 0 course, that barrier had looked like a fortification and most o this one didn't. But something else went on here, too. The po tato seller had said that Rumkowski could do what he wante inside the ghetto. He'd meant it scornfully, but Moishe though his words held a truth he hadn't intended. He had the feelin Rumkowski liked being a big fish, no matter how small hi pond was.

At least there were enough potatoes to go around these day The Lodz ghetto had been as hungry as Warsaw's, maybe hun grier. The Jews inside remained gaunt and ragged, especiall compared to the Poles and Germans who made up the rest the townsfolk. They weren't actively starving any mor(though. From where they'd been a year before, that wasn't ju progress. It felt like a miracle.

A horse-drawn wagon clattered up behind Russie. H

stepped aside to let it pass. It was piled high with curious looking objects woven out of straw. "What are those thing anyway?" Russie called to the driver.

"You must be new in town." The fellow pulled back on th reins, slowed his team to an amble so he could talk for While. "They're boots, so the Lizards won't freeze their littl chicken feet every time they go out in the snow." "Chicken feet-I like that," Russie said.

The driver grinned. "Every time I see two or three Lizarc together, I think of the front window of a butcher's shop. want to go down the street yelling, 'Soup! Get your soup fi ings here!' " He sobered. "We were making straw boots for Nazis before the Lizards came. All we had to do was in lern smaller and change the shape."

"Wouldn't it be fine to make what we wanted just for o selves, not for one set of masters or another?" Russie sal wistfully. His hands remembered the motions they'd ma sewing seams on field-gray trousers.

"Fine, yes. Should you hold your breath? No." The dri coughed wetly. Tuberculosis, said the medical student Russ had once been. The driver went on, "It'll probably h

about the time the Messiah comes. These days, stranger, I'll take small things-my wife's not embroidering little eagles for Luftwaffe men, a kholereye on them, to wear on their shoulders. You ask me, that's fine."

"It is fine," Russie agreed. "But it shouldn't be enough."

"If God had asked me when He was making the world, I'm sure I could have done much better for His people. Unfortunately, He seems to have been otherwise engaged." Coughing again, the driver flicked the reins and sent the wagon rattling on down the street. Now at least he could go outside the ghetto.

More posters of Rumkowski were plastered on the front of Russie's block of flats. Under his lined face was one wordwoRK-in Yiddish, Polish, and German. His hope had been to make the industrious Jews of Lodz so valuable to the Nazis that they would not want to ship them to extermination camps. It hadn't worked; the Germans were running trains to Chelinno and other camps until the day the Lizards drove them away. Russie wondered how much Rumkowski had known about that.

He also wondered why Rumkowski fawned so on the Lizards when only horror had come from his efforts at accommodating the Nazis. Maybe he didn't want to lose the shadowy power he enjoyed as Jewish Eldest. Or maybe he just didn't know any other way to deal with overlords so much mightier than he. For the Eldest's sake, Russie hoped the latter was true.

Shlepping the potatoes up three flights of stairs as he walked down the hallway to his flat, years of bad nutrition and weeks of being cooped up inside the cramped bunker had taken their toll on his wind and on his strength generally. He tried the door. It was locked. He rapped on it. Rivka let him in.

A small tornado in a cloth cap tackled him just above the knees. "Father, Father!" Reuven squealed. "You're back!" Ever since they'd come out of the bunker-where they'd been to-gether every moment, awake and asleep-Reuven had been nervous about his going away for any reason. He was, how-ever, starting to get over that, for he asked, "Did you bring me anything?"

"Sorry, son; not this time. I just went out for food," Moishe said. Reuven groaned in disappointment. His father pulled his cap down over his eyes. He thought that was funny enough to make up for the lack of trinkets.

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People sold toys in the market square. How many of though, used to belong to children who'd died in the ghetto been taken away to Chelmno or some other camp? When e something that should have been joyous, like buying a to saddened and frightened you because you wondered why was for sale, you began to feel in your belly what the Nazi had done to the Jews of Poland. Rivka took the sack of potatoes. "What did you have pay?" she asked.

"Four hundred and fifty Rumkies," he answered. She stopped in dismay. "This is only ten kilos, right Last week ten kilos only cost me 320. Didn't you haggle? When he shook his head, she rolled her eyes toward the hem ens. "Men! See if I let you go shopping again." "The Rumkie's worth less every day," he said defensivel

"In fact, it's almost worthless, period." As if she were explaining a lesson to Reuven, she sai "Last week, the potato seller's first price for me was 43 Rumkies. I just laughed at him. You should have done same.,,

"I suppose so," he admitted. "It didn't seem to matter,

when we have so many Rumkies." "They won't last forever," Rivka said sharply. "Do you w us to have to go to work in the Lizards' factories to m enough to keep from starving?" "God forbid," he answered, remembering the wagon full straw boots. Making things for the Germans had been b enough; making boots and coats for the aliens who aimed conquer all mankind had to be worse, although the wago driver hadn't seemed to think so. Rivka laughed at him. "It's all right. I got us some nice oi ions from Mrs. Jakubowicz downstairs for next to nothig That should cancel out your foolishness." "How does Mrs. Jakubowicz come by onions?" "I didn't ask. One doesn't, these days, but she had enoug of them that she didn't gouge me." "Good. Do we have any of that cheese left?" Moishe askeA "Yes-plenty for today, with some left over for too. 11 "That's very good," Moishe said. Food came first. Th ghetto had taught him that. He sometimes thought that if ever got rich (not likely) and if the war ever ended (whic

seemed even less likely), he'd buy himself a huge house, live in half of it, and fill the other half with meat and butter (in separate rooms, of course) and pastries and all manner of wonderful things to eat. Maybe he'd open a delicatessen. Even in wartime, people who sold food didn't go as hungry as those who had to buy it.

The part of him that had studied human nutrition said cheese and potatoes and onions could keep body and soul together a long time. Protein, fat, vitamins (he wished for something green, but that would have been hard to come by in Poland in late winter even before the war), minerals. Unexciting food, yes, but food.

Rivka carried the sack of potatoes into the kitchen. Moishe trailed after her. The apartment was scantily furnished-just the leftovers of the people who had lived, and probably died, here before his family came. One thing it did boast, though, was a hot plate, and Lodz, unlike Warsaw even now, had reliable electricity.

Rivka peeled and chopped up a couple of onions. Moishe drew back a few paces. Even so, the onions were strong enough to make tears start in his eyes. The onions went into the stew pot. So did half a dozen potatoes. Rivka didn't peel them. She glanced over to her husband. "Nutrients," she said seriously.

"Nutrients," he agreed. Potatoes in their jackets had more than potatoes without. When potatoes were most of what you ate, you didn't want to waste anything.

"Supper in-a while," Rivka said. The hot plate was feeble. It would take a long time to boil water. Even after it did, the potatoes would take a while to cook. When your stomach was none too full, waiting came hard.

Without warning, a huge bang! rattled the windows. Reuven started crying. As Rivka rushed to comfort him, sirens began to wail.

Moishe followed his wife out to the front room. "It frightened me," Reuven said.

"It frightened me, too," his father answered. He'd tried to forget how terrifying an explosion out of the blue could be. Hearing just one took him back to the surnmer before, when the Lizards had forced the Germans out of Warsaw, and to 1939, when the Nazis had pounded a city that couldn't fight b k

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"I didn't think the Germans could hurt us any more," Rivk said.

"I didn't, either. They must have gotten lucky." Moish spoke as much to reassure himself as to hearten his wife. Be lieving they were safe from the Nazis was as vital to them a to every other Jew in Poland.

Bang! This one was louder and closer. The whole block o

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flats shook. Glass tinkled down on the floor as two window blew in. Faint in the distance, Moishe heard screams. The ri ing bay of the sirens soon drowned them out.

"LuckyT' Rivka asked bitterly. Moishe shrugged with much nonchalance as he could find. If it wasn't just luc didn't want to think about that.

"The Deutsche got lucky," Kirel said. "They launched the rnissiles when our antimissile system was down for periodi maintenance. The warheads did only relatively minor damag to our facilities."

Atvar glowered at the shiplord, though it was only natu that he try to put the best face on things. "Our facilities- in not be badly damaged, but what of our prestigeT' the fle snapped. "Shall we give the Big Uglies the impression can lob these things at us whenever it strikes their fancy?' "Exalted Fleetlord, the situation is not so bad as that," Kin said. "No, eh?" Atvar was not ready to be appeased. "How not? "They fired three more at our installations the next days an we knocked ail of those down," Kirel said-"This is less wonderful than it might be," Atvar said. "I pre sume we expended three antimissile missiles in the process? "Four, actually," Kirel said. "One went wild and had to destroyed in flight." "Which leaves us how many such missiles in our inven tory?" "Exalted Fleeilord, I would have to run a computer check give you the precise number," Kirel said. Atvar had run that computer check. "The precise numbe Shiplord, is 357. With them, we can reasonably expect to sho(down something over three hundred of the Big Uglies' mis siles. After that, we become as vulnerable to them as they to us."

"Not really," Kirel protested. "The guidance systems o

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their missiles are laughable. They can strike militarily significant targets only by accident. The missiles themselves are-_2

"Junk," Atvar finished for him. "I know this." He poked a claw into a computer control on his desk. The holographic image of a wrecked Tosevite missile sprang into being above the projector off to one side. "Junk," he repeated. "Sheet-metal body, glass-wool insulation, no electronics worthy of the name-2'

"It scarcely makes a pretense of being accurate," Kirel said. "I understand that," Atvar said. "And to knock it out of the sky, we have to use weapons full of sophisticated electronics we cannot hope to replace on this world. Even at one for one, the exchange is scarcely fair."

"We cannot show the Big Uglies how to manufacture integrated circuits," Kirel said. "Meir technology is too primitive to let them produce such sophisticated components for us. And even if it weren't, I would hesitate to acquaint them with such an art, lest we find ourselves on the receiving end of it in a year's time."

"Always a question of considerable import on Tosev 3," Atvar said. "I thank the forethoughtful spirits of Emperors pasf'-he cast his eyes down to the floor, as did Kirel--"that we stocked any antimissiles at all. We did not expect to have to deal with technologically advanced opponents."

"The same applies to our ground armor and many other armaments," Kirel agreed. "Without them, our difficulties would be greater still."

"I understand this," Atvar said. "What galls me still more is that, despite our air of superiority, we have not been able to shut down the Big Ugfies' industrial capacity. Their weapons are primitive, but continue to be produced."

He had once more the uneasy vision of a new Tosevite landcruiser rumbling around a pile of ruins just after the Race's last one had been lost in battle. Or maybe it would be a new missile flying off its launcher with a trail of fire, and no hope of knocking it down before it hit.

Kirel said, "Our strategy of targeting the Tosevites' petroleum facilities has not yet yielded the full range of desired results."

"I am painfully aware of this," Atvar replied. "The Big Uglies are better at effecting makeshift repairs than any rational being could have imagined. And while their vehicles and air-

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craft are petroleum-fueled, the same is not true of a large pro portion of their heavy manufacturing capacity. This also make matters more difficult."

"We are beginning to get significant amounts of small-arm ammunition from Tosevite factories in the areas under our con

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trol," Kirel said, resolutely looking at the bright side of things
"The level of sabotage in production is acceptably low."
 "That's something, anyhow. Up till now, these Tosevite facilities have produced nothing but frustration for us," Atvai
said. "The munitions they turn out are good enough to damage
us, but not of sufficient quality or precision to be usefW to w
in and of themselves. We cannot merely match them bullet foi
bullet or shell for shell, as they have more of each. Ours, then.
must have the greater effect."

"Indeed so, Exalted Fleetlord," Kirel said. "To that end, we have recently converted a munitions factory we captured froir the Franqais to producing artillery ammunition in our calibers. The Tosevites manufacture the casings and the explosive charges; our only contribution to the process is the electronicq for terminal guidance."

"Something," Atvar said again. "But when our supply ol seeker heads runs out-" In his mind, that ugly, smoke-belching landcruiser came out from behind the pile of ruins again.

"Such stocks are still fairly large," Kirel said. "Again, we now have factories in Italia, France, and captured areas of the U.S.A. and the SSSR beginning to turn out brakes and othet mechanical parts for our vehicles."

'This is progress," Atvar admitted. "Whether it proves sufficient progress remains to be seen. The Big Uglies, unformnately, also progress. Worse still, they progress qualitatively where we are lucky to be able to hold our ground. I still worry about what the colonization fleet will find here when it arrives." "Surely the conquest will be complete by then," Kirel exclaimed.

"Will it?" The more Atvar looked ahead, the less he liked what he saw. "Try as we will, Shiplord, I fear we shall not be able to prevent the Big Uglies from acquiring nuclear weapons, And if they do, I fear for Tosev 3."

Vyacheslav Molotov detested flying. That gave him a personal reason for hating the Lizards to go along with reasons ol Ι

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patriotism and ideology. Ideology came first, of course. He hated the Lizards for their imperialism, for the efforts to cast all of mankind-and the Soviet Union in particular-back into the ancient economic system, with the aliens taking the role of masters and reducing mankind to slaves.

But beneath the imperatives of the Marxist-Leninist dialectic, Molotov also despised the Lizards for making him fly here to London. This trip wasn't as ghastly as his last one, when he had flown in the open cockpit of a biplane from just outside Moscow to Berchtesgaden to beard Hitler in his den. He'd been in a closed cabin all the way-but he'd been no less nervous.

True, the Pe-2 fighter-bomber that had brought him across the North Sea was more comfortable than the little U-2 he'd used before. But it was also more vulnerable. The U-2 seemed too small for the Lizards to notice. Not so the machine he'd flown in yesterday. If he'd gone down into the cold, choppy gray water below, he knew he wouldn't have lasted long.

But here he was, at the heart of the British Empire. For the five major powers still resisting the Lizards-the five major powers which, before the Lizards came, had been at war with one another-London remained the most accessible common ground. Large parts of the Soviet Union, the United States, and Germany and its European conquests lay under the aliens' thumb, while Japan, though like England free of invaders, was next to impossible for British, German, and Soviet representatives to reach.

Winston Churchill strode into the Foreign Office conference room. He nodded first to Cordell Hull, the American Secretary of State, then to Molotov, and then to Joachim von Ribbentrop and Shigenori Togo. As former enemies, they stood lower on tc

his scale of approval than did the nations that had handed 0, gether against fascism.

But Churchill's greeting included all impartially: "I welcome you, gentlemen, in the cause of freedom and in the name of His Majesty the King."

Molotov's interpreter murmured the Russian translation for him. Big Five conferences got along on three languages: America and Britain shared English, while Ribbentrop, a former German ambassador to the Court of St. James's, was also fluent in that tongue. That left Molotov and Togo linguis-

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tically isolated, but Molotov, at least, was used to isolationserving as foreign commissar for the only Marxist-Leninis state in a capitalist world was good pariah training.

The envoys delivered their replies. When Molotov's tun came, he said, "The peasants and workers of the Soviet Unioi express through me their solidarity with the peasants and work ers of worldwide humanity against our common foe." Ribbentrop gave him a dirty look. Getting the Nazi's goat file:///C|/2590% 20Sci-Fi% 20 and % 20 Fantasy% 20 E-books/Harry% 20 Turtled ove% 20-% 20 Worldwar% 2002% 20-% 20 Tilting% 20 the% 20 Balance.txt the state of the state of

though, was no great accomplishment; Molotov thought of hin as nothing more than a champagne salesman jumped up be yond his position and his abilities. Churchill's round pink face on the contrary, remained utterly imperturbable. For the Britis] Prime Minister, Molotov had a grudging respect. No doubt lit was a class enemy, but he was an able and resolute man. With out him, England might have yielded to the Nazis in 1940, ant he had unhesitatingly gone to the support of the Soviet Unioi when the Germans invaded a year later. Had he thrown hi weight behind Hitler then in the crusade against Bolshevisn he'd once preached, the USSR might have fallen.

Cordell Hull said, "It's a good idea that we get togethe when we can so we can plan together the best way of riddinj ourselves of the damned Lizards." As he had been at previou meetings, Molotov's interpreter was a little slower in translat ing for Hull than he had been for Churchill: the American' dialect differed from the British English he'd learned.

"Ridding ourselves of the Lizards now is not our only con cem," Shigenori Togo said.

"What coald possibly be of greater concern to us?' Ribbentrop demanded. He might have been a posturing, pop eyed fool, but for once Molotov could not disagree with hi question.

But Togo said, "We also have now a future concern. Sarel, you all hold captives from among the Lizards. Have you no observed they are all males?"

"Of what other gender could warriors properly beT' Church ill said.

Molotov lacked the Englishman's Victorian preconception on that score: female pilots and snipers had gone into battleand done well-against both the Germans and the Lizards. Bu even Molotov reckoned that a tactic of desperation. "What an you implying?" he asked of the Japanese foreign minister. "Under interrogation, a captive Lizard pilot has informed u

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that this enormous invasion force is but the precursor to a still larger fleet now traveling toward our planet," Togo replied. "The second fleet is termed, if we understand correctly, the colonization fleet. The Lizards intend not merely conquest but also occupation."

He could have created no greater consternation if he'd thrown a live grenade onto the gleaming mahogany surface of the table in front of him. Ribbentrop shouted in German; Cordell Hull slammed the palm of his hand down onto the tabletop and shook his head so that the fringe of hair he combed over his bald crown flailed wildly; Churchill choked on his cigar and coughed harshly.

Only Molotov still sat unmoved and unmoving. He waited for the hubbub to die down around him, then said, "Why should we allow this to surprise us, comrades?" He used the last word deliberately, both to remind the other dignitaries that they were in the struggle together and to irk them on account of their capitalist ideology.

Speaking through an interpreter had its advantages. Among them was getting the chance to think while the interpreter performed his office. Ribbentrop started off in German again (a mark of indiscipline, to Molotov's mind), then switched to spluttering English: "But how are we to defeat these creatures if they throw at us endless waves of attack?"

"This is a question you Germans should have asked yourselves before you invaded the Soviet Union," Molotov said.

Hull raised a hand. "Enough of that," he said sharply. "Recriminations have no place at this table, else I would not be sitting here with Minister Togo."

Molotov dipped his head slightly, acknowledging the Secretary of State's point. He enjoyed twitting the Nazi, but enjoyment and diplomacy were two separate things.

"The depths of space between the stars are vaster than any man can comfortably imagine, and traveling them, even near the speed of fight, takes time, or so the astronomers have led me to believe," Churchill said. He turned to Togo. "How long have we before the second wave falls on us?"

The Japanese foreign minister answered, "The prisoner states that this colonization fleet will reach Earth in something under forty of his kind's years. That is less than forty of our years, but by how much he does not know."

The interpreter leaned close to Molotov. "I am given to un-

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that two of the Lizards' years are more or less equal tdoerosntaendof ours," he murmured in Russian. '7ell them," Molotov said after a moment's hesitation. Revealing information of any sort went against his grain, but joint planning required this. When the interpreter finished speaking, Ribbentrop beamed. "So we have twenty years or so, then," he said. "This is not

so bad."

Molotov was dismayed to see Hull nod at that. To them, he concluded, twenty years hence was so far distant that it might as well not exist. The Soviet Union's Five-Year Plans forced a concentration on the future, as did continued study of the ineluctable dynamics of the historical dialectic. As far as Molotov was concerned, a state that did not think about where it would be twenty years from now did not deserve to be anywhere.

He saw intense concentration on Churchill's face. The Englishman had no dialectic to guide him-bow could he, when he represented a class destined for the asb-heap of history?but was himself a student of history of the reactionary sort, and thus used to contemplating broad sweeps of time. He could look ahead twenty years without being dizzied at the distance.

"I shall tell you what this means, gentlemen," Churchill said: "It means that, even after we have defeated the Lizards even now encroaching on the green hills of Earth, we shall have to remain comrades in arms-even if not comrades in Commissar Molotov's sense-and ready ourselves and our world for anotheir great battle."

"I agree," Molotov said. He was willing to let Churchill twit him without mercy if that advanced the coalition against the Lizards. Next to them, even a fossilized conservative like Churchill was reminted in shiny progressive metal.

Ribbentrop said, "I agree also. I must say, however, that certain countries now preaching the gospel of cooperation would do well to practice it. Germany has noted several instances of new developments transmitted to us incompletely or only with reluctance, while others at this table have shared more equally and openhandedly." Churchill's bland face remained bland. Molotov did not change expression, either-but then he rarely did. He knew Ribbentrop was talking about the Soviet Union, but declined to feel the least bit guilty. He was still sorry that Germany had

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succeeded in smuggling even half his share of explosive metal back to his homeland. That hadn't been part of the Soviet plan. And Churchill couldn't be enthusiastic about sharing British secrets with the power that had all but brought Britain to her knees.

"Minister Ribbentrop, I want to remind you that this notion of sending new ideas runs both ways," Cordell Hull said. "You haven't shared your fancy long-range rockets with the rest of us, I notice, nor the improved sights I hear tell about in your new tanks."

"I will investigate this," Ribbentrop said. "We shall not be less forthcoming than our neighbors."

"While you are investigating, you ought to look into the techniques involved in your Polish death camps," Molotov said. "Of course, the Lizards have publicized them so well that I doubt many secrets are left any more."

"The Reich denies these vicious fabrications advanced by aliens and Jews," Ribbentrop said, sending Molotov an angry glare that made him want to smile-he'd hurt the German foreign minister where it mattered. And Germany could deny all she pleased; no one believed her. Then Ribbentrop went on, "And in any case, Herr Molotov, I doubt whether Stalin needs any instruction in the ail of murder."

Molotov bared his teeth; he hadn't expected the normally fatuous German to have such an effective comeback ready. Stalin, though, killed people because they opposed him or might be dangerous to him (the two categories, over the years, had grown closer together until they were nearly identical), not merely because of the group from which they sprang. The distinction, however, was too subtle for him to set it forth for the others around the mahogany table.

Shigenori Togo said, "We need to remember that, while we were enemies, we now find ourselves on the same side. Things which detract from this should be left by the wayside as inessential. Perhaps one day we shall find the time to pick them up once more and reexamine them, but that day is not yet."

The Japanese foreign minister was the appropriate man to speak to both Molotov and Ribbentrop, as his country had been allied with Germany and neutral to the Soviet Union before the Lizards came.

"A sensible suggestion," Hull said. His agreement with

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Harry Turtledove 125 T090 meant something, for the United States and Japan had the same reasons for hatred as Russians and Germans. Molotov said, "As best we can, then, we shall maintain ow Progressive coalition and continue the struggle against the imperialist invaders, at the same time seeking ways to share the fruits of technical progress among ourselves?" "As best we can, yes," Churchill said. Everyone else aroun~ $file:///C|/2590\%\,20Sci-Fi\%\,20 and\%\,20F antasy\%\,20E-books/Harry\%\,20Turtledove\%\,20-\%\,20Worldwar\%\,2002\%\,20-\%\,20Tilting\%\,20 the\%\,20B alance.txt$

the table nodded. Molotov knew the qualification wouk weaken their combined effort. But he also knew that, withoul it, the Big Five might have balked at sharing anything at all An agreement with an acknowledged flaw was to his mind better than one that could blow up without warning. They were keeping the fight alive. Past that, little matterec now. *V*

The air-raid siren at Bruntingthorpe began to howl. David Goldfarb sprinted for the nearest slit trench. Above the siren came the roar of the Lizards' jets. It seemed to grow impossibly fast.

Bombs started falling about the time Goldfarb dove headlong into the trench. The ground shook as if it were writhing in pain. Antiaircraft guns hammered. The Lizard planes screamed past at just above treetop height. Their cannon were pounding, too. Through everything, the siren wailed on.

The jets streaked away. The AA around Bruntingthorpe sent a last few futile rounds after them. Shell fragments pattered down from the sky like jagged metal hail. Stunned, half deafened, filthy, his heart pounding madly, Goldfarb climbed to his feet.

He glanced down at his watch. "Bloody hell," he muttered, and then, because that didn't have enough kick, "Gevalt. " Hardly more than a minute had gone by since the air raid warning began.

In that minute, Bruntingthorpe had been turned upside down. Craters pocked the runway. One of the bombs had struck an airplane in spite of the camouflaged revetment in which it huddled. A column of greasy black smoke rose into the cloudy sky.

Goldfarb looked around. "Oh, bloodyfucking hell," he said. The Nissen hut where he'd been studying how to fit a radar into the Meteor jet fighter was just a piece of rubble. Part Of the curved roof of corrugated galvanized iron had been blown fifty feThe radarman scrambled out of the trench and dashed toward 126

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the Nissen hut, which was beginning to bum. "Group C Hippie!" he shouted, and then called in turn the names of other men with whom he'd been working. A dreadful fear th he would hear no reply rose in him.

Then, one by one, the heads of the RAF officers popped out of the trench close by the hut. Only the top of Hippie's c was visible; he really was very short. "That you, Goldfarb?" called. "Are you all right?"

"Yes, sir," Goldfarb said. "Are you?"

"Quite, thanks," Hippie answered, scrambling out spryly. looked around at the hut, shook his head. "There's a good de of work up in smoke. I'm glad we salvaged what we did." A the other officers got out, he waved Goldfarb over to see w he meant.

The bottom of the slit trench was covered with manila fol ers and the papers that had spilled out of them. Goldfarb st from them to Hippie and back again. "You-all of yo stopped to grab papers when the air raid alarm went off?."

"Well, the work upon which we are engaged here is of coi siderable importance, don't you think?" Hippie murmured,

if he hadn't imagined doing anything but what he'd done. probably hadn't. Had Goldfarb been in the Nissen hut with others, the only thing he would have thought about was getti to cover as fast as he could.

Groundcrew men had already emerged from their shelter They swept and pushed chunks of tarmac off onto the wi brown grass to either side of the newly hit runways, or el tossed them into the craters the bombs had made. Othei started dragging up lengths of pierced-steel planking materi to put over the holes until they could make more permanent n pairs.

Flight Lieutenant Kennan pointed toward the burning craft. "I do hope that's not one of our Pioneers."

"Not in that revetment, sir." Flight Officer Roundbush sho his head. "It's only a Hurricane."

"Only a Hurricane?" Kennan looked scandalized; he'd flow one during the Battle of Britain. "Basil, if it weren't for ricanes, you'd have had to trim that mustache of yours dow to a toothbrush and start learning German. The Spitfir grabbed the glory-they look like such thoroughbreds, all-but Hurricanes did more of the work." Roundbush's hand went protectively to the bushy blo file:///C//2590%20Sci-Fi%20and%20Fantasy%20E-books/Harry%20Turtledove%20-%20Worldwar%2002%20-%20Tilting%20the%20Balance.txt

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growth on his upper lip. "I beg your pardon, sir. Had I realized the Hurricane stood between my mustache and war's desolation, I should have spoken of it with more respect--even if it is as obsolete as a Sopwith Camel these days."

If possible, Kennan looked even more affronted, not least because Roundbush was in essence right. Indeed, against the Lizards a Sopwith Camel might have been of more use than a Hurricane, simply because it contained very little metal and so was hard for radar to pick up.

Before Kennan could return to the verbal charge, Group Captain Hipple said, "Maurice, Basil, that's quite enough." They shuffled their feet like a couple of abashed schoolboys.

Wing Commander Peary jumped back down into the trench, started rummaging through file folders. "Oh, capital," he said a minute later. "We didn't lose the drawings for the installation of the multifrequency radar in the Meteor fuselage."

At the same time as Goldfarb breathed a silent sigh of relief, Basil Roundbush said, "I had to save those. David would have smote me hip and thigh if I'd left them behind."

"Heh," Goldfarb said. He wondered if Roundbush was using that pseudo-Biblical language to mock his Jewishness. Probably not, he decided. Roundbush made fun of everything on general principles.

"Shall we gather up our goods and see who will give us a temporary home?" Hipple said. "We shan't have a hut of our own for a while now."

Planes were taking off and landing on the damaged runways by that afternoon. By then, Goldfarb and the RAF officers were back at work in a borrowed comer of the meteorological crew's Nissen hut. The inside of one of the temporary buildings was so much like that of another that for a few minutes at a time Goldfarb was able to forget he wasn't where he had been.

The telephone rang. One of the weathermen picked it up, then held it out to Hipple. "Call for you, Group Captain."

"Thank you." The jet engine specialist took the phone, said, "Hipple here." He listened for a couple of minutes, then said, "Oh, that's first-rate. Yes, we'll be looking forward to receiving it. Tomorrow morning some time, you say9 Yes, that will do splendidly. Thanks so much for calling. Good-bye." "What was that in aid of?" Wing Commander Peary asked.

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"There may be some justice in the world after all, Julian Hipple answered. "One of the Lizard jets which strafed d base was later brought down by antiaircraft fire north of cester. The aircraft did not bum upon impact, and damage w less extensive than in most other cases where we have be fortunate enough to strike a blow against the Lizards. An gine and the radar will be sent here for our examination." "That's wonderful," Goldfarb exclaimed; his words w partly drowned by similar ones.from the other members of h tearn and from the meteorologists as well.

"'"at happened to the pilotT' Basil Roundbush asked, ing, "Nothing good, I hope."

"I was told he used one of the Lizards' exploding seats get free of the aircraft, but he has been captured by Hi Guards," Hipple answered. "Perhaps it might be wise for to seek to have him placed here so we can draw on his know edge of the parts of his aircraft once he gains some commai of, English."

"I've heard the Lizards sing like birds once they get to point where they can talk," Roundbush said. "They're s posed to be even worse than the Italians for that. It's odd, you ask me.,,

Maurice Kennan walked into the trap: "Why's that?" "Because they all come with stiff upper rips, of cours Roundbush grinned.

"You're one of the brightest Britain has to offer?" Kenn said, groaning. "God save us all."

Goldfarb groaned, too-Basil Roundbush would have be disappointed if he hadn't-but he was also smiling. He'd s this kind of chaffing at the radar station in Dover at the hei of the Battle of Britain, and then again with the Lancaster testing airborne radar. It made men work better together, les ened their friction against one another. Some, like Group C tain Hipple, didn't need such social lubrication, but most mortals did.

They labored on until well past eight, trying to make up time lost to the Lizard raid. They didn't catch up; Go spent most of his time looking for the papers he needed, didn't always find them. The other four men, being more co cerned with engines than radar, had grabbed those file fol first and his as an afterthought.

When Fred Hipple yawned and stood up from his stool,

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was a signal for everyone else to knock off, too: if he'd had enough, they didn't need to be ashamed to show they were wom. Goldfarb felt it in the shoulders and in the small of the back.

Hippie, a man of uncommon rectitude, headed for the refectory and then, presumably, for his cot-such, at least, was his usual habit. Goldfarb, though, had had a bellyful-in both the literal and figurative senses of the word--of the food the RAF kitchens turned out. After a while, stewed meat (when there was meat), soya links, stewed potatoes and cabbage, dumplings the size, shape, and consistency of billiard balls, and stewed prunes got to be too much.

He climbed onto his bicycle and headed for nearby Bruntingthorpe. Nor was he surprised to hear the rattling squeak of another bicycle's imperfectly oiled chain right behind him. Looking back over his shoulder in the darkness would have been an invitation to go straight over the handlebars. Instead, he called, "A Friend In Need--2'

Basil Roundbush's chuckle came ahead to him. The flight officer finished the catch phrase: '~-is a friend indeed."

A few minutes later, they both pulled up in front of A Friend In Need, the only pub Bruntingthorpe boasted. Without the RAF aerodrome just outside the hamlet, the place would not have had enough customers to stay open. As things were, it flourished. So did the fish-and-chips shop next door, though Goldfarb fought shy of that one because of the big tins of lard that showed up in its refuse bins. He was not nearly so rigid in his Orthodox faith as his parents, but eating chips fried in pig's fat was more than he could stomach.

"Two pints of bitter," Roundbush called. The publican poured them from his pitcher, passed them across the bar in exchange for silver. Roundbush raised his pint pot in salute to Goldfarb. "Confusion to the Lizards!"

They both drained their pints. The beer was not what it had been before the war After the first or second pint , though, you stopped noticing. Following immemorial custom, Goldfarb bought the second round. "No confusion to us tomorrow, when they fetch the damaged goods," he declared. He said no more, not off the base.

"I'll drink to that, by Godl" Roundbush said, and proved it. "T'he more we can learn about how they do what they do, the better our chance of keeping them from doing it."

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The innkeeper leaned across the waxed oak surface of bar. "I've still got half a roasted capon in the back room, lad he said in a confidential voice. "Four and six, if you interested-2'

The slap of coins on the bar gave his sentence its end tuation. "Light meat or dark?" Goldfarb asked when the b appeared: as an officer, Roundbush had the right to choost

"I fancy breasts more than legs," Roundbush answered, added, after the perfect tiny pause, "and I. like light meat file:///C|/2590% 20 Sci-Fi% 20 and % 20 Fantasy% 20 E-books/Harry% 20 Turtled ove% 20-% 20 Worldwar% 2002% 20-% 20 Tilting% 20 the% 20 Balance.txt

ter, too."

So did Goldfarb, but he ate the dark without complaint was vastly better than anything they made back at the drome. The two RAF men each bought another round. The regretfully, they rode back to the base. Keeping bicycles on steady course seemed complicated after four pints of even b bitter.

The headache Goldfarb had the next morning told him probably shouldn't have drunk the last one. Basil Roundbu looked disgustingly fresh. Goldfarb did his best to keep Captain Flipple from noticing he was hung over. He thought succeeded, and got help because no one was working at best, not only because of yesterday's raid, but also because eryone was looking forward to examining the wreckage fr(the Lizard plane.

Said wreckage did not arrive until nearly eleven, which everyone, even the patient, mild-mannered Hipple, on When it finally happened, though, the arrival was a portent: fragments came to Bruntingthorpe aboard a pair of 6x6 trucks.

The big rumbling American machines seemed to Go almost as great a prodigy as the cargo they bore. Next to the the British lorries he was used to were awkward makeshi timid and underpowered. If the Lizards hadn't come, thou of these broad-shouldered bruisers would have been hauli men and equipment all around England. As it was, only earliest handful of arrivals were working here. The Yanks h more urgent use for the rest on their own side of the Ad

That a couple of the precious American lorries had been trusted with their present cargo spoke volumes about how i portant the RAF reckoned it. T"he lorries also boasted winc which helped get the pieces out of the cargo compartments:

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dar and engine, especially the latter, were too heavy for convenient manhandling.

"We have to get these under cover as quickly as we can," Hippie said. "We don't want Lizard reconnaissance aircraft noting that we're trying to learn their secrets."

Even as he spoke, men from the groundcrew were draping camouflage netting over the wreckage. Before long, it looked pretty much like meadow from above. Goldfarb said, "They'll expect us to rebuild the Nissen hut they wrecked yesterday. When we do, it might be worthwhile to move this gear into it. That way, the Lizards won't be able to tell we have it."

"Very good suggestion, David,~' Hipple said, beaming. "I expect we'll do that as soon as we have the opportunity. Yet no matter how quickly they can run up a Nissen hut, we shan't wait for them. I want to attack these beasts as rapidly as possible, as I'm certain you do also."

There Hippie was right. Even though it was gloomy under the netting, Goldfarb got to work right away. The Lizard plane must have come down on its belly rather than nose first, a happy accident that had indeed kept it from being too badly smashed up. Part of the streamlined nose assembly remained in place in front of the parabolic radar antenna.

The antenna itself had escaped crumpling. It was smaller than Goldfarb had expected; for that matter, the whole unit was smaller than he'd expected. The Lizards had mounted it in front of their pilot--that was obvious. It was good design; Goldfarb wished the set that would go into the Meteor was small enough to imitate it.

Some of the sheet metal around the radar had torn. Peering through a gap, Goldfarb saw bundles of wires with brightcolored insulation. Coded somehow, he thought, wishing he knew which color meant what.

Even wrecked, the finish of the Lizard aircraft was very fine. Welds were smooth and flat, rivets countersunk so their heads lay flush with the metal skin. Even tugging with pliers at a tear in the metal to widen it so he could reach inside felt like tampering to Goldfarb.

Behind the radar antenna lay the magnetron; he recognized the curved shape of its housing. It was the last piece of apparatus he did recognize. Things that looked like screws held it to the rest of the unit. They did not, however, have conventional heads. Instead of openings for a flat-blade or Phillips-

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head screwdriver, they had square cavities sunk into the centers of the heads.

Goldfarb rummaged through the tools on his belt till he found a flat-blade screwdriver whose blade fit across the diagonal of one of the Lizard screws. He turned it. Nothing happened. He gave the screw a hard look that quickly turned speculative and tried to turn it the other way. It began to come file:///C|/2590% 20Sci-Fi% 20 and % 20 Fantasy% 20 E-books/Harry% 20 Turtled ove% 20-% 20 Worldwar% 2002% 20-% 20 Tilting% 20 the% 20 Balance.txt the state of the state of

out.

Bad language was coming from the RAF men working on the engine. Suspecting he knew why, Goldfar~ called, "The screws are backwards to ours: anticlockwise tightens, clockwise loosens."

He heard a couple of seconds' silence, then a grunt of satisfaction. Fred Hippie said, "Thank you, David. Lord only knows how long that would have taken to occur to us. One can sometimes become too wedded to the obvious."

Goldfarb fairly burst with pride. This from the man who had designed and patented the jet engine almost ten years before the war began! Praise indeed, he thought.

The bad language from the engine crew faded away as the officers got the casing off and started looking at the guts.

"Ibey use fir-tree roots to secure the turbine blades, sit," Julian Peary said indignantly. "Pity you had so much trouble convincing the powers that be it was a good notion."

"The Lizards have had this technology in place rather longer than we have, Wing Commander," Hippie answered. Despite long thwarting by RAF indifference and even hostility, he showed no bitterness. -

"And look," Basil Roundbush said. "The blades have a slight twist to them. How long ago did you suggest that, sir? Two years? Three?"

Whatever Hippie's answer was, Goldfarb didn't hear it. He'd loosened enough screws himself to get off a panel of the radar's case. He had a good notion of what he'd find inside: since physical laws had to be the same all through the universe, he figured the Lizard set would closely resemble the ones he was used to. Oh, it would be smaller and lighter and better engineered than RAF models, but still essentially similar. Valves, after all, remained valves-unless you went to the United States, where they turned into tubes.

But the second he got a good look at the radar, the flush of pride he'd felt a little while before evaporated. Hippie and his

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team could make some sense of what they saw inside the jet engine. The parts of the radar set remained a complete mystery to Goldfarb. The only thing of which he could be certain was that it had no valves ... or even tubes.

What took their place was sheets of grayish-brown material with silvery lines etched onto them. Some had little lumpy things of various shapes and colors affixed. Form said nothing about function, at least not to Goldfarb.

Basil Roundbush chose that moment to inquire, "How goes it with you, David?"

"I'm afraid it doesn't go at all." Goldfarb knew he sounded like a bad translation from the French. He didn't care: he'd found the simplest way to tell the truth.

"Pity," Roundbush said. "Well, I don't suppose we need every single answer this morning. One or two of them may possibly wait until tonight."

Goldfarb's answering laugh had a distinctly hollow ring.

Mutt Daniels drew the cloth patch through the barrel of his tommy gun. "You got to keep your weapon clean," he told the men in his squad. Telling--even ordering-accomplished only so much. Leading by example worked better.

Kevin Donlan obediently started in on his rifle. He obeyed Daniels like a father (or maybe, Mutt thought uneasily, like a grandfather-he was old enough to be the kid's grandfather, if he and his hypothetical child had started early). Other than that, though, he had a soldier's ingrained suspicion of anyone of higher rank than his own-which in his case meant just about the whole Army, He asked, "Sarge, what are we doing, in Mount Pulaski anyways?"

Daniels paused in his cleaning to consider that. He wished he had a chaw; working the wad of tobacco in his mouth always helped him think. He hadn't come across one in a long time, though. He said, "Near as I can see, somebody looked at a map, saw 'Mount,' and figured this here was high ground. Hell of a mountain, ain't it?"

The men laughed. Mount Pulaski was on higher ground than the surrounding hamlets-by twenty, thirty, sometimes even fifty or sixty feet. It hardly seemed worth having spent fives to take the place, even if it did also sit at the junction of State Roads 121 and 54.

Bela Szabo said, "They finally figured out we weren't about

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to take Decatur, so they figuied they'd move us someplace new and see how many casualties we can take here." Szabo wasn't much older than Kevin Donlan, but had a couple of extra lifetimes' worth of cynicism under his belt.

But Mutt shook his head. "Naah, that ain't it, Dracula. What they're really after is seein' how many fancy old-time buildings they can blow to hell. They're gettin' right good at it, too."

The Mount Pulaski Courthouse was his case in point here. Almost a hundred years old, it was a two-story Greek Revival building of red-brown brick with a plain classical pediment. Or rather, it had been: after a couple of artillery hits, more of it was rubble than building. But enough still stood to show it would have been worth saving.

"You boys hungry?" a woman called. "I've got some ducks and some fhed trout here if you are." She held up a big wicker picnic basket.

"Yes, ma'am," Mutt said enthusiastically. "Beats the shpants off what the Army feeds us-when they feed us." Quartermaster arrangements had gone to hell, what with the Lizards hitting supply lines whenever they could. If it hadn't been for the kindness of locals, Daniels and his men would have gone hungry a lot more than they did.

The woman came up to the front porch of the wrecked house where the squad was sitting. None of the young soldiers paid her any particular inind-she was a year or two past forty, with a tired face and mouse-brown hair streaked with gray. Their attention was on, the basket she carried.

Springfields and M-Is still came with bayonets, even if nobody was likely to use them in combat any more. They turned out to make first-rate duck carvers, though. The roast ducks were greasy and gamy. Mutt still ate duck in preference to trout; the only fish he cared for was catfish.

"Mighty fine, ma'am," Kevin Donlan said, licking his fingers. "Where'd you come by 0 this good stuff, anyhow?" "up in Lincoln Lakes, six, seven miles north of here," she

answered. "They aren't real lakes, just gravel pits filled with water, but they're stocked with fish and I can use a shotgun."

"Found that out," Mutt said. Flis teeth had stumbled on birdshot a couple of times. You could break one that way if you weren't lucky. He tossed aside a leg botle gnawed bare, then went on, "Mighty kind of you to go to so much trouble

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for us, uh"--his eyes flicked to her left hand to see if she wore a ring-"Miss ..."

"I'm Lucille Potter," she answered. "What's your name?"

"Pleased to meet you, Miss Lucille," he said. "I'm M-uh, Pete Daniels." He thought of himself as Mutt these days; he had for years. But that didn't seem the right way to introduce yourself to a woman you'd just met. The kids might ignore her-they were younger than most of the players he'd managed-but she didn't look half bad to him.

Only trouble was, the kids wouldn't let him get away with being Pete. Some of them started rolling in the dirt; even Kevin Donlan snorted. Lucille looked from one of them to the next. "What's so funny?" she asked.

Resignedly, Daniels said, "My name's Pete, but they usually call me Mutt."

"Is that what you'd rather be called?" she asked. When he nodded, she went on, "Why didn't you say so, then? There's nothing wrong with that."

Her brisk tones made a couple of the soldiers look abashed, but more of them didn't care what she said, even if she had brought them food. The matter-of-fact common sense in her words made him eye her speculatively. "You a schoolteacher, ma'am?"

She smiled. That made some of her tiredness fall away and let him see what she'd looked like when she was twenty-five or so. No, she wasn't bad at all. She said, "Pretty good guess, but you didn't notice my shoes."

They were white-an awfully dirty white now-with thick, rubbery soles. "You're a nurse," Mutt said.

Lucille Potter nodded. "I sure am. I've been doing a doctor's work since the Lizards came, though. Mount Pulaski only had Doc Hanrahan, and somebody's bomb-God knows whose-landed in his front yard just when he was coming out the door. He never knew what hit him, anyhow."

"Lord, I wish we could take you with us, ma'am," Kevin Donlan said. "Me medics we got, they ain't everything they oughta be. 'Course, what is these days?"

"That purely is a fact," Daniels agreed. The Army tried hard, the same as it did with supplies. As with supplies, war's disruption was too great to permit hurt men proper care. He suspected his grandfathers in the War Between the States hadn't risked much worse medical treatment. Doctors knew a

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lot more nowadays, but so what? All the knowledge in thi world didn't matter if you couldn't get your hands on the med icines and instruments you needed to use it.

Lucille Potter said, "Why the hell not?"

Mutt gaped at her, startled twice-first at the casual way she swore and then by how she fell in with Donlan's suggestion which had been more wistful than serious. Mutt said, "But, ma'am, you're a woman." He thought that explained everyfile:///Cl/2590%20Sci-Fi%20and%20Fantasy%20E-books/Harry%20Turtledove%20-%20Worldwar%2002%20-%20Tilting%20the%20Balance.txt

thing.

"So?" Lucille said-evidently she didn't. "Would you care ~jfl was digging a bullet out of your leg? Or do you think your ys here are going to gang-rape me the second your back iss tumedT,

"But-But--2' Mutt spluttered like a man who can't swirr floundering out of a creek. He felt his face turn red. His mer were staring at Lucille Potter with their mouths open. Rapi wasn't a word you said around a woman, let alone a word you expected to hear from one.

She went on, "Maybe I should bring my shotgun along. You think that might make 'em behave?"

"Y'all mean it," he said, surprised again, this time into g Southernism he seldom used.

"Of course I mean it," she said, "Get to know me for i while and you'll find out I hardly ever say things I don't mean People in town were stupid, too, till they started coming dowr sick and breaking bones and having babies. Then they founc out what I could do--because they had to. You can't afford t(wait around Re that, can you? If you give me five minutes I'll go home and get my black bag. Oe'--she shrugged----"you can do without."

Mutt thought hard. Whatever the trouble she brought witt her, could it be worse than the hurts they'd take that would gc bad without a doctor? He didn't think so. But he also wantec to find out why she was volunteering, so he asked, "Ho% come you want to leave this town, if you're the only thinj even halfway close to a doctor hereT' "When the Lizards held this part of the state, I had to sta3 here-I was the only one around who could do anything,' Lucille answered. "But now that proper human beings are bac) in charge, it'll be easier to bring a real doctor around. And at awful lot of what I've been doing lately is patching up hur

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soldiers. I hate to put it so plain, Mutt, but I think you people are liable to need me worse than Mount Pulaski does."

"That makes sense," Mutt said. Glancing at Lucille Potter, he got the feeling she would make sense a lot of the time. He rubbed his chin. "Tell you what, Miss' Lucille. Let's take you over to Captain Maczek, see what he thinks about the idea. If it's all right with him, I like it." He looked over to the men in his squad. They were all nodding. Mutt suddenly grinned. "Here-bring some of this duck along with you. That'll help put him in the right kind of mood."

Maczek was around the comer, eating with another squad from the company. He was maybe half Mutt's age, but not altogether lacking in sense. Mutt grinned again to see him digging a spoon in what looked like a can'of baked beans. He held up the duck leg. "Got something better'n that for you, sir---an' here's the lady who shot the bird."

The captain stared in delight at the duck, then turned to Lucille. "Ma'am, my hat's off to you." He took himself literally, doffing his net-covered helmet. The sweaty blond hair undemeath it stuck up in all directions.

"Pleased to meet you, Captain." Lucille Potter gave her name, shook Maczek's hand with a decisive pump. Then the captain took the drumstick and thigh from Daniels and bit into it. Grease ran down his chin. His expression turned ecstatic.

"You know what else, sir?" Mutt said. He told Maczek what else.

"Is that a fact?" Maczek said.

"Yes, sir, it is," Lucille said. "I'm not a proper doctor, and I don't claim to be one. But I've learned a hell of a lot these past few months, and I'm a lot better than nothing."

Maczek absently took another bite of duck. As Mutt had, he eyed the men around him. They'd all been listening with eager curiosity. You couldn't run an army by asking what everybody thought all the time, but you didn't ignore what people thought, either, not if you were smart. Maczek wasn't stupid, anyhow. He said, "I'll clear it with the colonel later, but I don't think he'll say no. It's irregular as all get out, but this whole stinking war is irregular."

"I'll go get my tools," Lucille said, and strode off to do just that.

Captain Maczek watched her no-nonsense walk for a few seconds before he turned back to Daniels. "You know, Ser-

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geant, if you'd come along to me with some little chippy you, found, I'd have been very angry at you. But this one-I thin] she may do. If I've ever seen a female who can take care o herself, she's it."

"Reckon you're right I sir." Mutt pointed to the bone5 Maczek was still holding. "And we already know she can handle a shotgun."

"That's true, by God." Maczek laughed. "Besides, she's ok enough to be a mother for most of the men. You have anybod) in your squad with an Oedipus complex, you think?" file:///C//2590%20Sci-Fi%20and%20Fantasy%20E-books/Harry%20Turtledove%20-%20Worldwar%2002%20-%20Tilting%20the%20Balance.txt

"With a what, sir?" Mutt frowned-just because Macze) had been to college, he didn't need to show off. And besides-"She's not bad-lookin', I don't think."

Captain Maczek opened his mouth to say something. By tht glint in his eye, it would have been lewd or rude or both. Bu he didn't say it-he was too smart an officer to make fun o his noncoms, especially in front of a bunch of listening sot diers. What he did finally say was, "However you like, Mutt But remember, she's going to be medic for the whole com pany, maybe the battalion, not just your squad."

"Yeah, sure, Captain, I know that," Daniels said. To himself he added, I saw her first, though.

'Ibe U-2 droned through the night just above the trwtops The cold slipstream buffeted Ludmila Gorbunova's face. It wa not the only reason her teeth chattered. She was deep insidi Lizard-held territory. If anything went wrong, she wouldn' make it back to her diri airstrip and the crainped little spaci she shared with the other female pilots.

She forced such thoughts from her mind, concentrated oi the mission at hand. That was the only way to get throng] diem, she'd learned: keep your mind fmWy fixed on what yoi had to do now, then what you had to do new, and so on, Lool ahead or off to one side and you were in trouble. That hai been true against the Nazis; it was doubly so against the U2 ards.

"What I have to do now," she said aloud, letting the slip strem fling her words away behind her, "is find the parti file: ///C|/2590% 20Sci-Fi% 20 and % 20 Fantasy% 20 E-books/Harry% 20 Turtled ove% 20-% 20 Worldwar% 2002% 20-% 20 Tilting% 20 the% 20 Balance.txt

battalion." Easier said than done, in what looked like endless stretche of forest and plain. She thought her navigation was good, bL when you were flying by compass and wristwatch, little error

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always crept in. She thought about gaining altitude so she could see farther, but rejected the idea. It would also have made it easier for the Lizards to spot her.

She worked the pedals and the stick, swung the U-2 into a wide, slow spiral to search the terrain below. The little woodand-fabric biplane responded beautifully to the controls, probably better than it had when it was new. Georg Schultz, her German mechanic, might be-was-a Nazi, but he was also a genius at keeping the aircraft not only flying but flying well in spite of an almost complete lack of spare parts.

There down below-was that a light? It was, and a moment later she spotted the other two with it. She'd been told to look for an equilateral triangle of lights. Here they were. She buzzed slowly overhead, hoping the partisans had all their instructions straight.

They did. As soon as they heard the sewing-machine whine of the U-2's little Shvetsov engine, they set out two more lights, little ones, that were supposed to mark out the beginning of a stretch of ground where she could land safely. Her mouth went dry, as it did every time she had to land at night on a strip or a field she'd never seen before. The Kukuruznik was a rugged machine, but a mistake could still kill her.

She lined up on the landing lights, lost altitude, killed her airspeed-not that the U-2 had much to lose. At the last moment, the lights disappeared: they must have had collars, to keep them from being seen at ground level. Losing them made her heart thump fearfully, but then she was down.

The biplane bounced along over the field. Ludmila hit the brakes hard; every meter she traveled was one more meter in which a wheel might go into a hole and flip the U-2 over. Fortunately, it did not need many meters in which to stop.

Men-Aark shapes in darker night--came running up and got to the Kukuruznik while the prop was still spinning. "You have presents for us, Comrade?" one of them called.

"I have presents," Ludmila agreed. She heard the mutters when they heard her voice-variations on the theme of a woman! She was used to that; she'd been dealing with it ever since she joined the Red Air Force. But there were fewer such murmurs among the partisans than there had been at some air force bases to which she'd flown. A fair number of partisans were women, and most male partisans understood that women could fight.

set a foot in th She climbed down HarrY Turtledove 14

metal stirrup on the lefftrosmidteheoffrtoftnetfcuoscelkapgite, that gave acces to the rear one. She didn't go up into it, but started handing on boxes. "Here we are, Comrades: presents," she said. "Rifles-with ammunition . . . submachine guns-with ammunition." "The weapons are good, but we already have most of the weapons we need," a man said. "But next time you coine, Comrade Pilot, bring us lots more bullets. It's the ammunition we're short of-we use a lot of it." Wolflike chuckles rose from the partisans' throats.

From back in the crowd of fighters, someone called, "Comrade, did you fetch us any 7.92mm ammunition? We have a lot of German rifles and machine guns we could use more if we had bullets for them."

Ludmila hauled out a canvas bag that clinked metallically-The partisans' murmurs turned appreciative; a couple of them clapped gloved hands together in delight. Ludmila said, "I am told to tell you: you cannot expect this bounty on every resupply run. We have to scavenge German cartridges-we don't manufacture them. The way things are, we have a hard enough time manufacturing our own calibers."

"Too bad," said the man who had asked about German ammunition. "The Mauser is not a great rifle-accurate ' da, but a slow, clumsy bolt-but the Nazis make a very fine machine gun."

"Maybe we can work a trade," the fellow who'd first greeted Ludmila said. "There's a mostly German band of fighters back around Konotop, and they use our weapons just as we use theirs. They might swap some of their caliber for some of ours.

Those couple of sentences spoke volumes about the anguish of the Soviet Union. Konotop, a hundred fifty kilometers east, of Ludmila's native Kiev, had been in German hands. Now it belonged to the Lizards. When would the Soviet workers and people be able to reclaim the rodina, the motherland? Ludmila started handing out cardboard tubes and pots of paste. "Here you are, Comrades. Because wars are not won

only by bullets, I bring also the latest posters by Eftimov and the Kukryniksi group."

That drew pleased exclamations from the partisans. Newspapers hereabouts had been forced to echo the Nazi fine; now they slavishly reproduced Lizard propaganda. Radios, especial-

ly those able to pick up signals from land still under human control, were few and far between. Posters gave one way of striking back. They could go up on a wall in seconds and show hundreds the truth for days.

"What do the men of Kukrymksi do this time?' a woman asked.

"It's one of their better ones, I think," Ludmila said, which was no small praise, for the team of Kupryanov, Krylov, and Sokolov probably turned out the best Soviet poster art. She went on, 'This one shows a Lizard in Pharaoh's headdress lashing Soviet peasants; the caption reads, 'A Return to Slavery-, 11

"That is a good one," the partisan leader agreed. "It will make the people think, and make them less likely to collaborate with the Lizards. We will post it widely, in towns and villages and at collective farms."

"How much collaboration goes on with the Lizards?" Ludmila asked. 'This is something of which our authorities need to be aware."

"It's not as bad as what went on with the Germans at first," the man answered. Ludmila nodded; little could be as bad as that. Large segments of the Soviet populace had welcomed the Nazis as liberators in the early days of their invasion. If they'd played on that instead of working to prove they could be even more savage and brutal than the NKVD, they might have toppled the Soviet regime. The partisan went on, "We do have collaboration, though. Many people passively accept whatever power they find above them, while others welcome the rather indifferent rule of the Lizards as superior to the hostility they had known before."

:'Hostility from the fascists, you mean," Ludmila said. 'Of course, Comrade Pilot." The partisan leader's voice was innocence personified- No one could safely speak of hostility

to the people from the Soviet government, though that shadow lay across the whole of the rodina "You called the Lizards' rule indifferent," Ludmila said.

"Explain that more fully, please. Intelligence is worth more than many rifles."

"'Ibey take crops and livestock for themselves; in the towns, they try to set up manufacturers that might be useful to them: forges and chemical works and such. But they care nothing for what we do as people," the partisan said. "They do not forbid

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worship, but they do not promote it, either. They do not even forbid the Party, which would be only elementary prudence on their part. It is as if we are beneath their notice unless we take up arms against them. Then they hit hard." That much Ludmila already knew. The other perplexed her.

By the sound of his voice, it perplexed the partisan, too. They

were used to a regime that minutely regulated every aspect of its citizens' lives-and disposed of them without mercy when they didn't meet its expectations . . . or sometimes even if they did. Simple indifference seemed very alien by contrast. She hoped her superiors would have a better idea of what to make of it.

"Does anyone have letters for me?" she asked. "I'll be glad to take them along, though with the post as disrupted as it is, they may be months on the way."

The partisans queued up to hand her their notes to the outside world. None o - f them had envelopes; those had been in short supply before the Lizards came. The papers were folded into triangles to show they came from soldiers: the Soviet mail system carried such letters, albeit slowly, without a postage fee. When she had the last letter, Ludmila climbed back into the front cockpit and said, "Would you please swing my aircraft around nose for tail? If I landed safely on this strip, I'd like to take off down the same ground."

The little U-2 was easy to haul around by hand; it weighed less than a thousand kilos. Ludniila had to explain to someone how to turn the prop. As always on these missions, she had an anxious moment wondering whether the engine would start-no mechanical starter here if it didn't. But it was still warm from the flight in, and kicked over almost at once. She released the brake, pushed the stick forward. The Kukuruznik jounced over the rough field. A few partisans ran alongside, waving. They soon fell behind. The takeoff run Vas longer than the one she'd needed to land. That meant she was going over some new terrain (to say nothing of the holes she might have missed while she was landing). But after a last couple of jolts, the biplane made an ungainly leap into the air. She swung the U-2 north and west, back toward the base from which she'd set out. Finding it again would take the same kind of search she'd needed to locate the partisans' makeshift airstrip. A base that advertised its presence soon drew the

attention of the Lizards. Once that happened, the base was unlikely to remain present for long.

Not that she had any guarantees of getting back safely, anyhow. U-2s were detected and destroyed less often than any other Soviet aircraft; Ludmila's best guess was that they were too small and light and flimsy to be noticed most of the time. But Kukuruzniks did not always come home, either.

Off in the distance, she saw flashes, like heat lightning on a summer evening: someone's artillery, probably the Lizards'. She glanced at her watch and compass, made the best position estimate she could. When she landed, she'd report it to Colonel Karpov, Maybe one day before too long, the partisans would fire a rack of Katyusha rockets that way.

Stars twinkled through gaps in the clouds. A couple of times, she spotted brief twinkles of light on the ground, too: muzzle flashes. They made the stars seem less safe and friendly.

Watching the compass and her watch, she flew on toward the base. When she thought she was overhead, she looked down and saw-nothing. That failed to surprise her; finding it on the first try by dead reckoning was no likelier than plunging your hand into a haystack and bringing out a needle between thumb orefinger.

She began another search spiral. Now she watched her fuel gauge, too. If she was lost and had to set down in a field, she wanted to do it while she still had power, not dead stick.

Just when she was beginning to worry she might have to do exactly that, she spied the fights she'd been looking for. She gratefully made for them; knowing where you were made you feel ever so much more in control of things.

The airstrip had supposedly been leveled, As a matter of fact, it was no smoother than the one the partisans had marked off for her. Ludmila's teeth clicked together at every jolt until the U-2 stopped. She told herself the roughness made the runway harder to spot. Was that consolation enough for the bruises she'd have wherever her safety harness touched her? Maybe.

She unbuckled the harness, got out of the plane while the prop was still spinning. The groundcrew ran up, hauled the Kukuruznik away to its between-missions home in a camouflaged revetment. "Where's Colonel KarpovT' she asked.

"He went to bed an hour ago, " somebody answered. "It is

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close to three in the morning. Y~u have anything so importai it won't keep till dawn?"

"I suppose not," she said. The Lizard artillery wasn't som(thing he had to know about right now. She followed th Kukuruznik toward its shelter.

Ludmila would have bet as much money as she had th she'd find Georg Schultz waiting at the revetment. Su

enough, there he was. "Alles khorosho? " he asked in his usu mixture of German and Russian.

"Gut, da," she answered, mixing the languages the sam, way.

He scrambled up into the cockpit. No lantern was lighted not even beneath the camouflage netting; the Lizards had gad gets that could pick up the tiniest gleam. That didn't stol Schultz from starting to work on Ludmila's biplane. He teste(the pedals and other controls, leaned out to say, "Left aileror cable not good-feels a little loose. Come light, I fix."

"Thank you, Georgi Mikhailovich," Ludmila answered. She hadn't noticed anything wrong with the cable, but if Schultz said it needed tightening, she was willing to believe him. His understanding for machinery was, to her way of thinking, a but uncanny. She flew the aircraft; Georg Schultz projected mself into it as if he were pan plane himself.

"Nothing else bad," he said, "but here-you leave on floor." He handed her a folded triangle of paper.

"Thank you," she said again. "Our post is unreliable enough without me losing a letter before it ever gets into the ma." She wasn't sure how much of that he understood, but found herself yawning enormously. She was too tired to try to dredge up German to make things clear for him. If Colonel Karpov was asleep, she saw no reason she shouldn't grab a couple of hours for herself, too.

She shrugged out of her parachute harness-not that she'd have much chance to use a chute if she got hit while she was hedgehopping the way she usually did-and stowed it in the cockpit, then started out of the revetment toward her sleeping quarters. As she passed Georg Schultz, he patted her on the backside.

Ludmila took a skittering half step, half jump. She whirled around in fury. This wasn't the first time such things had happened to her since she'd joined the Red Air Force, but somehow she'd thought Schultz too kultumy to try them.

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"Don't you ever do that again!" she blazed in Russian, then switched to German to drive it home: "Nie wieder verstehst lu?" It was the du of insult, not intimacy. She added, "What would your Colonel Jager think if he found out what you just did?"

Schultz had been the gunner in the tank Jager commanded; he thought highly of his former leader. Ludmila hoped ren-iinding him of that would bring him to his senses. But he just laughed quietly and said, "He would think I wasn't doing anything he hadn't done himself."

A short, deadly silence followed. Ludmila broke it in tones of ice: "That is none of your business. If it will not make you keep your hands where they belong, maybe this will: remember, you are the only Nazi on a base full of Red Air Force men. They leave you alone because you work well. But they do not love you. Verstehst du das?"

He drew himself to stiff attention, did his best to click his heels in soft felt valenki, shot out his arm in a defiant Hitlerite salute. "I remember very well, and I do understand." He stomped away.

Ludmila wanted to kick him. Why couldn't he have just said he was sorry and gone on about his business instead of getting angry, as if she had somehow wronged him instead of the other way round? Now what was she supposed to do? If he was that angry with her, did she still want him working on her aircraft? But if he didn't, who would?

The answer to that formed in her mind with the question: some quarter-trained Russian peasant who hardly knew the difference between a screwdriver and a pair of pliers. She could do some work herself, but not all, and she knew she didn't have Schultz's artist's touch with an engine. Her show of temper was liable to end up getting her killed.

But what should she have done? Let him treat her like a whore? She shook her head violently. Maybe she should have responded with a joke instead of a blast, though.

Too late to worry about it now. Slowly, tiredly, she walked over to the building that sheltered the women pilots. It wasn't much of a shelter- the walls were dirt-filled sandbags and bales of hay like the revetments that protected the aircraft, the roof camouflage netting over straw over unchinked boards. It leaked and let in the cold. But no one here, Colonel Karpov included, had quarters any better.

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take off into the wind.

The door to the improvised barracks had no hinges, and141 ha(

to be pushed aside. Inside was a blackout curtain. Ludmila puffed the door closed before she went through the curtain. Le~ no light leak out was a rule she took as much for granted as

The barracks held little light to leak, anyhow: a couple of candles and an oil lamp were enough to keep you from stumbling over blanket-wrapped women snoring on straw pallets, but that was about all. Yawning, Ludmila stumbled toward her own place.

A white rectangle lay on top of her folded blankets. It hadn't been there when she went out on her mission a few hours earlier. "A letter!" she said happily-and from a civilian, too, or it would have been folded differently. Hope flared in her, painfully intense: she hadn't heard from anyone in her family since the Lizards came. Maybe they were safe after all, when she'd almost given up on them.

In the dim light, she had to pick up the letter to realize it was in an envelope. She turned it over, bent her head close to it to look at the address. She needed a moment to notice part of it was written in the Roman alphabet, and the Cyrillic characters were printed with a slow precision that said the person who used them wasn't used to them.

Then her eyes fixed on the stamp. Had anyone told her a year before that she'd have been glad to see a picture of Adolf Hitler, she'd either have thought him mad or been mortally insulted-probably both. "Heinrich," she breathed, doing her best to pronounce the H at the beginning of the name, which was not a sound the Russian language had.

She tore the envelope open, eased out the letter. To her relief, she saw Jager had considerately printed: she found German handwriting next to indecipherable. She read, My dear Ludmila, I hope this finds you safe and well. In fact, I have to hope it finds you at all.

In her mind's eye she could see one comer of his mouth quirking upwards as he set his small joke down on paper. The perfection and intensity of the image told her how much she missed him.

I was on duty in a town I cannot name lest the censor reach for his razor, he went on. I will be leaving in the next day or two, though, and going back to a panzer outfit I also cannot name. I wish I were returning to you insteae4 or vou to me So

much easier to travel long distance by plane than by horse or even by panzer

She remembered some of his stories of crossing Lizardoccupied Poland on horseback. That made anything she'd done in her U-2 seem taine by comparison. In the letter, he went on, I wish we could be together more. Even at best, we have so little time on this world, and with the war we do not have the best. Yet without it, we would not have met, you and 1, so I suppose I cannot say it is altogether a bad thing.

"No, it isn't," she whispered. Having an affair with an enemy might be stupid (a feeling Jdger no doubt shared with her), but she couldn't make herself believe it was a bad thing.

The letter continued, I thank you for looking out for my comrade Georg Schultz; your country is so vast that only great luck could have brought him to your base, as you said when we were last together Greet him for me; I hope he is well.

Ludmila didn't know whether to laugh or cry when she read that. Schultz was well, all right, and she had looked out for him, and 0 he wanted was to get her pants down. She wondered whether he had enough sense of shame to be embarrassed if she showed him Jdger's letter.

She didn't have to decide now. She wanted to finish the letter and get a little sleep. Everything else could wait. She read, If fate is kind, we will meet again soon in a world at peace. If it is less kind, we will meet again though the war goes on. It would have to be very cruel to keep us from meeting again at all. With love and the hope you stay safe-Heinrich.

Ludmila folded the letter small and stuck it in a pocket of her flying suit. Then she took off her leather helmet and goggles, but none of the rest of the outfit, not even her valenki. The inside of the barracks was cold. She lay down on the straw, pulled the blanket up over her head, and fell asleep almost at once.

When she woke the next morning, she found one hand in the pocket where she'd put the letter. That made her smile, and resolved her to answer it right away. Then she had to figure out whether to show it to Schultz. She decided she would, but not this minute. Time enough when they were calmer, not actively angry at each other. Meanwhile, she still had to make her report to Colonel Karpov.

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The Nipponese guard handed Teerts his bowl of food. He bowed polite thanks, turned one eye toward it to see what he'd got. He almost hissed with pleasure: along with the rice, the bowl was full of chunks of some kind of flesh. The Big Uglies had been feeding him better lately; by the time he finished the meal, he was almost content.

He wondered what they were up to. Captivity had taught him they were not in the habit of doing gratuitous favors for anybody. Up till now, captivity had taught him they weren't in the habit of doing any favors whatever. The change made him suspicious.

Sure enough, Major Okamoto and the usual stone-faced, rifle-toting guard marched up to the cell door not long after the bowl was taken away. As the door swung open, Okamoto spoke in the language of the Race: "You will come with me." "It shall be done, superior sit," Teerts agreed. He left the cell with no small relief. His step seemed lighter than it had in a long time; going upstairs to the interrogation chamber of the Nagasaki prison felt like good exercise, not a wearing burden. Amazing what something close to proper food can do, he thought.

Again, the Nipponese inside the chamber wore the white robes of scientists. The Big Ugly in the center chair spoke.

Major Okamoto translated: "Dr. Nishina wishes to discuss today the nature of the bombs with which the Race destroyed-the cities of Berlin and Washington."

",Vhy not?" Teerts answered agreeably. "These bombs were made from uranium. In case you do not know what uranium is, it is the ninety-second element in the periodic table." He let his mouth fall slightly open in amusement. The Big Uglies were so barbarous, they would surely have not the slightest notion of what he was talking about.

After Okamoto relayed his answer to the Nipponese scientists, he and they talked back and forth for some time. Then he returned his attention to Teerts, saying, "I do not have the technical terms I need to ask these questions in proper detail. Give them to me as we speak, please, and do your best to understand even without them."

"It shall be done, superior sir," Teerts said, agreeable still. "Good." Okamoto paused to think; his rubbery Big Ugly features made the process easy to watch. At length, he said, "Dr. Nishina wishes to know which process the Race uses to

separate the lighter, explosive kind of uranium from the more common heavy kind."

Teerts bit down on that as if it were an unsuspected bone in his meat. Not in his wildest nightmares-and he'd had some dreadful ones since his capture-had he imagined that the Big Uglies had the slightest clue about atomic energy, or even that they'd heard of uranium. If they did-He abruptly realized they might be dangerous to the Race, not just the horrid nuisances they'd already proved themselves.

To Major Okamoto, he said, "Tell the learned Dr. Nishina that I do not know which processes he means." He had to work not to turn an eye turret toward the instruments of torture in the interrogation chamber.

Okamoto fixed him with a stare he'd come to identify as hostile, but passed his words on to Nishina without comment. Nishina spoke volubly in reply, ticking off points on his fingers as if he were a male of the Race.

When he was through, Okamoto translated: "He says theory shows several ways which might accomplish this. Among them are successive barriers to a uranium-containing gas, heating the gas so that part of it which has the lighter kind of uranium rises more than the other, using a strong electromagnef'-a word that took a good deal of backing and filling to get across-----'and using rapid spinning to concentrate the lighter kind of uranium. Which of these does the Race find most efficient?"

Teerts stared at him. He was even more appalled than he had been when his killercraft got shot down. That had affected only his own fate. Now he had to worry about whether the Race had any idea what the Tosevites were up to. They might be barbarians-by everything Teerts had seen, they were barbarians-but they were also alarmingly knowledgeable ... which meant it behooved Teerts to be more than cautious in his answers. He'd have to do his best to avoid giving away any information at all.

He took so long figuring that out that Okamoto snapped, "Don't waste time dreaming up lies. Answer Dr. Nishina."

"I beg your pardon, superior sir," Teerts said, and added, "Gomen nasai-so sorry," from his limited stock of Nipponese. "Part of the problem is my not having enough words to give a proper answer, and another part is my own ignorance,

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for which I again beg pardon. You must remember th151 at I

am-1 was-a pilot. I had nothing at all to do with uranium." "You certainly were glib enough talking about it a little while ago," Okamoto said. "You do not want to make me disbelieve you. Some of the tools back there are very sharp, others can be made hot, and still others can be hot and sharp at the same time. Do you want to learn which is which?" "No, superior sir," Teerts gasped with utmost sincerity. "But I truly am ignorant of the knowledge you seek. I am only a pilot, not a nuclear physicist. What I know of flying, I have freely told you. I am not an expert in the matter of atomic weapons. What little I know of nuclear energy I learned in school as I was growing from hatchlinghood. It is no more and no less than any other ordinary male of the Race would know."

'7his is difficult to believe," Okamoto said. "You spoke quite a lot about uranium just a little while ago."

Mt was before I realized how much you knew about it, Teerts thought. He wondered how he was going to escape with his integument intact. He knew he couldn't lie to the Nipponese; he didn't know how much they knew, and the only way to find out-getting caught-would involve the painful penetration of that integument.

He said, "I do know that atomic weapons do not necessarily use uranium alone. Some involve, I am not sure how, hydrogen as well-the very first element." Let the Japanese chew on that paradox for a while, he thought: how could a weapon involve the lightest and heaviest elements at the same time?

After Okamoto interpreted, the team of Big Ugly scientists chattered for a while among themselves. Then Nishina, who seemed to be their spokesman, put a question to Okamoto. The major translated for Teerts: "The uranium explosion, then, is hot enough to make hydrogen act as it does in the sun and convert large amounts of matter to energy?"

Horror filled Teerts. Every time he tried to escape from this

hideous mess in which he found himself, he sank deeper instead. The Big Uglies knew about fusion. To Teerts, the product of a civilization that grew and changed at a glacial pace, knowing about something was essentially the same as being able to do it. And if the Tosevites could make fusion bombs ... Major Okamoto knocked him out of his appalled reverie by snapping, "Answer the learned Dr. Nishina!"

"I beg your pardon, superior sir," Teerts said. "Yes, everything the learned doctor says is true."

There. He'd done it. Any day now, he feared, the Nipponese would start using nuclear weapons against the Race on the mainland-which still struck Teerts as nothing more than a big island; he was used to water surrounded by land, not the other way around.

He heard Okamoto say "Honto," confirming his answer to the Nipponese scientist's question. The cold of the interrogation room sank deeply into his spirit. The Nipponese hardly seemed to need him. By their questions, they had all the answers already, just waiting to be put into practice.

Then Nishina spoke again: "We return to the question of getting the lighter uranium, the kind which is explosive, out of the other, more common, type. This as yet we have not succeeded in doing; indeed, we have only just begun the attempt. That is why we will learn from you how the Race solves this problem."

Teerts needed a moment to understand that. The Race had been shocked when they reached Tosev 3 to discover how advanced the Big Uglies were. Before Teerts was captured, pilots had talked endlessly about that; they'd expected no opposition, and here the Tosevites were, shooting back-not very wen, and from inadequate aircraft, but shooting back. How could they have learned to build combat aircraft in the eight hundred local years since the Race's probe examined them?

Now, for the first time, Teerts got a glimmering of the answer. The Race made change deliberately slow. When something new was discovered, extrapolationists performed elaborate calculations to learn in advance how it would affect a long-stable society, and how best to minimize those effects while gradually acquiring the benefits of the new device or principle.

With the Big Uglies, the tongue was on the other side of the mouth. When they found something new, they seized it with both hands and squeezed until they got all the juice out. They didn't care what the consequences five generations---or even five years-hence would be. They wanted advantages now, and worried about later trouble later, if at all.

Eventually, they'd probably end up destroying themselves with that attitude. At the moment, it made them far more deadly opponents than they would have been otherwise.

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"Do not waste time thinking up lies. I warned you before," Major Okamoto said. "Tell Dr. Nishina the truth at once.-

"By what I know, superior sir, the truth is that we do not use any of these methods," Teerts said. Okamoto drew back his hand for a slap. Afraid that would be the start of a torture session worse than any he'd yet known, Teerts went on rapidly, "Instead, we use the heavier form of uranium: isotope is the

term we use."

"How do you do this?" Okamoto demanded after a brief colloquy with the Nipponese scientists. "Dr. Nishina says the heavier isotope cannot explode."

"Mere is another element, number ninety-four, which does not occur in nature but which we make from the heavier, nonexplosive--Dr. Nishina is right-isotope of uranium. This other element is explosive. We use it in our bombs.-

"I think you are lying. You will pay the penalty for iL I promise you that," Okamoto said. Nevertheless, he translated Teerts' words for the Big Uglies in the 'white coats.

They started talking excitedly among themselves. Nishina, who looked to be the senior male, sorted things out and relayed an answer to Okamoto. He said to Teerts, "I may have been wrong. DL Nishina tells me the Americans have found this new element as well. They have given it the name plutonium. You will help us produce it."

"Past what I have already said, I know little," Teerts warned. Despair threatened to consume him. Every time he'd revealed something new to the Nipponese, it had been with the hope that the technical difficulties of the new revelation would force them Off the road that led toward nuclear weapons. Instead, everything he told them seemed to push them ftirther down that road.

He wished a plutonium bomb would fall on Nagasaki. But what were the odds of that?

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WELCOME TO CHUGWATER, POPULATION 286, the sign said. Colonel Leslie Groves shook his head as he read it. "ChugwaterT' he echoed. "Wonder why they call it that." Captain Rance Auerbach read the other half of the sign. 'Population 286,' " he said. "Sounds like Jerkwater'd be a better name for it." Groves looked ahead. The cavalry officer had a point. It didn't look like much of a town. But cattle roamed the fields around it. This late in winter, they were on the scrawny side, but they were still out there grazing. That meant Chugwater had enough to eat, anyhow. People came out to look at the spectacle of a cavalry company going through town, but they didn't act as impressed as townsfolk had in Montana and farther north in Wyoming. One boy in ragged blue jeans said to a man in overalls who looked just like him, "I liked the parade a couple of weeks ago better, Dad." "You had a parade through here a couple of weeks agoT' Groves called to a heavyset man whose black coat, white shirt, and string tie argued that he was a person of some local importance. "Sure as hell did." The pear-shaped man spat a stream of tobacco juice into the street. Groves envied him for having tobacco in any form. He went on, "Only thing missing then was a brass band. Had us a whole slew o' wagons and soldiers and foreigners who talked funny and even a couple of Lizardssilly-lookin' little things to cause all the trouble they do, aren't "Yes, now that you mention it." Excitement coursed through 154

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Groves. That sounded very much like the Met Lab crew. If he was only a couple of weeks behind them, they'd be into Colorado by now, not too far from Denver. He might even catch them before they got there. Whether he did or not, the lead-lined saddlebag in his wagon would push their work forward once they got themselves settled. Trying to make his hope a certainty, he asked, "Did they say what they were up toT'

The heavyset man shook his head. "Nope. They were right close-mouthed, as a matter of fact. Friendly enough people, though." His chest inflated, although not enough to stick out over his belly. "I married off a couple of 'em." One of the other men on the sidewalk, a stringy, leathery fellow who looked like a real cowboy, not the Hollywood variety, said, "Yeah, go on, Hoot, tell him how you laid the bride, too." "You go to hell, Fritzie," the pear-shaped man-Hoot-said.

A cowboy named Fritzie? Groves thought Before he had time to do more than marvel, Hoot turned back to him. "Not that I would've minded: pretty little thing, a widow I think she was. But I do believe the corporul she married would have kicked my ass around the block if I'd even looked at her sideways." "You'd've deserved it, too," Fritzie said with a most uncowboylike giggle.

"Oh, shut up," Hoot told him. Again, he returned to Groves: "So I don't know what they were doing, Colonel, only thatthere were a lot of 'em, heading south. Toward Denver, I think, not Cheyenne, but don't make me swear to that."

"Thank you very much. That helps," Groves said. If they weren't talking about the crew from the University of Chicago, he'd eat his hat. He'd made better time coming across Canada and then down through Montana and Wyoming than they had traveling straight west across the Great Plains. Of course, his party had only the one wagon in it, and that lightly loaded, while theirs was li * mited to the speed of their slowest conveyance. And they'd have been doing a lot more scrounging for fodder than his tight band. If you couldn't think in terms of logistics, you didn't deserve to be an Army engineer. "You folks going to put up here for the night?" Hoot asked. "We'll kill the fatted calf for you, like the Good Book says. 'Sides, there's nothin' between here and Cheyenne but miles

and miles of miles and miles."

Groves looked at Auerbach. Auerbach looked back, as if to

say, You're the boss. Groves said, "I know things are tight, Mister, uh--2'

"I'm Joshua Sumner, but you may as well call me Hoot; everybody else does. We got plenty, at least for now. Feed you a nice thick steak and feed you beets. By God, we'll feed you beets till your eyeballs turn purple-we had a bumper crop of 'em. Got a Ukrainian family up the road a couple miles, they showed us how to cook up what they call borscht-beets and sour cream and I don't know what all else. They taste a sight better that way than what we were doing with 'em before, I tell you for a fact."

Groves was unenthusiastic about beets, with or without sour cream. But he didn't think he'd get anything better farther south on US 87. "Thanks, uh, Hoot. We'll lay over, then, if it's all right with you people."

Nobody in earshot made any noises to say it wasn't. Captain Auerbach raised his hand. The cavalry company reined in. Groves reflected that a couple of the old-timers on the street had probably seen cavalry go through town before, back before the turn of the century. The idea left him unhappy; it was as if the Lizards were forcing the United States-and the worldaway from the twentieth century.

Such worries receded after he got himself outside of a great slab of fat-rich steak cooked medium-rare over a wood fire. He ate a bowl of borscht, too, not least because the person who pressed it on him was a smiling blonde of about eighteen. It wasn't what he would have chosen for himself, but it wasn't as bad as he'd thought it would be, either. And somebody in Chugwater made homebrew beer better than just about anything that came out of a big Milwaukee brewery.

Hoot Summer turned out to be sheriff, justice of the peace, and postmaster all rolled into one. He gravitated to Groves, maybe because they were the leaders of their respective camps, maybe just because they were about the same shape. "So what brings you through town?" he asked,

"I'm afraid I can't answer that," Groves said. "The less I say, the less chance the Lizards have of finding out." "As if I'm gonna tell 'em," Sumner said indignantly.

"Mr. Sumner, I have no way of knowing whom you'd tell, or whom they'd tell, or whom they'd tell," Groves said.' "What I do know is that I have orders directly from President Roosevelt that I tell no one. I intend to obey those orders."

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Sumner's eyes got big. "Straight from the President, yoi say? Must be something important, then." He cocked his head studied Groves from under the brim of his Stetson. Grove, looked back at him, his face expressionless. After close to minute of that tableau, Sumner scowled in frustration. "God damn, Colonel, I'm glad I don't play poker against you, or I'd be walking home in my long johns, I think."

"Hoot, if I can't tell you anything, that means I really can) tell you anything," Groves said.

"Thing is, though, a small town like this one here runs oE

gossip. If we can't get any, we'll just shrivel up and die," Sumner said. "Me folks who came through a couple weeks agc were just as tight-lipped as you people are-they wouldn't've said shit if they had a mouthful, if you know what I mean. All this stuff going through us, and we don't even get to fmd oui what the hell it is?"

"Mr. Sumner, it's altogether possible that you 'arid Chugwater don't want to know," Groves said. His face did twisi then, in annoyance at himself. He shouldn't have said anythin~ at all. How many mugs of that good home brew had he drunk,

He consoled himself with the thought that he'd learned something from Sumner. If the previous set of travelers ha(been as secretive as he was, the odds were even better thar good that they came from the Metallurgical Laboratory. The justice of the peace said, "Hellfire, man, those peopl(even had an Eyetalian with 'em, and ain't Eyetalians suppose(to be the talkingest people on the face of the earth? Brother not this one! Nice enough feller, but he wouldn't give you thf time of day. What kind of an Eyetalian is that?"

to him ... which just about nailed things down.

"Only time he unbent a-tall," Sumner went on, "was wher he did best man duty at the wedding I told you about-kisse(the bride right pert, he did, even though his own wife-not E bad looker herself-was standing right there beside him. Nom that sounds like an Eyetalian to me."

"Maybe so." Groves wondered where Sumner got his idea, about how Italians were supposed to act. Not in the great nie~ tropolis of Chugwater, Wyoming--or at least Groves hadn' seen any here. Most likely fivm Chico Marx, he thought. Wherever he got those ideas, though, Sumner was no fool ir matters directly under his own eye. Nodding to Groves, h(

said, "Stands to reason your business, whatever it is-and I won't ask any more-is somehow connected with that other crowd. We hadn't seen hardly anybody from the outside world since things went to hell last year, and then two big bunches both goin' the same direction, almost one on top of the other You gonna tell me it's a coincidenceT'

'?&. Sumner, I'm not saying yes and I'm not saying no. I am saying we'd all be better off-you and me and the country, too-if you didn't ask questions like that." Groves was a career Army man; to him, security was as natural as breathing. But civilians didn't, wouldn't, think that way. Sumner set a finger alongside his nose and winked, as if Groves had told him what he wanted to know.

Gloomily, Groves sipped more homemade beer. He was afraid he'd done just that.

"Ali, the vernal equinox," Ken Embry exclaimed. "Harbinger of mild weather, songbirds, flowers--2' '%, shut your bleeding gob," George Bagnall. said, with heartfelt sincerity.

Breath came from both Englishmen in great icy clouds. Vernal equinox or not, winter still held Pskov in an iron grip. The oncoming dawn was just beginning to tum the eastern horizon gray above the black pirre forests that seemed to stretch away forever. Venus blazed low in the east, with Saturn, far dimmer and yellower, not far above her. In the wes4 the full moon was descending toward the land. Looking that way, Bagnall was painfully reminded of the Britain he might never see again. Embry sighed, which turned the air around him even fog-

gier. He said, "I'm not what you'd call dead keen on being dernoted to the infantry."

"Nor 1:' Bagnall agreed. "That's what we get for being supernumeraries. You don't see them handing Jones a rifle and having him give Ins all for king and country. He's useful here, so they have him teaching everything he can about his pet radar. But without the Lane, we're just bodies."

"For commissar and country, please--remember where we are," Embry said. "Me, I'd sooner they tried ft-dining us up on Red Air Force planes. We are veteran aircrew, after all."

"I'd hoped for that myself," Bagnall said. "Only difficulty with the notion is that, as far as I can see, the Red Air Force, whatever may be left of it, hasn't got any planes within God

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knows how far from Pskov. If there's damn all here, they c hardly train us up on it."

"Too true." Embry tugged at his shlem-sort of a balacla, that didn't cover his nose or mouth-so it did a better job keeping his neck warm. "And I don't like the tin hat they' kitted me out with, either."

"Then don't wear it. I don't fancy mine, now that you me

tion it." Along with Mauser rifles, both Englishmen had ceived German helmets. Wearing that coal scuttle with i painted swastika set Bagnall's teeth on edge, to say nothing worrying him lest he be mistaken for a Nazi by some Russi more eager for revenge against the Germans than to attack d Lizards.

"Don't like to leave it off, either," Embry said. "Puts me much in mind of the last war, when they went for a year a half with no tin hats. at all."

"That is a poser," Bagnall admitted. Thinking about the i finite slaughter of World War I was bad enough anyho Thinking how bad it had been before helmets was enough make your stomach turn over.

Alf Whyte came walking toward them. He had his he

on, which made his silhouette unnervingly Germanic. He sai "You chaps ready to find out about the way our fathe foughtT'

"Sod our fathers," Bagnall muttered. He stamped his feet i and down. Russian felt boots kept them warm; boots were tl one part of his flying suit he'd willingly exchanged for the local equivalents.

Other small groups of men gathered in Pskov's mark square, chatting softly among themselves in Russian or man. It was a more informal muster than any Bagnall h imagined; the occasional female voice among the deeper run bles only made the scene seem stranger.

The women 'fighters were as heavily bundled against cold as their male counterparts. Pointing to a couple of Embry said, "They don't precisely put one in mind of Jane, they?"

"Ali, Jane," Bagnall said. He and Alf Whyte both si The Daily Mirror's marvelous comic-strip blonde dressed one of two ways: very little and even less. Bagnall went "Even Jane would dress warmly here. And the Russians, eve

dressed like Jane, wouldn't much stir me. The ones I've seen are most of them lady dockwallopers or lorry drivers." "Too right," Whyte said. "This is a bloody place." All three Englishmen nodded glumly.

A couple of minutes later, officers-or at least leadersmoved the fighters out. Bagnall's rifle was heavy; it made him feel lopsided and banged his shoulder at every step he took. At firV it drove him to distraction. Then it became only a minor nuisance. By the time he'd gone a mile or so, he stopped noticing it.

He did expect to see some difference in the way the Russians and Germans went off to war. German precision and efficiency were notorious, while the Red Army, although it had a reputation for great courage, was not long on spit and Polish. He soon found what such clich6s were worth. He couldn't even tell the two groups apart by their gear: many Russian partisans bore captured German equipment, while about an equal number of Hitler's finest eked out their own supplies with Soviet stocks.

They even marched the same way, in loose, widespread groups that got looser and more spread out as the sun rose. "We might do well to emulate them:' Bagnall. said. "They have more experience at this kind of thing than we do."

"I suppose it's to keep too many from going down at once if they're caught out in the open by aircr-A" Ken Embry said. "If we're caught out in the open, you mean," Alf Whyte

corrected him. As if with one accord, the three RAF men spread out a little farther.

Before long, they entered the forest south of Pskov. To Bagnall, used to neat, well-trimmed English woods, it was like stepping into another world. These trees had never been harvested; he would have bet money that many of them had never been seen by mortal man till this moment. Pine and fir and spruce held invaders at bay with their dark-needled branches, as if the only thing they wanted in all the world was for the men to go away. The occasional pale gray birch trunks among them startled Bagnall each time he went past one; they reminded him of naked women (he thought again of Jane) scattered among matrons properly dressed for the cold.

Off in the distance, something howled. "A wolf!" Bagnall said, and grabbed for his rifle before he realized there was no immediate need. Wolves had been hunted out of England for

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more than four hundred years, but he reacted to the sound b instinct printed on his flesh by four hundred times four dred generations.

"We're rather a long way from home, aren't we?" Wh said with a nervous chuckle; he'd started at the wolf call,

"Too bloody far," Bagnall said. Thinking about Engl brought him only pain. He tried to do it as little as he c Even battered and hungry from war, it felt infinitely more w coming than wrecked Pskov, tensely divided between Bolsh

viks and Nazis, or than this forbidding primeval wood. In amongst the trees, the almost eternal ravening wind w gone. That let Bagnall grow as nearly warm as he'd been si his Lancaster landed outside Pskov. And Jerome Jones said the city was known for its mild climate. Trudging throug snow as spring began gave the lie to that, at least if you w a Londoner. Bagnall wondered if spring ever truly began Alf Whyte said, "What precisely is our mission, anyhow

"I was talking with a Jerry last night." Bagnall paused, not just to take another breath. He had a little German and Russian, so he naturally found it easier to talk with the Weh macht men than with Pskov's rightful owners. That bothe him. He was so used to thinking of the Germans as enemi that dealing with them in any way felt treasonous, even if the loved the Lizards no better than he.

"And what did the Jerry say, pray tell?" Whyte asked w he didn't go on right away.

Thus prompted, Bagnall answered, "There's a Lizard don't know what exactly-forward observation post, little g rison, something-about twenty-five kilometefs south Pskov. We're supposed to put paid to it."

"Twenty-five kilometersT' As a navigator, Whyte was us to going back and forth between metric and imperial measure "We're to hike fifteen miles through the snow and then fig It'll be nightfall by the time we get there."

"I gather that's part of the plan," Bagnall said. Whyte scandalized tone showed what an easy time England had h in the war. The Germans and, from what Bagnall could gathe the Russians took the hike for granted: just one more thi they had to do. They'd done worse marches to get at e other the winter before.

He munched cold black bread as he shuffled along. Whi he paused to spend a penny against the trunk of a birch

a Lizard jet wailed by, far overhead. He froze, wondering if the enemy could have spotted the advancing human foes. The trees gave good cover, and most of the fighters wore white smocks over the rest of their clothes. Even his own helmet had whitewash splashed across it.

The leaders of the combat group (or so his German of the night before had called it) took no chances. They hurried the fighters along and urged them to scatter even more widely than before. Bagnall obeyed, but worried. He'd thought nothing could be worse than fighting in these grim woods. But suppose he got lost in them instead? The shiver that brought had nothing to do with cold.

On and on and on. He felt as if he'd marched a hundred miles already. How was he to fight after a slog like this? The Germans and Russians seemed to think nothing of it. A British Tommy might have felt the same, but the RAF let machines carry warriors to combat. In a Lanc, Bagnall could do things no infantry could match. Now, quite literally, he found the shoe on the other foot.

The sun swung through the sky. Shadows lengthened, deepened. Somehow, Bagnall kept up with everyone else. As shadows gave way to twilight, he saw the men ahead of him going down on their bellies, so he did, too. He slithered forward. Through breaks in the forest he saw a few houses-huts, really-plopped down in the middle of a clearing. "Mat's it?" he whispered.

"How the devil should I know?" Ken Embry whispered back. "Somehow, though, I don't think we've been.invited here for high tea."

Bagnall didn't think the village had ever heard of high tea. By its look, he wondered if it had heard of the passing of the tsars. The wooden buildings with carved walls and thatched roofs looked like something out of a novel by Tolstoy. The only hint of the twentieth century was razor wire strung around a couple of houses. No one, human or Lizard, was in sight.

"It can't be as easy as it looks," Bagnall said.

"I'd like it if it were," Embry answered. "And who says it can't? We-2'

Off in the distance a small popf interrupted him. Bagnail had been involved in dropping countless tons of bombs and had been on the receiving end of more antiaircraft fire than he cared to think about, but this was the first time he'd done

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his fighting on the ground. The mortar fired again and ag fast as its crew-Bagnall didn't know whether they were Ru sians or Germans--could serve it with bombs.

Snow and dirt fountained upward as the mortar rounds home. One of the wooden houses caught fire and began bum merrily. Men in white burst from the trees and dash across the clearing. Bagnall wondered if the village really w a Lizard outpost after all.

He fired the Mauser, worked the bolt, fired again. He trained on a Lee-Enfield, and vastly preferred it to the weap he was holding. Instead of angling down to where it was e to reach, the Mauser's bolt stuck straight out, which quick firing difficult, and the German rifle's magazine only five rounds, not ten.

Other rifles started hammering, and a couple of machi guns, too. Still no response came from the village. Bagnall gan to feel almost sure they were attacking a place empty the enemy. Relief and rage fought in him-relief that he wasn in danger after all, rage that he'd made that long, miserab march in the snow.

Then one of the white-cloaked figures flew through the

torn almost in two by the land mine he'd stepped on. And muzzle flashes began winking from a couple of the vill buildings as the Lizards returned fire. The charging, yelling h mans began to go down as if scythed.

Bullets kicked up snow between Bagnall and Embr whacked into the trees behind which they hid. Bagnall hugg the frozen earth like a lover. Shooting back was the last thi on his mind. This was, he decided in an instant, a much ug business than war in the air. In the Lanc, you dropped yo bombs on people thousands of feet below. They shot back, ye but at your aircraft, not at your precious and irreplaceable se Even fighter aircraft didn't go after you personally-their ject was to wreck your plane, and your gunners were trying do the same to'them. And even if your aircraft got shot dow you might bail out and survive.

It wasn't machine against machine here. The Lizards w doing their best to blow large holes in his body so he'd scre and bleed and die. Their best seemed appallingly good, to Every one of however many Lizards there were in the vill had an automatic weapon that spat as much lead as one of raiders' machine guns and many times as much as a bolt-ac

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rifle like his Mauser. He felt like Kipling's Fuzzy-Wuzzy charging a British square.

But you couldn't charge here, not if you felt like living. The Russians and Germans who'd tried it were most of them down, some chewed to bits by a hail of bullets, others shredded like the first luckless fellow by stepping on a mine. The few still on their feet could not go forward. They fled for the shelter of the woods.

Bagnall turned to Embry, shouted, "I think we just stuck our tools in the meat grinder."

"Whatever gave you that idea, dearie?" Even in the middle of battle, the pilot managed to come up with a high, shrill falsetto.

In the gathering gloom, one of the houses in the village began to move. At first Bagnall rubbed his eyes, wondering if they were playing tricks on him. Then, after Mussorgsky, he thought of the Baba Yaga, the witch's hut that ran on chicken's legs. But as the wooden walls fell away, he saw that this house moved on tracks. "rank!" he screamed. "It's a bleeding tank!"

The Russians were yelling the same thing, save with a broad a rather than his sharp one. The Germans screamed "Panzer!" instead. Bagnall understood that, too. He also understood that a tank-no, two tanks now, he saw-meant big trouble.

Their turrets swiveled toward the heaviest firing. Machine guns opened up on them as they did so; streams of bullets struck sparks from their armor. But they'd been made to withstand heavier artillery than most merely Earthly tanks commanded-the machine guns might as well have been firing feathers.

Their own machine guns started shooting, muzzle flashes winking like fireflies. One of the raiders' machine guns--a new Gerinan one, with such a high cyclic rate that it sounded like a giant ripping an enormous canvas sail when it opened up-abruptly fell silent. It started up again a few seconds later. Bagnall admired the spirit of the men who had taken over for its surely fallen crew.

Then the main armament of one of the tanks spoke, or rather bellowed. From less than half a mile away, it sounded to Bagnall like the end of the world, while the tongue of flame it spat put him in mind of hellmouth opening. The machine gun stopped firing once more, and this time did not open up again. The other tank's cannon fired, too, then slowed so it pointed

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more nearly in Bagnall's direction. He scrambled deeper in the woods: anything to put more distance between himself at that hideous gun.

Ken Embry was right with him. "How the devil do you sa 'Run like bloody hell!' in RussianT' he asked. "Not a phrase I've learned, I'm afraid, but I don't beliei the partisans need our advice in that regard," Bagnall ai swered. Russians and Germans alike were in full retreat, d tanks hastening on their way-and hastening too many of the into the world to come-with more cannon rounds. Shell splir ters and real splinters blown off trees hissed through the with deadly effect.

"Someone's reconnaissance slipped up badly," Embry sai 'This was supposed to be an infantry outpost No one said word about going up against armor."

Bagnall only grunted. What Embry had said was sel evidently true. Men were dyingy because of it. His main hop at present was not being one who did. Through the crash of tb cannon, he heard another noise, one he didn't recognize. quick, deep thutter that seemed to come out of the air. "What's that?" he said. Beside him, Embry shrugged. Th, Russians were running faster than ever, crying "Ve7lolyet! " an4 "Avtozhir! " Neither word, unfortunately, meant anything a Bagnall.

Fire came out of the sky from just above treetop height streaks of flame as if from a Katyusha launcher taken aloft an(mounted on a flying machine instead of a truck. The wood exploded into flame as the rocket warheads detonated. Bagnall shrieked like a lost soul, but couldn't even hear himself

Whatever had fired the rockets, it wasn't ap- ordinary airplane. It hung in the sky, hovering like a mosquito the size of a young whale, as it loosed another salvo of rockets on the humans who had presumed to attack a Lizard position. More deadly shrapnel flew. Buffeted, half stunned by the blast, Bagnall lay flat on the ground, as he might have during a great earthquake, and prayed the pounding would end.

But another helicopter came whickering up from the South and poured two more salvos of rockets into the raiders' ranks. Both machines hovered overhead and raked the forest with machine-gun fire. The tanks came crashing closer, too, smashing down everything that stood in their way but the bigger trees.

Somebody booted Bagnall in the backside, hard. "Get up and run, you bloody twit!" The words were in English. Bagnall turned his head. It was Ken Embry, his foot drawn back for another kick.

"I'm all right," Bagnall said, and proved it by getting up. As soon as he was on his pins again, adrenaline made him run like a deer. He fled north-or, at any rate, away from the tanks and the helicopters' killing ground. Embry matched him stride for desperate stride. Somewhere in their mad dash, Bagnall gasped out, "Where's Alf?"

"He bought his plot back there, I'm afraid," Embry answered.

That hit Bagnall like-like a machine-gun round from one of the deathships up there, he thought. Watching Russians and Germans he didn't know getting shot or blown to bits was one thing. Losing someone from his own crew was ten times worse-as if a flak burst had torn through the side of his Lancaster and slaughtered a bombardier. And since Whyte washad been-one of the three other men in Pskov with whom he could speak freely, he felt the loss all the more.

Bullets still slashed the woods, most of them, though, behind the fleeing Englishmen now. The Lizards' tanks did not press the pursuit as aggressively as they might have. "Maybe they're afraid of taking a Molotov cocktail from someone up a tree whom they don't spy till too late," Embry suggested when Bagnall said that out loud.

"Maybe they are," the flight engineer said. "I'm damned sure I'm afraid of them."

The gunfire and rockets and cannon rounds had left Ins-ears as dazed as any other part of him. Dimly, as if from far away, he heard screams of terror and the even more appalling shrieks of the wounded. One of the helicopters flew away, then, after a last hosing of the woods with bullets, the other one. Bagnall looked down at his wrist. The glowing hands of his watch said only twenty minutes had gone by since the first shots were fired. Those twenty minutes of hell had stretched for an eternity. Though not ordinarily a religious man, Bagnall wondered how long a real eternity of hell would seem to last.

Then his thoughts snapped back to the present, for he almost stumbled over a wounded Russian lying in a pool of blood that looked black against the snow at night. "Bozhemoi, " the Russian moaned. "Bozhemoi- "

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"My God," Bagnall gasped, unconsciously translating "Ken, come over here and help me. It's a woman." "I hear." The pilot and Bagnall stooped beside the wounde partisan. She pressed a hand against her side, trying to stanc the flow of blood.

As gently as he could, Bagnall undid her quilted coat an(tunic so he could see the wound. He had to force her han4 away before he could bandage it with gauze from his aid kil She groaned and thrashed and weakly tried to fight him ofl "Nemtsi, " she wailed.

"She thinks we're Jerries," Embry said. "Here, give her this too." He pressed a morphia syrette into Bagnall's hand. Even as he made the injection, Bagnall thought it a waste precious drug: she wasn't going to live. Her blood had alread, soaked the bandage. Maybe a hospital could have saved hei but here in the middle of a frozen nowhere . . . "Arta! " h, yelled in German. "Gibt es Aria hier? Is there a doctor here? No one answered. He and Embry and the wounded womaj might have been alone in the woods. She sighed as the mor phia bit into her pain, took a couple of easy breaths, and died "She went out peacefully, anyhow," Embry said; Bagnall re alized the pilot hadn't thought she'd make it, either. He'd doni her the last favor he could by freeing her death from agony. Bagnall said, "Now we have to think about staying alivi ourselves." In the middle of the cold woods, after a crushinj defeat that showed only too clearly how the Lizards had seize(and held great stretches of territory from the mightiest niilitar~ machines the world had known, that seemed to require consid erable thought.

Liu Han called, "Come and see the foreign devil do amazinj things with stick and ball and glove. Come and see! Come an(see!"

Mountebanks of all sorts could be sure of an audience in th Chinese refugee ciamp.- Behind her, Bobby Fiore tossed into th air the leather-covered ball he'd had made. Instead of catchinj it in his hands, he tapped it lightly with his special stick-, bat, he called it. The ball went a couple of feet into the aii came straight down. He tapped it up again and again an again. All the while, he whistled a merry tune. "See!" Liu Han pointed to him. 'The foreign devil juggle

without using his hands!"

A spattering of applause came from the crowd. Three or four people tossed coins into the bowl that lay by Liu Han's feet. Some others set rice cakes and vegetables on the mat next to the bowl. Everyone understood that entertainers had to eat or they wouldn't be able to entertain.

When no donations came for a minute or so, Bobby Fiore tapped the ball up one last time, caught it in his free hand, and glanced toward Liu Han. She looked out into the crowd and said, "Who will play a game where, if he wins, the foreign devil will look ridiculous? Who will try this simple game?" Several men shouted and stepped toward her. Nothing delighted Chinese more than making a European or American into an object of ridicule. Liu Han pointed toward the bowl and the mat: if they wanted to play, they had to pay. A couple of them made their offerings without a word, but one asked

belligerently, "What is this game?" Bobby Fiore handed her the ball. She held it up in one hand,

bobby Flore handed her the ball. She held it up in one hand, bent to pick up a flat canvas bag stuffed with rags which she displayed in the other. Then she put the bag back on the ground, gave the ball to the belligerent man. "A simple game, an easy game," she said. The foreign devil will stand well back and then ran toward the bag. All you have to do is stand in front of it and touch him with the ball before he reaches it. Win and you get back your stake and twice as much besides."

"That is easy." The man with the ball puffed out his chest and tossed a silver trade dollar into the bowl. It rang sweetly. "I will put the ball on him, no matter what he does."

Liu Han turned to the crowd. "Clear a path, please. Clear a path so the foreign devil can run." Chattering among themselves, the people moved aside to form a narrow lane. Bobby Fiore walked down it When he was almost a hundred feet from the man with the ball, he turned and bowed to him. The arrogant fellow did not return his courtesy. A couple of people clucked reproachfully at that, but most didn't think a foreign devil deserved much courtesy.

Bobby Fiore bowed again, then ran straight at the man with the ball. The Chinese man clutched it in both hands, as if it were a rock. He set himself for a collision as Fiore bore down on him.

But the collision never came. At the last instant, Fiore threw himself to the ground on his hip and thigh and hooked around the clumsy lunge the man made with the ball. His foot came

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down on the stuffed bag. "Safe! " he yelled in his own lan. guage-

Liu Han didn't quite know what safe meant, but she knev it meant he'd won. "Who's nextT' she called, taking the bal from the disgruntled Chinese man.

"Wait!" he said angrily, then turned and played to th crowd: "You all saw that! The foreign devil cheated me!"

Fear coursed through Liu Han. She called Bobby Fiore yanA kwei-tse-foreign devil-herself, but only to identify him. h

the angry man's mouth, it was a cry to turn an audience int(a mob.

Before she could answer, Fiore spoke for himself in clumsy Chinese: "Not cheat. Not say let win. He quick, he win. He slooow." He stretched the last word out in a way no native Chinese would have used, but one insultingly effective.

"He's right, Wu-you missed him by a li," someone yellec from the crowd. The miss hadn't really been a third of a mile but it hadn't been close, either.

"Here, give me the ball now," someone else said. "I'll pu it on the foreign devil." He said yang kwei-tse the same wa3 Liu Han did, to name Bobby Fiore, not to revile him.

Liu Han pointed to the bowl. As Wu stamped away, the nex player tossed in some paper money from Manchukuo. It wasn'

worth as much as silver, and Liu Han did not like it becaus(of what Manchukuo's Japanese puppet masters had done to China-and to her own family, just before the Lizards came But the Japanese were still fighting hard against the Lizards which gave them prestige they hadn't had before. She let the bills lay, handed the man the ball.

Bobby Fiore brushed dirt off his pants, shooed the spectators back so he could take his running start. The Chinese man stood in front of the bag, holding the ball in his left hand and leaning left, as if to make sure Fiore wouldn't use on him the trick that had footed the first player.

Bobby Fiore ran down the aisle of chattering Chinese, as before. When he got within a couple of strides of the waiting Chinese, he took a small step in the direction the fellow was leaning. "Ha!" the man cried in triumph, and brought the ball down.

But Bobby Fiore was not there to be tagged. After that small step made the man commit himself, Fiore took a long, hard stride on his other leg, changing directions as nimbly as any

acrobat Liu Han had ever seen. The man tagged to the left; Bobby Fiore slid to the right. "Safe!" he yelled again. The man with the ball ruefully flipped it to Liu Han. His sheepish grin said he knew he'd been outsmarted. "Let's see if this fellow can put the ball on the foreign devil," he said, now

using the label almost in admiration. "If I couldn't, I'll make a side bet he can't, either." Another man set down a meaty slab of pork ribs to pay for

the privilege of trying to tag Bobby Fiore. The fellow making side bets did a brisk business: now that Fiore had gone one way and then the other, what tricks could he have left?

He promptly demonstrated a new one. Instead of going right or left, he dove straight toward the bag on his belly, snaked a hand through his opponent's legs, and grabbed the bag before the ball touched his back. "Safe!" Now a couple of people in the crowd raised the victory cry with him.

He kept running and sliding as long as men were willing to pay to try to put the ball on him. Sometimes he'd hook one way, sometimes the other, and once in a while he'd dive straight in. A couple of people did manage to guess right and tag him, but Liu Han watched the bowl fill with money and the mat with food. They were doing well.

When the sport began to seem routine rather than novel, Liu Han called, "Who wants revenge?" She tossed the ball up and down in her hand. "You can throw at the foreign devil now. He will not dodge, but if you hit him anywhere but his two hands, you win three times what you wager. Who will try?"

While she warmed up the crowd, Bobby Fiore put on the padded leather glove he'd had made along with the ball. He stood in front of the wall of a shack, then made a fist with his other hand and pounded it into the glove, as if confident no one would be able to touch him.

"From how close do we get to throw?" asked the man who'd been making side bets.

Liu Han paced off about forty feet. Bobby Fiore grinned at her. "Do you want to try?" she asked the man.

"Yes, I'll fling at him," he answered, dropping more money into the bowl. "I'll put it right between his ugly round eyes, you see if I don't."

He tossed the ball into the air once or twice, as if to get the feel of it in his hand, and then, as he'd said, threw it right at

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Bobby Fiore's head. Whack! The noise it made striking th peculiar leather glove was like a gunshot. It startled Liu Han and startled the people in the crowd even more. A couple o them let out frightened squawks. Bobby Fiore rolled the bal back to Liu Han.

She stooped to pick it up. Before long, that wouldn't b easy, not with her belly growing. "Who's next?" she asked. "Whoever it is, he can wager with me that he misses, too,' said the fellow who liked to make side bets. "I'll pay five one if he hits." If he couldn't beat Bobby Fiore, he was con vinced nobody could.

The next gambler paid Liu Han and let fly. Wham! Th wasn't ball hitting glove, that was ball banging against the si of the shack-the man had thrown too wildly for Bobby Fi to catch his offering. Fiore picked up the ball and tossed i gently back to him. "You try again," he said; he'd practice the phrase with Liu Han.

Before the fellow could take another throw at him, the ol woman who lived in the shack came out and screamed at Liu Han: "What are you doing? Are you vying to frighten me ou of my wits? Stop hitting my poor house with a club. I a bomb landed on it." "No bomb, grandmother," Liu Han said politely. "We are only playing a gambling game." The old woman kept on screaming until Liu Han gave her three trade dollars. Then she disappeared back into her shack, obviously not caring what happened to it after that.

The fellow who hadn't thrown straight took another shot at Bobby Fiore. This time he was on target, but Fiore caught the ball. The man squalled curses like a scalded cat.

If the old woman had thought that first ball was like a bomb landing, she must have figured the Lizards had singled out her house for bombardment practice by the time the next hour had passed. One of the things Liu Han discovered about her countrymen during that time was that they didn't throw very well. A couple of them missed the shack altogether. That sent boys chasing wildly after the runaway ball, and meant Liu Han had to pay small bribes to get it back.

When no one else felt like trying to hit the quick-handed foreign devil, Liu Han said, "Who has a bottle or clay pot he doesn't mind losingT'

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A tall man took a last swig from a bottle of plum brandy, then handed it to her. "Now I do," he said thickly, breathing plurnmy fumes into her face.

She gave the bottle to Bobby Fiore, who set it on an upsidedown bucket in front of the wall. He walked back farther than the spot from which the Chinese had taken aim at him.

"The foreign devil will show you how to throw properly," Liu Han said. This last stunt made her nervous. The bottle looked very small. Bobby Fiore could easily miss, and if he did he'd lose face.

His features were set and tight-he knew he could miss, too. His arm went back, then snapped forward in a motion longer and smoother than the Chinese had used The ball flew, almost invisibly fast. The bottle shattered. Green glass flew every which way. Chatter from the crowd rose to an impressed peak. Several people clapped their hands. Bobby Fiore bowed, as if he were Chinese himself.

"Mat's all for today," Liu Han said. "We will present our show again in a day or two. I hope you enjoyed it."

She picked up all the food the show had earned them. Bobby Fiore carried the money. He also hung onto ball and bat and glove. That made him different from all the Chinese men Liu Han had known: they would have added to her burden without a second thought. She'd already seen up in the plane that never came down that he had the strange ways ascribed to foreign devils. Some of them, such as his taste in food, annoyed her; this one she found endearing.

"Show good?" he asked, tacking on the Lizards' interrogative cough.

"The show was very good." Liu Han used the emphatic cough to underline that, adding, "You were very good too there, especially at the end-you took a chance with the bottle, but it worked, so all the better."

Of necessity, she spoke mostly in Chinese, which meant she had to repeat herself several times and go back to use simpler words. When Fiore understood, he grinned and slipped an arm around her thickening waist. She dropped an onion so she could break away to pick it up. Showing affection in public was one foreign devil way she wished he would forget in a hurry. It not only embarrassed her, but lowered her status in the eyes of everyone who saw her.

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As they approached the hut they shared, she stopped fretti over such relatively trivial concerns. Several little scaly devil stood outside, two with fancy body paint and the rest wi guns. Their unnerving turreted eyes swung toward Liu H and Bobby Fiore.

One of the little devils with fancy paint spoke in hissing decent Chinese: "You are the human beings who live in thi

house, the human beings brought down from the ship 29th E peror Fessoj?" The last three words were in his own languag("Yes, superior sir," Liu Han said; by his perplexed lool Bobby Fiore hadn't understood the question. Even though scaly devil used words that were individually intelligible, s had trouble following him, too. Imagine calling the airplan that never came down a ship!

"Which of you is carrying the growing thing that will be come a human being in her belly?" the devil with the fanc paint asked.

"I am, superior sir." Not for the first time, Liu Han felt flash of contempt for the little scaly devils. They not onl couldn't tell people apart, they couldn't even tell the sexe apart. And Bobby Fiore, with his tall nose and round eyes, wa unique in this camp, yet the little devils didn't recognize hi as a foreign devil.

One of the gun-carrying little devils pointed at Liu Han an hissed something to a companion. The other devi."s mouth fel open in a devilish laugh. They found people preposterous, too The little devil who spoke Chinese said, "Go in this lial

house, the two of you. We have things to say to you, things ask of you."

Liu Han and Bobby Fiore went into the hut. So did the tw little devils with elaborate paint on their scaly hides, and so di one of the more drably marked guards. The two higher-rankinj little devils skittered past Liu Han so they could sit on hearth that also 'supported the hut's bedding. They sank dow on the warm clay with rapturous sighs-Liu Han had seen the didn't like cold weather. The guard, who liked it no better, ha(to stand where he could keep his eyes on the obviously viciou and dangerous humans.

"I am Ttomalss," the scaly devil who spoke Chinese said-, stutter at the front of his name and a hiss at the end. "First ask you what you were doing with these strange things." H

turned his eye turrets toward the ball and bat and glove Bobby Fiore held, and pointed at them as well.

"Do you speak English?" Fiore asked in that language when Liu Han had put the question into their peculiar jargon. When neither little scaly devil answered, he muttered, "Shit," and turned back to her, saying, "You better answer. They won't follow me any more than I follow them."

"Superior sir," Liu Han began, bowing to Ttomalss as if he were her village headman back in the days (was it really less than a year before?) when she'd had a headman ... or a village, "we use these things to put on a show to entertain people here in this camp and earn money and food for ourselves."

Ttomalss hissed to translate that to his companion, who might not have known any human language. The other scaly devil hissed back. Ttomalss turned his words into Chinese: "Why do you need these things? We give you this house, we give you enough to get food you need. Why do you want more? Do you not have enough?"

Liu Han thought about that. It was a question that went straight to the heart of the Tho, the way a person should live. Having too much-or caring in excess about having too much-was reckoned bad (though she'd noticed that few people who had a lot were inclined to give up any of it). Cautiously, she answered, "Superior sir, we seek to save what we can so we will not be at want if hunger comes to this camp. And we want money for the same reason, and to make our lives more comfortable. Can this be wrong?"

The scaly devil did not reply directly. Instead, he said, "What sort of show is this? It had better not be one that endangers the hatchling growing inside you."

"It does not, superior sir," she assured him. She would have been happier for his concern had it meant he cared for her and the baby as persons. She knew it didn't. The only value she, the baby, and Bobby Fiore had to the little devils was as parts of their experiment.

That worried her, too. What would they do when she'd had the child? Snatch it away from her as they'd snatched her away from her village? Force her to find out how fast she could get pregnant again? The unpleasant possibilities were countless.

"What do you do, then?" Ttomalss demanded suspiciously.

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"Mostly I speak for Bobby Fiore, who does not speak C nese well," she said. "I tell the audience how he will hit aT catch and throw the ball. This is an art he brings with hi from his own country, and not one with which we Chinese a familiar. Things that are new and strange entertain us, help pass the time."

'This is foolishness," the little devil said. "Me old, the f. miliar, should be what entertains. Ile new and strange-ho could they be interesting? You will not be-what is th word?-familiar with them. Is this not frightening to you?" He was even more conservative than a Chinese, Liu Han r(file:///C|/2590% 20Sci-Fi% 20 and % 20 Fantasy% 20 E-books/Harry% 20 Turtled ove% 20-% 20 Worldwar% 2002% 20-% 20 Tilting% 20 the% 20 Balance.txt the state of the state of

alized. That rocked her. The little scaly devils had torn up h life, to say nothing of turning China and the whole world o their ear. Moreover, the little devils had their vast array of as tonishing machines, everything from the cameras that took pic tures in three dimensions to the dragonfly planes that coul hover in the sky. She'd thought of them as flighty gadgeteers as if they were Americans or other foreign devils with scale and body paint.

But it wasn't so. Bobby Fiore had almost burst with excite ment at the idea of bringing something new into the prisor camp and making a profit from it. She'd liked the notion, too To the scaly devil, it seemed as alien and menacing as tht devil did to her.

Her wool-gathering irritated Ttomalss. "Answer me," lic

snapped.

"I'm sorry, superior sir," she said quickly. She didn't want tc get the little devils annoyed at her. They mighL cast her and Bobby Fiore out of this home, they might take her back to the plane that never came down and turn her into a whore again, they might take her baby away as soon as it was born . . ' or they might do any number of appalling things she couldn'l imagine now. She went on, "I was just thinking that human beings like new things."

"I know that.'~ Ttomalss did not approve of it; his blunt little stump of a tail switched back and forth, like an angry cat's. "It is the great curse of you Big Uglies." The last two words were in his own language. Liu Han had heard the little scaly devils use them often enough to know what they meant. Ttomalss resumed, "Were it not for the mad curiosity of your kind, the Race would have brought your world under our sway long ago.,,

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"I am sorry, but I do not follow you, superior sit," Liu Han said. "What does this have to do with preferring new entertainments to old? When we see the same old thing over and over, we grow bored." How getting bored at old shows was tied to the devils' not conquering the world was beyond her.

"The Race also has this thing you call growing bored," Ttomalss admitted, "but with us it comes on more slowly, and over a long, long time. We are more content with what we already have than is true of your kind. So are the other two races we know. You Big Uglies break the pattern."

Liu Han did not worry about breaking patterns. She did wonder if she'd understood the scaly devil aright. Were there other kinds of weird creatures besides his own? She found it hard to believe, but she wouldn't have believed in the scaly devils a year earlier.

Ttomalss stepped forward, squeezed at her left breast with his clawed fingers. "Hey!" Bobby Fiore said, and started to get to his feet. The scaly devil with a gun turned it his way.

"It's all right," Liu Han said quickly. "He's not hurting me." That was true. His touch was gentle; although his claws penetrated her cotton tunic and pricked against her skin, they did not break it.

61YOU will give the hatchling liquid from your body out of these for it to eat?" Ttomalss asked, his Chinese becoming awkward as he spoke of matters and bodily functions unfamiliar to his kind.

'Mlk, yes," Liu Han said, giving him the word he lacked. "Milk." The scaly devil repeated the word to fix it in his memory, just as Liu Han did when she picked up something in English. Ttomalss continued, "When you mate, this male"-he pointed at Bobby Fiore---~'chews there, too. Does he get milk as well?'

"No, no." Liu Han had all she could do not to laugh. "Then why do thisT' Ttomalss demanded. "What is itsfunction, is that the proper word?"

"That is the proper word, yes, superior sit." Liu Han sighed. The little devils talked so openly about mating that her own sense of shame and reticence had eroded. "But he does not draw milk from them. He does it to give me pleasure and to arouse himself."

Ttomalss gave a one-word verdict: "Disgusting." He spoke

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in his own language to the other little devil with fancy pai That one and the guard both swung their eyes from Liu to Bobby Fiore and back again.

"What's going on?" Fiore demanded. "Honey, they aski filthy questions again?" Though he liked publicly showing fection in a way in which no Chinese would have felt easy, was and had stayed far more reticent than Liu Han in of intimate matters. "Yes," she answered resignedly. The scaly devil with fancy paint who didn't speak Chine sent several excited sentences at Ttomalss, who turned to Han. "You use the kee-kreek? This is our speech, not yours "I am sorry, superior sir, but I do not know what the ke, kreek is," Liu Han said. "The--2' Ttomalss made the little devils' interrogati) cough. "Do you understand now?" "Yes, superior sir," Liu Han said. "Now I understan Bobby Fiore is a foreign devil from a country far away. H words and my words are not the same. When we were up the plane that never came down-2' "The what?" Ttomalss interrupted. When Liu Han e

plained, the little devil said, "Oh, you mean the ship."

Liu Han still wondered how it could be a ship if it nev touched water, but the little devil seemed insistent about point, so she said, "When we were up in the ship, then, sup rior sir, we had to learn each other's words. Since we b knew some of yours, we used those, too, and we still do." Ttomalss translated for the other little scaly devil, wh

spoke volubly in reply. "Starraf--Ttomalss finally named other devil-"says you could do without all this moving b and forth between languages if you spoke only one, as we When your world is all ours, all you Big Uglies who survi) will use our language, just as the Rabotevs; and Halessi, other races in the Empire, do now."

Liu Han could see that having everyone speA the same guage would be simpler: even other dialects of Chinese beyond her easy comprehension. But the unspoken assu tions in the scaly devil's words chilled her. Ttornalss seeme very sure his kind would conquer the world, and also that the would be able to do as they pleased with its people (or many of them as were left when the conquest was complete

Starraf spoke again, and Ttomalss translated: "You have shown, and we have seen at other places, that you Big Uglies are not too stupid to learn the tongue of the Race. Maybe we should begin to teach it in this camp and others, so that you can begin to be joined to the Empire."

"Now whatT' Bobby Fiore asked.

"They want to teach everyone how to talk the way we do," Liu Han answered. She'd known the scaly devils were overwhelmingly powerful from the moment they first descended on her village. Somehow, though, she'd never thought much about what they were doing to the . rest of the world. She was only a villager, after a, and didn't worry about the wider world unless some part of it impinged on her life. All at once, she realized the little devils didn't just want to conquer mankind; they aimed to make people as much like themselves as they could.

She hated that even more than she hated anything else about the little scaly devils, but she hadn't the slightest idea how to stop it.

Mordechai Anielewicz stood at attention in Zolraag's office as the Lizard governor of Poland chewed him out. "The situation in Warsaw grows more unsatisfactory with each passing day," Zolraag said in pretty good German. "The cooperation between you Jews and the Race which formerly existed seems to have disappeared."

Anielewicz scowled; after what the Nazis had done to the Warsaw ghetto, hearing the word "Jews" in German was plenty to set his teeth on edge all by itself. And Zolraag used it with arrogance of a sort not far removed from that of the Germans. The only difference Anielewicz could see was that the Lizards thought of all humans, not just Jews, as Untermenschen.

"Whose fault is that?" he demanded, not wanting Zolraag to know he was concerned. "We welcomed you as liberators; we shed our blood to help you take this city, if you remember, superior sir. And what thanks do we get? To be treated almost as badly under your thumb as we were under the Nazis."

"That is not true," Zolraag said. "We have given you enough guns to make your fighters the equal of the Armija Krajowa, the Polish Home Army. Where you were below them, we set you above. How do you say we treat you badlyT'

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"I say it because you care nothing for our freedom" th Jewish fighting leader answered. "You use us for your ow purposes and to help make slaves of other people. We hav been slaves ourselves. We didn't like it. We don't see any son to think other people like it, either."

"The Race will rule this world and all its people," Zo said, as confidently as if he'd remarked, The sun will come tomorrow. "Ibose who work with us will have higher p than those who do not."

Before the war, Anielewicz had been a largely secularize Jew. He'd gone to a Polish Gymnasium and university, an

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studied Latin. He knew what the Latin equivalent of work t(gether was, too: collaborate. He also knew what he'd thoug of the Estonian, Latvian, and Ukrainian jackals who helped th German wolves patrol the Warsaw ghetto-and what he' thought of the Jewish police who betrayed their own people a crust of bread.

"Superior sir," he said earnestly, "with the guns we from you, we can protect ourselves from the Poles, and that very good. But most of us would rather die than help you the way you mean."

'This I have seen, and this I do not understand," said. "Why would you forgo such advantage?"

"Because of what we would have to do to get it," wicz answered. "Poor Moishe Russie wouldn't speak your lie so you had to play tricks with his words to make them co out the way you wanted them. No wonder he disappeared that, and no wonder he made you out to be liars the fir chance he got."

Zolraag's eye turrets swung toward him. That slow, deli ate motion held as much menace as if they'd containe 38-centimeter battleship guns rather than organs of vision. ' are still seeking to learn more of these events ourselves," said. "Herr Russie was an associate, even a friend, of your, We wonder how and if you helped him."

"You questioned me under your truth drug," Anielewicz r(minded him.

"We have not learned as much with it as we hoped fro early tests," Zolraag said. "Some early experimental subjec may have deceived us as to their reactions. You Tosevites hav a gift for being difficult in unusual ways."

"Thank you, " Anielewicz said, grinning.

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"I did not mean it as a compliment" Zolraag snapped-Anielewicz; knew that. Since he'd been up to his eyebrows in getting Russie away and in making the recording in which Russie blasted the Lizards, he was less than delighted to learn the Lizards had found their drug was worthless.

Zolraag resumed, "I did not summon you here, Herr Anielewicz, to listen to your Tosevite foolishness. I summoned you here to wam you that the uncooperative attitude of you Jews must stop. If it does not, we will disarm you and put you back in the place where you were when we came to Tosev 3."

Anielewicz gave the Lizard a long, slow, measuring stare. ,,It comes to that, does it?" he said at last.

'It does."

"You will not disarm us without a fight," Anielewicz said flatly.

"We beat the Germans. Do you think we cannot beat you?" "I am sure you can," Anielewicz said. "Superior sir, we will fight anyhow- Now that we have guns, we will not give them up. You will beat us, but one way or another we will manage to hurt you. You will probably set off the Poles, too. If you take our guns away, they'll fear you'll take theirs, too."

Zolraag didn't answer right away. Anielewicz hoped he 'd managed to distress the Lizard. The Race was good at war, or at least had machines of almost invincible power. When it came to diplomacy, though, they were as children; they had no feel for the likely effects of their actions. The Lizard governor said, "You do not seem to understand, Herr Anielewicz. We can hold your people hostage to make sure you turn in your rifles and other weapons." 11

"Superior sir, you are the one who does not understand, Anielewicz answered. "Whatever you want to do to us, we went through worse before you came. We will fight to keep that from happening again. Will you start up Auschwitz and Trebhnka and Chelmno and the rest again?9'

"Do not make disgusting suggestions." The German death camps had revolted all the Lizards, Zoh*aag included. Tbey'd gotten good propaganda mileage out of them. There, Russie and Anielewicz and other Jews had felt no compunctions about helping the Lizards tell the world the story.

"Well, then, in that case we have nothing to lose by fighting," Anielewicz said. "We were getting ready to fight the Nazis even though we had next to nothing. Now we have guns.

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If you are going to treat us the way the Nazis did, do you think we'd not fight you? What would we have to loseT'

"Your lives," Zolraag said.

Anielewicz: spat on the floor of the governor's office. He didn't know whether Zolraag knew how much scorn the gesture showed, but he hoped so. He said, "What good are our file:///C|/2590% 20Sci-Fi% 20 and % 20 Fantasy% 20 E-books/Harry% 20 Turtled ove% 20-% 20 Worldwar% 2002% 20-% 20 Tilting% 20 the% 20 Balance.txt the state of the state of

lives if you push us back into the ghetto and starve us once more? No one will do that to us again, superior sir, no one. Do what you like with me. The next Jew you pick as puppet leader will tell you the same--or his own people will deal with him.

"You are serious in this matter," Zolraag said in tones of wonder.

,'Of course I am," Anielewicz answered. "Have you talked with General Bor-Komorowski about taking guns away from the Home ArmyT'

"He did not seem pleased with the idea, but he did not reject it in the way you have," Zolraag said.

"He Is politer than I am," Anielewicz said, adding the alter kacker to himself. Aloud, he went on, "That doesn't mean

you'll get any real cooperation from him."
 "We get no real cooperation from any Tosevites," Zolraag
said-mournfully. "We thought you Jews were an exception, but
I see it is not so."
 "We owed you a lot for throwing out the Nazis and saving
us from the death camps," Anielewicz said. "If you'd treated
us as free people who deserved respect, we would have
worked with you. But you just want to be another set of masters and treat everyone on Earth the way the Nazis treated us."
 "We would not kill the way the Gennans did," Zolraag protested.

"No, but you would enslave. When you were through, not a human being on this world would be free."

"I do not see that this matters," Zolraag said.

"I know you don't," Anielewicz: said-sadly, for Zolraag was, given the limits of his position, a decent enough being. Some of the Germans had been that way, too; not all by any means enjoyed exterminating Jews for the sake of extermination. But enjoy it or not, they'd done it, as Zolraag resented freedom now.

That ate at Anielewicz's. Nineteen hundred years before,

Tacitus had remarked with pride that good men-the one in particular he had in mind was his father-in-law--could serve a bad Roman emperor. But when a bad ruler required good men to do monstrous things, how could they obey and remain good? He'd asked himself the question more times than he could count, but never yet found an answer.

Zolraag said, "You claim we cannot make you obey by force. I do not believe this, but you say it. Let us think ... does this language have a word for thinking of something so as to examine it?"

"'Assume' is the word you want," Anielewicz said.

"Assume. Thank you. Let us assume, then, that what you say is true. How in this case are we to rule you Jews and have you obey our requirementsT'

"I wish you would have asked that before events drove a wedge between you and us," Anielewicz answered. "The best way, I think, is not to force us to do anything that would darnage the rest of mankind."

"Even the GermansT' Zolraag asked.

The Jewish fighting leader's lips curled in what was not a smile. Zolraag knew his business, sure enough. What the Nazis had done to the Jews in Poland-all over Europe-cried out for vengeance. But if the Jews collaborated with the Lizards against the Germans, how could they say no to collaborating with them against other peoples as well? That dilemma had sent Moishe Russie first into hiding and then into flight.

"Don't use us as your propaganda front." Anielewicz knew he wasn't answering directly, but he could not force himself to say yes or no. "Whether you win your war or lose it, you make the rest of the world hate us by doing that." "Why should we care?" Zolraag asked.

The trouble was, he sounded curious, not vindictive. Sighing, Anielewicz; replied, "Because that would give you your best chance of ruling here quietly. If you make other people hate us, you'll also make us hate you."

"We gave you privileges early on, because you did help us against the Germans," Zolraag said. "By our way of thinking, you abused them. Issuing threats will not make us want to give you more. You may go, Herr Anielewicz."

"As you say, superior sit," Anielewicz answered woodenly. Trouble coming, he thought as he left the Lizard governor's office. He'd managed to get Zolraag to hold off on trying to dis-

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He sighed. He'd found a hiding place for Russie. Now he was liable to need one himself.

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"I wish we were in Denver," Barbara said. "Well, so do I," Sam Yeager answered as he helped her out of the wagon. "Me weather can't be helped, though." Lateseason snowstorms had held them up as they made their way into Colorado. "Fort Collins is a pretty enough little place."

Lincoln Park, in which several Met Lab wagons were drawn up, was a study in contrasts. In the center of the square stood a log cabin, the first building that had gone up on the Poudre River. The big gray sandstone mass of the Carnegie Public Library showed how far the area had come in just over eighty years.

But Barbara said, "Mat's not what I mean." She took his arm and steered him away from the wagon. He looked back toward Ulhass and Ristin, decided the Lizard POWs weren't going anywhere, and let her guide him.

She led him over to a tree stump out of earshot of anybody else. "What's up?" he asked, checking the Lizards again. They hadn't poked their heads out of the wagon; they were staying down in the straw where it was warmer. He was as sure as sure could be that they wouldn't pick this moment to make a break, but ingrained duty made him keep an eye on them anyhow.

Then Barbara asked him something that sounded as if it came out of the blue: "Remember our wedding night?"

'Huh? I'm not likely to forget it." As Sam remembered, a broad smile spread over his face.

Barbara didn't smile back. "Remember what we didn't do on our wedding night?" she persisted.

"There wasn't a whole lot we didn't do on our wedding night. We--2' Yeager stopped when he took a close look at 184

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Barbara's half-worried, half-smiling expression. A light we on inside his head. Slowly, he said, "We didn't use a rubber. "That's right," she said. "I thought it would be safe enoug] and even if it wasn't--2' Her smile grew broader, but still a twist in it. "My time of the month should have started week ago. It didn't, and I've always been very steady. So think I'm expecting a baby, Sam."

Had it been a normal marriage in a normal time, he have shouted, That's wonderjul! The time was anything b normal, the marriage very new. Yeager knew Barbara hadn wanted to get pregnant. He set down his rifle, took her in hi arms. They clung to each other for a couple of minutes. "It' work out," he said at last. "One way or another, we'll take c of it, and it'll be okay."

"I'm scared," she said. "Not many doctors, or equipmen and us in the middle of the war--2'

"Denver's supposed to be better off than most places," said. "It'll be all right, honey." Please, God, make it all righ he thought, something that would have been closer to a file:///C//2590%20Sci-Fi%20and%20Fantasy%20E-books/Harry%20Turtledove%20-%20Worldwar%2002%20-%20Tilting%20the%20Balance.txt

prayer if God had given any signs lately of listening. After ai other few seconds, he went on, "I hope it9s a girl." "You do? Why?" "Because she'd probably look just like you." Her eyes widened. She stood up on tiptoe to give him quick kiss. "You're sweet, Sam. It wasn't what I expecte but--2' She kicked at the dirty snow and at the mud th showed through it. "What can you doT' For a career minor leaguer, What can you do? was an articl of faith that ranked right alongside the commandments Mose had brought down from the mountain. Actually, Yeager there was something you could do if you wanted to. But fi ing an abortionist wouldn't be easy, and the procedure was I able to be more dangerous than having the baby- If Barb brought it up, h ' e'd think about it then. Otherwise, he'd his mouth shut. She said, "We'll just do the best we can, that's all. Right? "Sure, honey," Sam said. "Like I said, we'll manage. idea kind of grows on me, you know what I meanT' "Yes, I do." Barbara nodded. "I didn't want this to happei but now that it has ... I'm scared, as I said, but I'm excite(

but now that it has ... I'm scared, as I said, but I'm excite(too. Something of ours, to go on after we're gone-that' something special, and somed-iing wonderful."

"Yeah." Yeager saw himself tying a little girl's shoes, or maybe playing catch with a boy and teaching him to hit well enough to get all the way to the top in pro ball. What the father might have done, the son would. He would, anyhow, if the Lizards were beaten and there ever was pro ball again. Sam should have been in spring training, getting ready for yet another season on the road, hoping to move up as better players got drafted, still with a ghostly chance at a big-league slot and glory. As it was ...

Someone shouted, "Back to the wagons, everybody. They're going to billet us at the college on the south edge of town." Yeager hadn't thought Fort Collins big enough to boast a college. "You never can tell," he muttered, which would have been a good handle for the whole past year. Hand in hand, he and Barbara walked back toward Ullhass and Ristin. "Careful

getting up there," he warned as she scrambled in.

She made a face at him. "For God's sake, Sam, I'm not made out of cut glass. If you start treating me as if I were going to fall to pieces any minute now, we'll have trouble."

"Sorry," he said. "I've never had to worry about anybody expecting before."

The wagon driver's head whipped around. "You gonna have a baby? That's great. Congratulations!"

"Fhanks," she said. As the wagon rattled forward, she shook her head wryly. Yeager knew she wasn't as delighted as she might have been. He wasn't, either. He couldn't imagine a worse time to try to raise a kid. But all they could do now was give it their best shot.

Sure enough, the Colorado State College of Agriculture and the Mechanic Arts sat on the southern border of Fort Collins. Its red and gray brick buildings clustered along an oval drive that ran through the heart of the campus. The cafeteria wasn't far from the south end of the drive. Women in surprisingly clean white dished out fried chicken and biscuits. That was good, but the burnt-grain brew they called coffee tried to bite off Yeager's tongue.

"Where do we sleep tonightT' he asked as he walked out of the cafeteria.

"Girls' dormitory," a soldier answered, pointing northward. Grinning, he went on, "Jeez, I dreamed for years of getting into one o' those, but it just ain't the same this way." The only rooms in the dorin with doors that locked from the

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outside were the rest rooms. Fortunately, it had three, so S didn't feel guilty about commandeering one for the Lizard pris oners to use during the night. He and Barbara had a two-coe room for themselves. Looking at the steel-framed cots, he sai "I think I'd sooner have been quartered with some nic friendly people back in town." "It'll be all right for one night," she said. "It's easier thern to keep track of us if we're together here instead of sc tered around Fort Collins."

"I suppose so," he said, unenthusiastic still. But then, as h set his rifle down, he exclaimed, "I'm going to be a father How about that?"

"How about that?" Barbara echoed.

Only one candle lit the room. Her face was hard to re Electricity had taken the mystery out of night, turned it brigh and certain as day. Now mystery was back, with a vengeanc Yeager studied the shifting shadows. "We'll do the best w can, that's all," he said, as he had when she first gave him th news.

"I know," she answered. '"*Vhat else can we do? And," added, "if anyone can take care of me and help me take

of a baby, I know it's you, Sam. I do love you. You kno that." "Yeah. I love you, too, hon." She sat down on one of the cots, smiled over at him. "Ho shall we celebrate the newsT' "No booze around. No firecrackers ... I guess we'll ju have to make our own fireworks. How does that sound?" "It sounds good to me." Barbara took off her shoes, the stood up for a moment so she could slide out of her slacks panties. When she sat down again, she made a face an bounced back to her feet. "That wool blanket scratches. Wai a second; let me turn down the sheet." Some happy time later, Sam asked, "Do you want me to p on a rubber, in case you're wrongT' "Don't bother," she said. "I'm regular as clockwork; eve getting sick doesn't throw me off. And I haven't been sick The only d-iing that could make me this late is a bun in oven. And since there's one in there, we don't need to w about keeping the oven door closed." "Okay." Sam poised himself over her. She tilted her hips to ease his way, locked her legs and arms around him.

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wards, he rubbed at his back; she'd clawed him pretty hard.
"Maybe you should get knocked up more often," he said.
Barbara snorted and poked him in the ribs, which almost
made him fall off the narrow cot. Then she leaned over and
kissed him on the tip of his nose. "I love you. You're crazy."

"I'm happy, is what I am." He squeezed her against him, tight enough to make her squeak. She was all the woman he'd ever wanted and then some: pretty, bright, sensible, and, as he'd just delightedly found out again, a handful and a half in bed. And now she was going to have his baby. He stroked her -hair. "I don't know how I could be any happier."

"That's a sweet thing to say. I'm happy with you, too." She took his hand, set it on her belly. "That's ours in there. I wasn't expecting it, I wasn't quite ready for it, but"-she shrugged-----'it's here. I know you'll make a good father."

"A father. I don't feel like a father right now." He let his hand slide lower, through her little nest of hair to the softness it concealed. His fingertip traced small, slow circles.

"What do you feel like?" she whispered. The candle burned out about then. They didn't need it.

The next morning, Yeager woke still a little wom. Feels like I played a doubleheader yesterday. He grinned. I did. The cot squeaked when he sat up. The noise woke Barbara. Her cot squeaked, too. He wondered how much racket they'd

made the night before. At the time, he hadn't noticed. Barbara rubbed her eyes, yawned, stretched, looked over at him and started to laugh. "What's so funny?" he asked. He didn't sound as grumpy as he would have a few months before; he'd finally got used-or resigned-to facing the day without coffee.

She said, "You have a large male leer pasted all over your face. That's what's funny."

"Oh." Now that he thought about it, that was funny. "Okay." He put his corporal's uniform back on. The last time it had been washed was in Cheyenne. He'd got used-or resignedto dirty clothes, too. Just about everybody's clothes were dirty these days; it wasn't as if Corporal Sam Yeager stood out as a special slob. He slung his rifle over his shoulder and said, "I'm going downstairs to turn Ristin and Ullhass loose. They'll be glad to see the light of day, I expect.,,

"Probably. It seems mean to keep them locked up all night long." Barbara laughed again, this time at herself. "I've been

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with them so long now that I think of them as people, not Lizards."

"I know what you mean. I do the same thing myself. Yeager considered, then said, "Come on, you get dressed, to(Then we can go over to the cafeteria with them and we'll hav breakfast."

Breakfast was bacon and eggs. The bacon came in gre

thick slices and was obviously home-cured; it took Yeag back to the smokehouse on the Nebraska farm where he' grown up. The stuff that came in packages of cardboard an waxed paper just didn't have the same flavor. The Lizard POWs wouldn't touch eggs, maybe because the were hatched themselves. But they loved bacon. Ristin ran h long, lizardy tongue around the edges of his mouth to get ri of grease. "That is so good," he said, adding the emphati cough. "It reminds me of aasson back on Home."

the salt shaker, poured some onto the bacon, took another bi "Ah-better." Ristin held out his hand for the salt shaker. H too, hissed with pleasure after he'd sprinkled the bacon. Sam and Barbara exchanged glances: the bacon had s enough for any human palate. In the manner of an Astoundi reader, Yeager tried to figure out why the Lizards wanted with even more. They'd said Home was hotter than Earth, its seas smaller. Maybe that meant they were saltier, too, d way Salt Lake was. When he got to Denver, he'd have to a somebody about that.

Back to the wagons. Ullhass and Ristin scrambled abo theirs, then all but disappeared under the straw and blank they used to fight the cold. Yeager was about to help Barb up-no matter what she said, he wanted to make sure she extra care of herself-when a fellow on horseback came ting up the oval drive toward them. He was dressed in oli drab and wore a helmet instead of a cavalryman's hat, but put Yeager in mind of the Old West just the same.

Most of the Met Lab wagons were untenanted. Some did even have their teams hitched to them yet: a lot of people w still eating breakfast. The rider reined in when he saw Yeag and Barbara. He called to her, "Ma'am, you wouldn't by aj chance know where to find Barbara Larssen, would you?" "I arn-I was-I am Barbara Larssen," she said. "What

you want?"

"Right the first time," the cavalryman exclaimed happily. "Talk about your luck." He swung down from his horse, walked over to Barbara. Maybe it's his boots that make him look that way, Yeager thought. They were tall and black and shiny and looked as if they'd hurt like hell if he had to walk more than a few feet in them. He reached inside his coat, pulled out an envelope, handed it to Barbara and said, "This here is for you, ma'am." Then he stamped back to his horse, remounted, and rode off, trappings jingling, without a backward glance.

Yeager watched him go before he turned back to Barbara. "What do you suppose that's all about?" he said.

She didn't answer right away. She was staring down at the envelope. Sam took a look at it, too. It didn't have a stamp or a return address, just Barbara's name scrawled hastily across it. Her face was dead pale when she lifted it to him. "That's Jens' handwriting," she whispered.

For a couple of seconds, it didn't mean anything to Yeager. Then it did. "Oh, Jesus," he muttered. He felt as if a Lizard shell had just landed next to where he was standing. Through stunned numbness, he heard himself say, "You'd better open it.,,

Barbara nodded jerkily. She almost tore the letter along with the envelope. Her hands shook as she unfolded the sheet of paper. The note inside was in the same handwriting as her name had been. Yeager read over her shoulder:

Dear Barbara, I had to twist arms to get them to let me write this and send it to you, but I finally managed to do it. As you'll gather I'm already in the town you're going toward. I had some interesting (!!) times getting back to the town ftom which we both left, but came through them all right. I hope you're OK, too. I'm so glad you'll be here soon-I miss you more than I can say. With all the love there is, Jens. There was a row of X's under the signature.

Barbara looked at the letter, then at Yeager, then at the letter again. She held it in her right hand. Her left hand, which didn't seem to know what her right was doing, pressed at her belly through the ratty wool sweater she was wearing.

"Oh my God," she said, maybe to herself, maybe to Yeager, and maybe to God, "what am I supposed to do now?" "What are we supposed to do now?" Yeager echoed.

She stared at him, as if consciously reminded of his pres-

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ence for the first time. Then she noticed her hand, fingei spread fan-fashion, stretched over her belly. She jerked it aw He flinched as if she'd hit him. Her face twisted when sh saw that. "Oh, Sam, I'm sorry," she exclaimed. "I didn mean--2' She started to cry. "I don't know what I meant. E, erything's just turned upside down."

"Yeah," he said laconically. He startled himself by laughin Barbara glared through tears. "What could possibly be funn about this, this--2' She gave up in the middle of the sentenc Yeager didn't blame her. No words were strong enough to the mess they'd just landed in. He said, "Last night I found out I was going to be a and now I don't even know if I'm a husband any more. If isn't funny, what is?" He wondered if it would be too risqu6 for Hollywood touch. Probably. Too bad. He could all but see Kathari Hepburn and Cary Grant and somebody else-Robert Yo maybe-to play the guy who didn't get her, all of them goi through their antics bigger than life up on the screen. It wou be a great way to kill a couple of hours, and you'd come o of the theater holding your sides.

But it wasn't the same when it really happened to you, n when you were wondering whether you had the Cary

part or the Robert Young one you knew the answer. Barbara's small smile was the sun coming out from behi rain clouds. "That is funny. Like something out of a sil movie-2' "I just thought the very same thing," he said eagerly. sign that they were on the same wavelength felt doubly we come. The clouds covered the sun again. Barbara said, "Som body's going to get hurt, Sam; I'm going to have to hu somebody I love. That's the last thing in the world I want, b I don't see how I can help it." "I don't, either," Yeager said. He did his best not to sho his worry, his fear. It wouldn't help, any more than it wou have at the tryout for his first pro team half a lifetime ag Would he make it or wouldn't he? Show them or not, the worry and fear were there. Ho

could Barbara pick him? She'd been married to Jens for ye and years, while she'd only known him a matter of mon

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and they hadn't even been lovers for most of that time. And besides, with a choice between a nuclear physicist and a rminor league outfielder with an ankle that told him when it was gonna rain, whom would she take?

But she was carrying his kid. That had to count for something. Didn't it? Lord, if this was any kind of normal time, lawyers would be coming out of the woodwork like cockroaches. Maybe cops, too. Bigamy, adultery ... Maybe the chaos the Lizard invasion had brought wasn't such a bad thing after all.

He sucked in a deep breath. "Honey?"

"What is it?" Barbara asked warily. She'd been reading the letter again. He couldn't blame her for that, either, but just the same he wished she hadn't been.

He took her hands in his. She let him do it, but she didn't grab hold of him back the way she usually did. The edge of the sheet of paper scraped against the side of his palm. He made himself ignore it, concentrated on what he had to do as if he were trying to pick up the spin of a curveball right out of the pitcher's hand.

"Honey," he said again, and then paused to feel for the perfect words even though Barbara knew a thousand times more about words than he'd learn if he lived to be a hundred. He went on, one tough phrase at a time, "Honey, the most important thing in the whole world for me-is for you to be happy. So you-go ahead and do--whatever it is you've got to doand that'll be all right with me. Because I love you and-like I said-I want you to be happy."

She started crying again, hard this time, and buried her head in the hollow of his shoulder. "What am I supposed to do, SamT' she said between sobs, her voice so small and broken he could hardly understand her. "I love you, too, and Jens. And the baby---2'

He kept his arms around her. He wasn't more than an inch from breaking down and blubbering himself, either. Enrico Fermi picked that precise moment to walk up, hand in hand with his wife Laura. "Is something wrong?" he asked, concern in his accented voice.

"You might say so, sir," Yeager answered. Then he remembered the physicist needed to know Jens Larssen was alive, too. He patted Barbara on the back and said, "Honey, you'd better show Dr. Fermi the letter."

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She handed it to Fermi. The physicist put on reading glasse,, peered owlishly through them at the sheet of paper. "But this i wonderful news!" he exclaimed, his face lighting up in a smil(He spoke rapidly in Italian to his wife. She answered more hu itantly. Ferrni's smile went out. "Oh," he said. "It is, ah, cory plicated." He nodded to himself, pleased at finding the rigI word. "Si, complicated-" "It sure is," Yeager said bleakly. "It's more than just complicated," Barbara added. "I'm g(ing to have a baby." "Oh," Fermi said again, this time echoed by Laura. He trie again: "Oh, my." He was completely at home in abstrug realms of thought which Sam Yeager knew he could never ei ter. But when it came to merely human ways of messing u your life, the Nobel laureate was just as lost as anybody elsi Somehow that heartened Sam. "We like to say congratulations." Laura Fermi's accent w, thicker than her husband's. She spread her hands helplessl "But-" "Yeah," Yeager said. "But--2' Fermi handed the letter back to Barbara. He said, "You aj good people. One way or another, I am sure you will work th out in the fashion that is best for all of you." He touched hand to the brim of his hat and walked on with his wife. At first, Yeager was touched at the physicist's compl ment. Then he realized Fermi had just said, It's not my pro~ lem, Jack. He started to get angry. But what was the point i that? The man was right. One way or another, he and Barba and Jens would work it out.

The only trouble was, he had no idea what that way might b They made about thirteen miles that day, almost all of the in silence. Barbara seemed lost in her own thoughts, and Sa didn't want to break in. He had plenty on his mind, too; mayl she also avoided intruding on him. Ullhass and Ristin, obliN ous to what Was going on around them chattered with ew other, but whenever they ventured into English, the answe they got were so monosyllabic, they soon gave up.

The St. Louis Hotel on St. Louis Avenue in Loveland h; seen better days. The food wasn't up to college cafeteria stan ards, and the room Sam and Barbara got wasn't much bigg than the one at the college dorm. It wasn't very clean, eith(It had a double bed. At first Sam was glad to see that; slee

ing with Barbara warm and soft beside him was one of the joys of his life. Doing other things on a roomy mattress was wonderful, too. Or it had been, anyhow.

Barbara looked at the bed, at him, back again. He could see the same set of thoughts going through her mind as were in his. He didn't say anything. It wasn't really up to him.

Barbara quickly scanned the rest of the room. Other than the bed, it held only a night table, a couple of rickety chairs, and a chamber pot-the plumbing didn't work, then. She shook her head. "I'm not going to put you on the floor, Sam," she said. "Ibat wouldn't be right."

"Thank you, hon." He'd slept hard while he was out in the field against the Lizards. He knew he could do it ... but doing it with his wife in the room would have been unbearably lonely.

"This is even more complicated than I thought it was going to be," Barbara said. She managed a shaky laugh. "They said it couldn't be done."

"Yeah--tell me about it." Sam sat down on one of the chairs, pulled off his shoes and let them fall to the threadbare carpet with two loud clunks.

Barbara peeled back the bedspread. The blankets underneath were the best thing about the room; there were lots of them and they were nice and thick. She clucked approvingly, opened her suitcase and took out a long cotton flannel nightgown. "We won't have to sleep in all our clothes tonight," she said. She reached up to her neck to pull off her sweater, then froze, her eyes on Sam.

"Do you want me to turn my backT' he asked, though every word hurt.

He watched her think about it. That hurt, too. But finally she shook her head. "No, never mind, don't be silly," she said. "I mean, we're married, after all-kind of married, anyway."

Kind of marned, indeed, Yeager thought, and had another vision of swarming lawyers. He got out of his shirt and chinos while she was taking off the sweater and slacks. The flannel nightgown rustled as it slid down over her smooth skin. He liked to sleep with as few clothes as the weather would allow. Tonight, with all those heavy blankets, that meant socks and boxer shorts and undershirt. He dove under the covers in a hurry; the room itself was cold.

Barbara slipped in beside him. She blew out the candle on

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the night table. Darkness enfolded them; with the blinds clo and the curtains drawn, it was almost absolute. "Good nig honey," he said, and without thinking, leaned over for a ki He got it, but her lips didn't welcome his the way they had b fore.

He got back to his own side of the bed in a hurry. They I together on the same mattress, but a Maginot Line might h sprung up between them. He sighed and wondered if he'd ev go to sleep. He tossed and turned and turned and tossed

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felt Barbara doing the same, but they were both careful not bump into each other. After some time that seemed forever probably was before midnight, he drifted off.

He woke in the wee small hours, needing to use the ch ber pot. Regardless of how he and Barbara had kept apart each other awake, they'd come together in sleep, maybe warmth, maybe for no real reason at all. Her nightgown h ridden up a lot; her bare thigh sprawled across his legs. He cherished the feeling, wondering if he'd ever know again, wondering if he was just sticking pins in himself staying with her now when he didn't think she'd end up pi ing him. But what the hell? He'd played umpteen seasons ball, stubbornly hoping he'd catch a break. Why be di here? And he did have to use the pot. He slid away as gently he could, hoping not to wake her. But he did; the mat shifted as her head came off the pillow. "Sorry, hon," he w pered. "I need to get up for a second."

"It's okay," she whispered back. "I have to do the s thing. Go ahead and go first." She rolled over to her own si but not, this time, as if she thought she'd get leprosy touching him. He groped around by the bed, found the ch ber pot, did what he had to do, and handed the pot to

The flannel nightgown rustled again as she hiked it up. S used the pot, too, then slid it out of the way and got back i bed. Yeager did, too. "Good night again," he said.

"Good night, Sam." To his surprise and delight, Barbara s across to his side of the bed and gave him a hug. His arms s around her, squeezed her to him. She was good to hang on in the middle of the night. Too soon, though, she slipped aw and he knew that if he tried to hold her there, he was liable lose her forever.

He tossed and turned for another long while before he w

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back to sleep. He wondered what that hug meant for his future, trying to read it the same way he'd tried to gauge managers' oracular pronouncements in years gone by to see whether he was liable to get promoted or shipped down.

As with a lot of those pronouncements, he couldn't figure out exactly what the hug foretold. He just knew he was gladder with it than he would have been without it. He also knew this mess wouldn't unravel quickly, no matter what. More than the other, that thought calmed him and helped him fall asleep at last.

Heinrich Jager set a hand on the stowage compartment that rode atop the track assembly of his Panther. The steel was warm against his palm-spring came to France more quickly than to Germany, and far more quickly than to the Soviet Union, where he'd waited out last winter.

The panzer crews stood by their machines, waiting for him to speak. Sunlight dappled down through trees in new leaf. With their black coveralls, the tankers looked like splotches of shadow. Their panzers were painted in what the camouflage experts called ambush pattem-red-brown and green splotches over ocher, and then smaller ocher patches over the red-brown and green. It was the best scheme the Wehrmacht had come up with for making its vehicles invisible from the air. Whether it was good enough-they were about to find out.

"Fuel pump aside," Jager said, giving his Panther an affectionate thwack, "this is the best human-made panzer in the world." The crewmen of the Tigers attached to his unit glared at him, as he'd known they would. They liked their massive beasts' 88mm gun better than the Panther's 75, even if the Panther was more maneuverable and had its armor properly sloped.

"But," Jager went on, and let the word hang in the air, "if you try to fight the Lizards straight up with your machines, the only thing you'll do is get yourselves killed. The Fatherland can't afford that. Remember it. Think of yourselves as going up against T-34s in a Panzer II."

That got their attention in the way he wanted. Next to one of the tough Soviet machines, a Panzer 11, with its 20mm cannon and cardboard-thin protection, was a crew's worth of "sad duty to inform you" letters waiting to happen. And yet, despite

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technical shortcomings, the Wehrmacht had advanced deep into Russia.

"We'll try to hit them from ambush, then," Jager said. "We'll lure them, put some of our parizers where we can get a shot at them from flank or rear. You all know how to do that; you've most of you done it on the Eastern Front." He was glad he had picked crews here. Sending new fish against the Lizards would have been an invitation to slaughter. Casualties would be bad enough as things were.

"Their equipment will be better than ours," he emphasized. "Their tactics and doctrine won't. From what I saw in the Ukraine last year, they're even more stereotyped than the Bolsheviks, but their equipment is so good, they'll hurt you if you make any mistakes at all. In fact, they'll hurt you even if you don't make any mistakes. As tankers they're nothing much, but if I had a chance to capture one of their parizers, I'd give up a lot to do it. Questions?"

"Will we have any air support?" one of the Tiger crewmen asked.

"I wouldn't hold my breath," Jager answered dryly. "Any-

thing we put up, they knock down." He thought about Ludmila Gorbunova in her little flying sewing machine. He hadn't had any reply to the latest letter he'd posted. With the state of the mails these days, that meant nothing, but he worried all the same. Going into the air against the Lizards was more nearly suicidal than fighting them in panzers.

The same tanker asked, "We'll see their helicopters, though, won't we?"

"If you already know the answer, why ask the question?" Jager said. "Yes, we probably will. If you hear one and it hasn't spied you, get under tree cover as fast as you can. If a panzer in your squad blows up and you don't think you're in contact with the enemy, you'd better do the same. Anything else? No? Let's go, then. Heil Hitler!"

"Heil Hitler!" the panzer crews chorused. They piled into their machines. Jager tried to gauge their attitude. They weren't confident of victory any more, the way they had been before the blows against the Poles or the French or the Russians. They all knew what the Lizards could do.

But no one hung back or hesitated. Better to hold the Lizards as far from the Fatherland as possible: they all knew that.

Without much hope and without fear, they'd try to accomplish it.

Jdger climbed up onto the turret of his Panther, slid down inside through the open cupola. Beneath and behind him, the big Maybach engine thundered into life. He wished it were a diesel like the ones the Russians used; a petrol power plant didn't just bum when it got hit-it exploded.

"Down the road southwest," he told the driver over the intercom. "We're looking for good defensive positions, remember. We want to be in ambush before we run into the Lizards nosing north from Besangon."

As seemed their habit since the blitzkrieg that followed their arrival on Earth, the Lizards were moving on Belfort slowly and methodically-with luck, even more slowly than they'd planned, because they had a way of overreacting to harassment fire from German infantry and French guerrillas. With more luck, JaNger's panzer regiment-panzer combat group was a better name for it, given the mixed and mixed-up nature of his command-would slow them further. With a whole lot more luck, he might even stop them.

The Panther had a much smoother ride than the Panzer III in which he'd advanced into Russia. The interleaved road wheels had a lot to do with that. Not feeling as if his kidneys were shaking loose was a pleasant novelty. Now if the damned fuel pump wouldn't keep breaking down ...

In spite of the engine's rumble and the rattle and squeak and grind of the treads, riding with his head and shoulders out of the cupola was pleasant on a bright spring day. New grass sprouted in meadows and in cracks in the macadam of the road. In a normal year, traffic would have smashed that latter hopeful growth flat, but the column of German panzers might have been the first motorized traffic the road had known in months. Here and there in the grass, wildflowers made bright splashes of red and yellow and blue. The air itself smelled green and growing.

To Jdger's right, Klaus Meinecke sneezed sharply, once, twice, three times. The gunner pulled a handkerchief from the

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breast pocket of his tunic, and let out a long, mournful honk. "I hate springtime," he mumbled. His eyes were puffy and tracked with red. "Miserable hay fever kills me every year." Nothing makes everybody happy, Jdger thought. They ran

through Montb6hard, where the big Peugeot works stood idle

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for want of fuel and raw materials, then followed the road that

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paralleled the Doubs River southwest toward Besangon-and toward the Lizards surely on the way up toward Belfort. Eiger's head swiveled up and down, back and forth, watching every moment for the airplane or helicopter that could turn his panzer into a funeral pyre. Meinecke chuckled. "You've got the deutsche Blick all right, Colonel," he said. "The German glance?" Jdger echoed, puzzled. "What's that?"

"They recruited me for Panthers out of the Aftika Korps not the Russian war," the gunner explained. "It was a joke we made there, a takeoff on the deutsche Gruss, the German sa lute. We were always on the lookout for aircraft, first British then from the Lizards. Spot one and it was time to find a hole in the ground." Before the Lizards came, Jdger had envied the tankers who fought in North Africa. The war against the British there wa clean, gentlemanly-war as it should be, he thought. Both sides in Russia had fought as viciously as they could. Jdgei thought of the massacres of Jews at Babi Yar and other places A miracle the Polish Jews hadn't killed him on his way back to Germany.

He didn't care to brood on that too long; it made him won der about what his country had been doing in the lands it had conquered. Instead he said, "So what was it like in the desert after the Lizards came?"

"Bad," Meinecke answered. "We'd been beating the British they were brave, but their panzers didn't match up to ours, and their tactics were pretty bad. If we'd had proper supplies, we'd have mopped them up, but everything kept going to the Eastern Front."

"We never had enough, either," Jdger put in.

"Maybe not, Colonel, but a lot even of what was supposed to go to us endedup on the bottom of the Mediterranean. But you asked about the Lizards. They mopped up the Tommies and us both. They liked the desert, and we couldn't hide from their planes there. Talk about the deutsche Blick-Gott in Himmel! The Tommies had it, too."

"Misery loves company," Jdger said. Then, still looking around, he suddenly called "Halt!" to the Panther's driver. The big battle tank slowed, stopped. Jdger stood tall in the cupola, waving the column to a halt behind him. He studied

the little ridge that rose off to one side of the road. It was covered with old brush and saplings, and its crest could have been more than four hundred meters from the roadway. He'd have to scout out what lay behind, check his line of retreat-the one thing you couldn't do was stand toe-to-toe with the Lizards, or before long you wouldn't have any toes left.

He ordered the Panther up the rise to the crest. The longer he looked at the setup, the better he liked it. He didn't think he'd come across a better defensive position, anyhow.

At his command, most of the German panzers deployed hull down on the reverse slope of the ridge line. He sent three or four Panzer IVs and a Tiger forward to meet the Lizards ahead of his main position and, with luck, bring them back all unsuspecting into the ambush he'd set up.

That left nothing to do but wait and stay alert. In back of the ridge lay a pond fed by a small stream. A fish leaped out of the water after a fly, fell back with a splash. Somewhere in his gear, Jdger had a couple of hooks and a length of light line. Pan-fried trout or pike sounded a lot better to him than the miserable rations he'd been eating.

A Frenchman in civilian clothes came out of the bushes on the far side of the pond. Riger wasn't surprised to see he had a rifle on his back. He waved to the Frenchman, who returned the gesture before stepping back into the undergrowth. Before the Lizards came, the French underground had nipped at the Germans who occupied their country. Now they worked together against the new invaders: in French eyes, the Germans were the lesser of two evils.

That's something, anyhow, Jdger thought. In Poland, the Lizards had seemed the lesser of two evils to the Jews. From what he'd learned, he couldn't blame them for feeling that way.

A couple of times, he'd tried talking with officers he trusted about what Germany had done in the east. It hadn't worked: he'd been met by a refusal to listen that almost amounted to saying, I don't want to know. He hadn't brought up the subject now for some time.

Away in the distance, he heard the harsh, abrupt bark of a panzer cannon. At the same time, a shout sounded in his earphones: "Engaging lead element of enemy panzer column! Will attempt to carry out plan as outlined. Will---2' The transmission cut off abruptly; Riger feared he knew why. More booms: from the Panzer IV's 75min guns; heavier,

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deeper ones from the Tiger's 88; and, sharp as thunderclaps, from the Lizards' cannon. Then another sort of roar, lower and more diffuse, with smaller blasts and cheery pop-pops all mixed in with it. That was the sound of a panzer brewing up.

"Armor-piercing," Jdger said quietly. The loader slammed a black-nosed shell into the breech of the cannon. Out of sight down the road, another panzer exploded. Riger bit his lip; those were men, conwades-in-arms, dying nastily. And, the officer part of him whispered, if all my panzers get killed before any make it back here, what good is my ambush? He was inured to sacrificing men; throwing them away was something else again.

He stood up in the cupola, made a hand sign: be ready. Panzer commanders passed it down the line. He didn't want to use radio, not now. The Lizards were too good at picking up their foes' signals. As if from very far away, he felt his heart thudding in his chest, his bowels loosening. That was what fear did to your body. It didn't have to rule you if you didn't let it.

Up the road, motor going flat out, men inside probably shaken to blood pudding, raced a Panzer IV. It sounded like an explosion in a smithy, roaring and clattering and clanking as if

it were about to fall to pieces.

Behind it, almost silent by comparison, glided a Lizard panzer, then another and another and another. JAger knew they were toying with the Panzer IV. They had a way of stabilizing their guns so they shot accurately even on the move, but they were enjoying the chase for a while before they ended it.

Le6 see how they enjoy this, he thought, and yelled, "Fire!" Because his head was outside the cupola, the bellow of the cannon half stunned him. Flame and smoke spurted from the gun's muzzle. "Hit!" he cried in delight. It was a solid hit, too, right at the join between the turret and body of the Lizard panzer. The turret tilted, almost torn out of its ring; JAger wouldn't have wanted to be inside when that 6.8-kilo round came knocking.

But the Lizards made their panzers tough. That shell would have tom the turret right off a British tank or a Soviet T-34, and turned either of them into an inferno on the instant. Not only did this one not catch fire, its driver threw it into reverse and did his best to escape the trap in which he found himself. "Hit him again!" Riger shouted. His gunner required no urging-the second shot punctuated Jdger's sentence.

All the rest of the hull-down German panzers along the ridge line opened up, too. The Lizards offered them a target tankers dream about: the less heavily armored flanks and engine compartments of their vehicles. One of those vehicles brewed up in a flash of orange and blue flame-somebody's round had penetrated to something vital. Jager wondered if that had been a Panther's kill or a Tiger's: the heavier panzer's 88 fired a correspondingly more massive shell, but the Panther's gun had a higher muzzle velocity and would pierce just as much armor, maybe more.

The Lizards did not react well to being taken in flank. Jager had counted on that: they were even more vulnerable to the unexpected than Soviet troops. For a crucial few seconds, they either tried to back out of trouble like the panzer Jager had hit or traversed their turrets toward the concealed German armor without shifting the tanks themselves. That let the Gennans keep pounding away at their more vulnerable sides and rears. Another Lizard panzer turned into a fireball, then another.

But the Lizards did not stay stupid forever. One by one, they turned toward the Germans' fire. No German panzer gun could beat their front glacis plates. Jager's gunner tried. I-Es shell buried itself almost to the drive bands, but did no damage anyone could find.

Then the aliens started shooting back. They had only small targets at which to aim, but they didn't need anything big: their fire-control arrangements were even better than the ones the new Panthers boasted. And while a Panther shell couldn't quite shift one of their turrets, the Lizards' projectiles smashed German panzer turrets as if they were anvils dropping on cockroaches.

Two tanks down from Jager, a Panzer IV was abruptly beheaded. Shells cooking off inside, its turret smashed down the rear slope of the ridge and skidded into the pond. The hull exploded in flames, too, and started a fire in the brush.

Then a Tiger got hit. Its turret flew off, too, which rocked Jager; he'd hoped the 100min of armor there might be proof against anything the Lizards could throw at it. No such luck, though. Now he got on the radio. "Fall back!" he ordered. Keep things moving, keep them confused: that was how you got whatever chance you had against the Lizards. In a set-piece battle, you were dead.

As if he were back on the other side of the rise, Jager saw

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what the Lizard panzer commander would be thinking: if the came straight up the slope and charged after the retreating G mans, they'd keep presenting their invulnerable frontal arm to his comrades and him. Then they could destroy the pan7A force at their convenience and press on up the road tow Belfort.

He got on the command frequency again: "Peel off to

side as you retreat. We'll want to get some decent shots at the flanks when they come after us."

His Panther backed through the little stream that fed pond; water sprayed up on either side. Sure enough, just he'd guessed, a couple of Lizard panzers breasted the rise an advanced on the Germans. They were too confident of own invincibility; had he been an instructor on a trainin ground, he would have lowered their mark. The proper tactic solution was to stay hull down on the reverse slope and pou the Germans while exposing as little of themselves as possibl

He remembered his first big fight with the Lizard panzers, the Ukraine. They'd made the same mistake then, and he killed one of their tanks with a Panzer M-he was one of bare handful of German tankers who could say that. This time, though, he didn't get a chance to put a shell i the enemy's belly, where his armor was thinnest. One of Lizards fired. A Panzer IV went up in gouts of flame. But d Germans were hitting back, too, and their high-velocity piercing shells could hurt the Lizards when they hit the rig spot. One of the Lizard panzers slewed to a halt, road wh wrecked by a shell. That made the machine only margin less dangerous; its main armament still worked, and its swung toward a Panther. It took the German panzer out wi one shell straight through the sloped front plate that was su posed to deflect enemy fire.

More rounds slammed into the disabled Lizard panz Hatches popped open in the turret and at the driver's positi in the front of the hull. Lizards jumped out. Machine chattered. The Lizards went down. Jager felt some sy for them---they'd fought bravely, if not with a lot of brair That didn't keep him from yelling like a wild-west Indi when they fell.

A moment after the last Lizard bailed out and was down, the disabled panzer brewed up. A smoke ring, perfect any an old man with a cigar in his mouth might make

twenty times as big, blew out of the commander's open cupola. Then all the ammunition stowed in there must have cooked off at once, for the panzer went up in a fireball that sent blazing debris flying for a hundred meters.

A Lizard helicopter fluttered over the ridge just then, rockets stabbing out from it like knives of fire. Machine gunners opened up on it, but it was armed against their fire. But a Panzer IV, traversing its cannon toward the second Lizard tank, happened to line up on the flying machine. Jager never knew whether the commander gave the order or the gunner acted on his own initiative. Either way, the 75min shell tore through the helicopter's belly and swatted it out of the air in flames. Jager screamed with delight.

The commander of the other Lizard panzer that had come over the ridge should have pulled back then. The panzer's turret swung back and forth, as if the Lizards inside couldn't make up their minds on a target. The Germans had no such hesitation-and Panthers and Tigers, though far from a match for the Lizard machine, could hurt it when they got a chance like this one. Even the new Panzer IVs, though hideously vulnerable to return fire, had in their long 75s main armament little inferior to what the Panthers carried.

When the Lizard did decide to go back, it was too late. Smoke and almost transparent blue flames boiled from the enemy panzer's engine compartment. That crew bailed out, too. Jager didn't know if they all perished; the smoke was too thick for him to be sure. If they didn't, though, it wasn't for lack of effort.

"Forward the Panthers," he ordered. "Tigers and Ws lay back to support."

"How many Panthers are still running?" Klaus Meinecke asked. Jager blinked; the gunner's question hadn't occurred to him, but it was a damn good one. It would be a hell of a thing to go swanning over the ridge to confront the Lizards ... alone. But no. At least two other machines rumbled past the flaming hulks of friends and foes to renew the fight against the Lizards on the Belfort road.

The smartest thing the Lizards could have done was to keep right on moving toward Belfort, make the Germans react to them. With their rotten fuel pumps, the Panthers would surely have broken down if pushed hard. And the Lizard panzers were faster than the ones Jager commanded, anyhow. Guderian

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and Manstein had invented the drill: first force your opening then worry about what happens next.

But the Lizards in this column didn't have a Guderian lea ing them. Jager stuck his head and torso out of the cupola t see what they were about. They still waited on the road face-on toward the ridge fine. "Halt hull down," he called t his comrades. He also ordered his own panzer to halt; no sens file:///C//2590%20Sci-Fi%20and%20Fantasy%20E-books/Harry%20Turtledove%20-%20Worldwar%2002%20-%20Tilting%20the%20Balance.txt

in exposing more of it to enemy fire than he had to. For the moment, standoff. Jager saw no point in firing fro his present position. He'd just waste ammunition and announc to the Lizards where he was. About the only way he could h them from here would be to put one right down a cannon barrel. He laughed at that and muttered, "If I want a miracle, I'l ask for it in church."

The Lizards weren't eager to swarin up the ridge any more though, not when the two that had tried it didn't come back They weren't used to armor fights where their foes had a de cent chance of doing them in. Jager didn't think they were afraid; he'd stopped underestimating enemies after his firs couple of weeks in Russia. He did think he'd made the Lizards thoughtful. He was about to order his reserves to try a flanking maneuver using the ridge for cover when a shell slammed into the side of the northernmost Lizard panzer. Another followed a few seconds later and set the armored vehicle ablaze. Jager was still trying to figure out who was doing the shooting when the Lizard crew bailed out of their panzer and ran for the brush. Machine-gun fire cut them down.

Jager whooped. "It's that Panzer IV!" he yelled. "They should have chased it down and killed it, but they got busy with us and forgot all about it." He'd forgotten all about it, too, but he didn't have to admit that, even to himself.

The Lizards certainly had left it out of their plans. Its unexpected return to action did the same thing to them that the unexpected in combat often did to the Russians: it panicked them and sent them into a retreat they didn't have to make. Jager fired a couple of rounds at them from the ridge line, just to remind them he was there, but didn't pursue----con-iing out into the open against them was asking to get shot up.

Klaus Meinecke looked up from his gunsight, a grin stretched wide across his face. "By God, Colonel, they're as

sensitive about their flanks as any virgin I ever tried to lay," he exclaimed.

"So they are." Jdger laughed, too, but under the coarse joke lay a grain of truth. He had seen the same thing fighting the Red Army. Come straight at them and they'd die in place by thousands sooner than yielding a meter of ground. Flank them out-or even threaten to flank them out-and they were liable to run like rabbits. Half to himself, he said, "They aren't quick to adapt, not even a little."

"No, sir," the gunner agreed. "And they've paid for being slow, that they have."

"You're right.,, Jdger sounded wondering, even to himself. His men had killed at least five Lizard panzers-to say nothing of a helicopter-in this fight. They'd lost more than that-Tigers, Panthers, Panzer IVs-but they'd done the enemy some real damage. He wondered how long it had taken the Wehrmacht's armor to kill five Lizard panzers last year. Weeks probably, maybe months. Panzer Hs, Panzer Ills, Czech machines impressed into action, Panzer IVs with the stubby 75mm guns for infantry support-they were all toys, set against the Lizards' tanks.

He must have said that aloud, for Meinecke answered, "That was last year. This is now. And who knows what they'll come up with next? Maybe a Tiger with sloped armor and a really long-barreled 88. That'd make the Lizards sit up and think."

It made Jager sit up and think, too. He liked the idea. Then he looked around again. Now he didn't see smoke and flame and shattered flesh and metal. He saw that his comrades were still here and the Lizards had fled. "We held the position," he exclaimed.

"We did, by God!" The gunner sounded as surprisedalmost dazed-as higer felt. "I'm not used to that."

"Nor I," Jdger said. "I've been part of a partisan raid that stung them, but every time I went up against them in regular combat, I always ended up retreating ... till now." He started thinking about what needed to happen next. "Now we can bring some infantry forward, send 'em down the road to screen for us."

"Infantry!" Meinecke spoke the word with a tanker's grained scom. "What's infantry going to do against panzers?" "Give us warning when they're on the move, if nothing

else," Jdger answered. "Snipers may pick off a commander or

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two; the Lizards come out of their cupolas when they think it' safe, same as we do. Maybe even an unbuttoned driver. And hear they're going to get some sort of antipanzer rocket th Americans have passed on to us."

"That'd be something, if it works," the gunner said. "The Lizarls have hurt us plenty with rockets."

"I know. They've hurt us with their panzers, too, a lot wors

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than they did today." Jdger scratched his head. His hair w matted with greasy sweat. "I haven't seen them foolish th way before-those couple that charged straight at us. should have known better. I wonder why they didn't." "Don't know that, sir," Meinecke said, "but I'm not going t complain about it. You?" "No," JAger said.

Ussmak desperately wanted a taste of ginger. He needed t feel strong and bright and in control of things, even if he kne he wasn't. Back in the turret of the landcruiser, Hessef an Tvenkel were undoubtedly dipping their tongues into the sup ply of the drug they'd brought along. Undoubtedly, too, made them see the fight from which they'd just retreated as small thing, hardly more than some cracked pavement on th path to the Race's inevitable victory.

Ussmak wished he could feel the same way. But no mat how much he craved ginger, he didn't trust it any more. Ging could make you do stupid things, things stupid enough to ge you killed. Two landcruisers had swarmed over that rise the Deutsche. Neither one had come back.

Everything had seemed so easy when he started out on th plains of the SSSR: easier even than the training simulators for those had assumed an opposition of a quality to match hi own, and the Soviets' machines didn't come close, while the tactics weren't anything special, either.

When he'd got into Besangon, the males had warned hi the Deutsche were better at armored warfare. Now he kne what they'd meant. Nobody'd paid any attention to that ris until the Deutsche started shooting from it. They'd lured th Race's landcruisers right into an ambush, he realized. The were just Big Uglies-they shouldn't have been able to tric males of the Race like that.

And their landcruisers weren't just inflammable targets an more. These were a lot bigger and heavier than the Sovie

tanks he'd faced in the SSSR, let alone the little Deutsch models. Their guns could hurt, too.

Hessef's voice came over the audio button taped to Ussmak's hearing diaphragm: "Come on back here. We've got enough herb to share with you, even if you didn't bring any of your own."

"I'll be there soon, superior sir," Ussmak answered. Just blind luck, he thought, that Hessef hadn't gone charging after the Big Uglies himself and gotten his landcruiser-and Ussmak with it-blown to bits.

He wanted to pop the hatch above his reclining seat and get a little fresh if chilly air, but he knew that wasn't a good idea. The side of the road closer to the river offered no cover for Big Uglies with guns, but any number of Tosevite raiders might be lurking in the woods that led up onto the mountain slopes to the west, just waiting for a male to show himself, even for a moment.

As with landcruisers, the Big Uglies' personal weapons were less effective than those of the Race: most of their individual firearms could shoot only one bullet at a time, while their machine guns were too heavy and clumsy to be easily portable. As with the landcruisers again, though, you didn't want to make a mistake or you'd find that one of those inferior weapons was plenty good enough to kill you.

Ussmak crawled back through the fighting compartment, then, and stuck his head up through the opening in the bottom of the turret. "Here you are, just another shell to be expended," Tvenkel exclaimed. "Well, as long as you are here, you might as well have a taste."

Before Ussmak could say no as he'd intended, his tongue shot out and licked the little mound of ginger from the palm of the gunner's hand. He opened and closed his jaws several times, gulped the powder down his throat.

"That's good," he exclaimed. With the herb buzzing through him, he felt like a brand-new male. All his worries, all his fears, ebbed away. "I wish we had the Big Uglies in our sights again." Part of him knew that was just the ginger talking, but none of him cared.

"So do I," Tvenkel said fiercely. "If they think I'd miss 'em again at that range, I tell you they're wrong." So Tvenkel had missed when he should have hit, had he?

Under the influence of the ginger, Ussmak felt almost as much

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contempt for him as he did for the Big Uglies. The bunglin incompetent couldn't hit a city if he was in the middle of it, h thought.

Hessef said, "We didn't do as well as we should have." Hi voice held melancholy uncertainty; the drug was wearing leaving crushing sadness and emptiness behind. He als sounded more thoughtful than usual as he continued, "Mayb file:///C//2590%20Sci-Fi%20and%20Fantasy%20E-books/Harry%20Turtledove%20-%20Worldwar%2002%20-%20Tilting%20the%20Balance.txt

Ussmak is right: maybe we should go into combat witho tasting first."

"I think that would be a good idea, superior sir," Ussm said. At the moment, he would have thought any ideas go that agreed with his own. He went on, "We may think we well when we taste the herb, but in fact we don't." The cor trast between belief and reality hit him with stunning force, most as if his own words came not from his mouth but fro one of the great departed Emperors of the past.

"It may be so," Hessef agreed mournfully. He was shdi down from his peak of omnipotent euphoria, sure enough.

"Nonsense, superior sir." Tvenkel must have had taste just before he gave one to Ussmak, for he still sounde ginger-certain about things. "Just bad luck, that's all. Can't h everything all the time-and these Big Uglies had the advar tage of position on us."

"Yes, and how did they get it?" Ussmak answered his ow question: "They got it because we rushed ahead without takin proper notice of our surroundings and we did that because to many of us were tasting." His mouth fell open. Here he wa complaining about tasting while he had a head full of ging The irony struck him as deliciously funny.

"We should smash them anyhow," Tvenkel declared.

"When we first landed, we would have, I think," Hesse said. "Now we face tougher landcruisers ... and ours remai the same."

"Still better by far than anything the Big Uglies have, Tvenkel said with an angry hiss; the herb was making hi confident to the point of being combative. "Even these ne machines are slow and weak next to ours."

"That's so," Hessef said, "but they're not as slow or weak as the ones we met before. And who can say what th Tosevites will build next?" He shivered a little. Just as Tvenke was arrogant under the influence of ginger and ignored re

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problems, Hessef saw those problems magnified in the depression that came when the drug wore off.

"If we conquer them, they won't build anything next," Tvenkel said.

Ussmak liked that idea. Since he was riding his taste of ginger up to the heights, he felt as Tvenkel did: that the Race could accomplish whatever it desired, and that nothing would be allowed to stand in its way. But he had learned that what he felt when he tasted was not to be relied upon, which was something few other ginger tasters seemed to have realized. He tried to stand outside himself, to look at what the ginger did to him as if it were happening to someone else.

He said, "We had better conquer them soon, or they will build their new machines. And every one they do build makes them that much harder to overcome."

"Retreating from their landcruisers isn't going to make conquering them any easier," Hessef said, almost moaning. "But losing five machines in battle against them doesn't get the job done, either. The Emperor only knows what they're saying about that back in Besangon." He cast down his eyes at the mention of the Race's sovereign, and didn't raise them again right away. Sure enough, after-ginger depression held him in its claws.

"Superior sir, what you need is another taste," Tvenkel said. He took out a vial of ginger, poured some into his hand, offered it to Hessef. The landcruiser commander's tongue flicked out. The powdered drug disappeared-

"Ali, that's better," Hessef said as the ginger began to take hold of him once more.

"Why is it better?" Ussmak wondered aloud. "The world is sull me same as it was before you tasted, so how have things really changed?"

"They've changed because now I have this lovely powder inside of me. No matter how ugly the Big Uglies outside the landcruiser are, I don't have to worry about it. All I have to do is sit here in my seat and not think about a thing."

And if some Tosevite chooses this moment to sneak up on us with a satchel charge, we're all liable to die because you're not thinking. Ussmak held that to himself. Despite all he'd been through, despite the herb coursing through him, the subordination drilled into him since his hatchling days remained strong.

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In any case, he didn't think the Big Uglies had pursued th Race's retreating landcruisers. Why should they have? They' kept the Race from pushing north, which was what they'd ha, in mind. They didn't have to conquer, they just had to resis For how long? Ussmak wondered. The answer slammed int him like a cannon shell: till we have no equipment left.

Five landcruisers gone today in this engagement alone Hessef was right: they would be gnashing their teeth i Besan~on over that news. Ussmak wondered how many land cruisers the Race had left, all over Tosev 3. In the first head days of the invasion, it hadn't seemed to matter. They ad vanced as they would, and swept all before them. They didn' sweep any more; they had to fight. And when they fought they got hurt.

Oh, so did the Tosevites. Though his ginger euphoria wa starting to ebb, Ussmak still acknowledged. that. Even in the botched engagement from which the Race's landeruisers h just retreated, they'd killed many more enemy vehicles than they'd lost themselves. When transcribing his after-action report onto disk, the unit commander would probably be able to present the engagement as a victory.

But it wasn't a victory. The clarity of thought the drug brought to Ussmak let him see that only too well. The Big Uglies were losing landcruisers at a prodigal rate, yes, but they were still making them, too, and making them better than they had before. Ussmak wondered how many landcruisers remained aboard the freighters that had fetched them from Home. Even more than that, he wondered what the Race would do when no more landeruisers, were left on those freighters.

When he said that aloud, Hessef answered, "That's why we'd better conquer quickly: if we don't, we'll have nothing left to do the job with." Even the landcruiser commander's new taste of ginger didn't keep him from seeing as much for himself.

"We'll beat them. It's our destiny-we are the Race," Tvenkel said. The herb left him confident still. He gave his gun's autoloader an affectionate slap.

Thus reminded of the device, Hessef said, "We ought to perform maintenance on that gadget. We expended a lot of rounds today. It goes out of adjustment easily, and then we're left with main armament that won't shoot."

"It'll be all right, superior sir," Tvenkel said. "If it hasn't gone wrong, odds are it won't."

Ussmak expected Hessef to come down angrily on the gunner for that: maintenance was as much a part of a landcruiser crew's routine as eating. But Hessef kept quiet--the ginger made him more confident than he should have been, too. Ussmak didn't like that. If the autoloader wouldn't feed shells into the cannon, what good was the landcruiser? Good for getting him killed, that was 0.

Though the gunner outranked him, Ussmak said, "I think you ought to service the autoloader, too."

"It's working fine, I tell you," Tvenkel said angrily. "All we need is to top up on ammunition and we'll be ready to go out and fight some more."

As if on cue, a couple of ammunition carriers rolled up to the landcruisers. One was a purpose-built vehicle made by the Race, but the other sounded like a Tosevite rattletrap. Ussmak went back to the driver's position, undogged the hatch, and peered out. Sure enough, it was a petroleum-bun-iing truck; its acrid exhaust made him cough. When the driver-a male of the Race-got out, Ussmak saw he had wooden blocks taped to the bottoms of his feet to let him reach the pedals from a seat designed for bigger beings.

Tvenkel climbed out through the turret, hurried over to the ammunition carriers. So did the gunners from the rest of the landcruisers in the unit. After a low-voiced comment from one of the resupply drivers, one of them shouted, "What do you mean, only twenty rounds per vehicle? That'll leave me less than half full!"

"And me!" Tvenkel said. The rest of the gunners echoed him, loudly and emphatically.

"Sorry, my friends, but it can't be helped," the male driving the Tosevite truck said. If is foot blocks made him tower over the angry gunners but, instead of dominating them, he just became the chief target of their wrath. He went on, "We're a little short all over the planet right now. We'll share what we have evenly, and it'll come out well in the end."

"No, it won't," Tvenkel shouted. "We're facing real landcruisers here, don't you see that, with better guns and tougher armor than anybody else has to worry about. We need more ammunition to make sure we take them out."

"I can't give you what I don't have," the truck driver an-

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swered. "Orders were to bring up twenty rounds per landcruiser and that's what we brought, no more, no less."

The Race didn't need to run out of landcruisers to find itself in trouble against the Big Ughes, Ussmak realized. Running out of supplies for the landeruisers it had was less dramatic, but would do the job just fine. т

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After darkness, light. After winter, spring. As Jens Larssen peered north from the third floor of Science Hall, he thought that light and spring had overtaken Denver all at once. A week before, the ground had been white with snow. Now the sun blazed down from a bright blue sky, men bustled across the University of Denver campus in shirtsleeves and without hats, and the first new leaves and grass were beginning to show their bright green faces. Winter might come again, but no one paid the possibility any mind-least of all Jens.

Spring sang in his heart, not because of the warm weather, not for the new growth on lawns and trees, not even because of early arriving birds warbling in those trees. What fired joy in him was at first sight much more prosaic: a long stream Of horse-drawn wagons making their slow way down University Boulevard toward the campus.

He could wait up here no longer. He dashed down the stairs, his Army guard, Oscar, right behind him. When he got to the bottom, his heart pounded in his chest and his breath came short with exercise and anticipation.

Jens started over to his bicycle. Oscar said, "Why don't you just wait for them to get here, sir?"

"Dammit, my wife is in one of those wagons, and I haven't seen her since last summer," Jens said angrily. Maybe Oscar didn't breathe hard even in bed.

"I understand that, sir," Oscar said patiently, "but you don't know which one she's in. For that matter, you don't even know if she's in any of the ones coming in today. Isn't the convoy broken into several units to keep the Lizards from paying too much attention to iff

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The right way, the wrong way, and the Army way, Jens thought. This once, the Army way seemed to have something going for it. "Okay," he said, stopping. "Maybe you're smarter than I am."

Oscar shook his head. "No, sir. But my wife isn't on one of those wagons, so I can still think straight."

"Hmm." Aware he'd lost the exchange, Larssen turned toward the wagons, the first of which had turned off University onto East Evans and was now approaching Science Hall. I'll have the best excuse in the worldfor getting out of BOQ now, he thought.

He didn't recognize the only man aboard the lead wagon: just a driver, wearing olive drab. Oscar had had a point, he reluctantly admitted to himself. A lot of these wagons would just be carrying equipment, and the only people aboard them would be soldiers. He'd have felt a proper fool if he'd pedaled up and down the whole length of the wagon train without setting eyes file:///C//2590%20Sci-Fi%20and%20Fantasy%20E-books/Harry%20Turtledove%20-%20Worldwar%2002%20-%20Tilting%20the%20Balance.txt

on Barbara.

Then he saw Leo Szilard sitting up alongside another driver. He waved like a man possessed. Szilard returned the gesture in a more restrained way: so restrained, in fact, that Jens wondered a little. The Hungarian physicist was usually as open and forthright a man as anyone ever born.

Larssen shrugged. If he was going to read that much into a wave, maybe he should have chosen psychiatry instead of physics.

A couple of more wagons pulled up in front of Science Hall before he saw more people he knew: Enrico and Laura Fermi, looking incongruous on a tarp-covered hay wagon. "Dr. Fernii!" he called. "Have you seen Barbara? Is she all right?" Fermi and his wife exchanged glances. Finally he said, "She is not that far behind us. Soon you will see her for yourself." Now what the devil was that supposed to mean? "Is she all right?" Larssen repeated. "Is she hurt? Is she sick?" The Fermis looked at each other again. "She is neither injured nor ill," Enrico Fermi answered, and then shut up. Jens scratched his head. Something was going on, but he didn't know what. Well, if Barbara was just a few wagons behind the Fermis, he'd find out pretty soon. He walked up the stream of incoming wagons, then stopped dead in his tracks. Ice ran up his spine-what were two Lizards doing here attached to the Met Lab crew?

He relaxed a bit when he saw the rifle-toting corporal in 1h wagon with the Lizards. Prisoners might be useful; the Lizards certainly knew how to get energy out of the atomic nucleus. Then all such merely practical thoughts blew out of his head. Sitting next to the corporal was-

"Barbara!" he yelled, and sprinted toward the wagon. Oscar the guard followed more sedately.

Barbara waved and smiled, but she didn't jump down and run to him. He noticed that, but didn't think much of it. Just seeing her again after so long made the fine spring day ten degrees warmer.

When he fell into step beside the wagon, she did get out, "Hi, babe, I love you," he said, and took her in his ams. Squeezing her, kissing her, made him forget about ev else.

"Jens, Wait," she said when lack of oxygen forced him to take Ins mouth away from hers for a moment.

_17he only thing I want to wait for is to get us alone," he said, and kissed her again.

She didn't respond quite the way she had the first time. That distracted him enough to let him notice the corporal saying, "Ullhass, Ristin, you two just go on along. I'll catch up witlt you later," and then getting down from the wagon himseff. His Army boots clumped on the pavement as he walked back toward Jens and Barbara.

Jens broke off the second kiss in annoyance that headed ra~ idly toward anger. Oscar had enough sense to keep his dis and let a man properly greet his wife. Why couldn't this hopper do the same?

Barbara said, "Jens, this is someone you have to know. ffis name is Sam Yeager. Sam, this is Jens Larssen."

Not, my husband, Jens Larssen? Jens wondered, but, trap* in the rituals of politeness, he grudgingly stuck out a hard "Pleased to meet you," Yeager said, though a dark blond eye. brow quirked up as he spoke. He was a handful of years o than Larssen, but considerably more weathered, as if he'd ways spent a lot of time outdoors. Gary Cooper type, Jens thought, not that the corporal was anywhere near so good, looking.

"Pleased to meet you, too, pal," he said. "Now if you'll excuse us--2' He started to steer Barbara away.

"Wait," she said again. He stared at her, startled. She wa

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Xw3king ~Lwwn ak Vht_ gtouno~. When She T&Sea 'her eyes, she looked not to him but to this Yeager character, which not only startled Jens but made him mad. The corporal nodded. Now Barbara turned toward Jens. In a low voice, she went on, "Ibere's something you have to know. You and Sam havesomething in common."

"Hub?" Jens gave Yeager another look. The soldier was human, male, white, and, by the way he talked, might well have sprung from the Midwest. Past that, Larssen couldn't see any resemblance between them. "What is it?" he asked Barbara. file:///C|/2590% 20Sci-Fi% 20 and % 20 Fantasy% 20 E-books/Harry% 20 Turtled ove% 20-% 20 Worldwar% 2002% 20-% 20 Tilting% 20 the% 20 Balance.txt the state of the state of

"Me."

At first, he didn't understand. That lasted only a heartbeat, maybe two; the way she said it didn't leave much room to doubt what she meant. Numbness filled him, to be replaced in an instant by all-consurning rage.

He almost threw himself blindly at Sam Yeager. He'd always been a peaceable man, but he wasn't afraid of a fight. After attacking a Lizard tank when Patton's troops drove the aliens back from Chicago, the idea of taking on somebody carrying a fifle didn't faze him.

Then he took another look at Yeager's face. The corporal wasn't toting that rifle just for show. Somewhere or other, he'd done some work with it. The way his eyes narrowed as he watched Jens said that louder than words. Jens hesitated.

"It wasn't the way it sounds," Barbara said. "I thought you were dead, I was sure you had to be dead. If I hadn't been, I never would have-" "Neither would I," Yeager put in. "There's names for people who do stuff like that. I don't like 'em." "But you did, " Jens said. "We did it the right way, or the best way we knew how." Yeager's mouth twisted; those weren't the same, not here. He went on, "Up in Wyoming a little while back, we got marfied." "Oh, Lord." Larssen's eyes went to Barbara, as if begging her to tell him it was all some dreadful joke. But she bit her lip and nodded. Something new washed over Jens then: fear. She wasn't just telling him she'd made a mistake with this miserable two-striper. She really had a thing for him. "Diere's more," Yeager said grimly.

"How could there be more?" Jens demanded. ara held up a hand. "Sam----2' she began. Ι

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Yeager cut her off. "Hon, he's gotta know. The sooner all the cards are on the table, the sooner we can start figuring out what the hand looks like. Are you gonna tell him, or shall IT'

"I'll do it," Barbara said, which surprised Jens not at all: she'd always been one to take care of her own business. Still, she had to gather herself before she brought out a blurted whisper: "I'm going to have a baby, Jens."

He started to say, "Oh, Lord," again, but that wasn't strong enough. The only things that were, he didn't want to say in front of Barbara. He thought he'd been afraid before. Nowhow could Barbara possibly want to come back to him if she was carrying this other guy's child? She was the best thing he'd ever known, most of the reason he'd kept going across Lizard-held Ohio and Indiana ... and now this.

He wished they'd started their family before the Lizards came. Tbey'd talked about it, but he kept reaching for the rubbers in the nightstand drawer-and times he hadn't (there were some), nothing happened. Maybe he was shooting blanks. Yeager sure as hell wasn't.

Jens also wished, suddenly, savagely, that he'd screwed the ears off the brassy blond waitress named Sal when the Lizards held them and a bunch of other people in that church in Fiat, Indiana. She'd done everything but send up a flare to let him know she was interested. He'd stayed aloof, figuring he'd be back with Barbara soon, but when he finally got back to Chicago, she was already gone, and now that he'd finally caught up with her-she was pregnant by somebody else. Wasn't that a kick in the nuts? It sure was. And he'd gone and wasted his chance.

"Jens-Professor Larssen, I guess I mean-what are we gonna do about this?" Sam Yeager asked.

He was being as decent as he could. Somehow, that made things worse, not better. Worse or better, though, he'd sure found the sixty-four-dollar question. "I don't know," Jens muttered with a helplessness he'd never felt while confronting the abstruse equations of quantum mechanics.

Barbara said, "Jens, I guess you've been here a while." She waited for him to nod before she went on, "Do you have some place where we could talk for a while, just the two of us?"

"Yeah." He pointed back toward Science Hall. "I've got an office on the third floor there."

"Okay, let's go." He wished she'd headed off with him with-

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out a backwards glance, but she didn't. She turned back to Sam Yeager and said, "I'll see you later."

Yeager looked as unhappy about her going with Jens as Jens felt about her looking back at the corporal, which oddly made him feel a little better. But Yeager shrugged-what else could he do? "Okay, hon," he said. "You'll probably find me riding herd on the Lizards." He mooched after the wagon that had held him and Barbara and the aliens.

"Come on," Jens said to Barbara. She fell into step beside him, their strides matching as automatically as they always did. Now, though, as he watched her legs move, all he could think of was them locked around Sam Yeager's back. That scene played over and over in his mind, in vivid Technicolor-and brought pain just as vivid.

Neither of them said much as they walked back to Science Hall, nor as they climbed the stairs. Jens sat down behind his cluttered desk, waved Barbara to a chair. The minute he did that, he knew it was a mistake: it felt more as if he was having a conference with a colleague than talking with his wife. But getting up and coming back around the desk would have made him look foolish, so he stayed where he was.

"So how did this happen?" he asked.

Barbara looked at her hands. Her hair tumbled over her face and down past her shoulders. He wasn't used to it so long and straight; it made her look different. Well, a lot of things had suddenly turned different.

"I thought you were dead," she said quietly. "You went off across country, you never wrote, you never telegraphed, you never called-not that the phones or anything else worked very well. I tried and tried not to believe it, but in the end-what was I supposed to think, Jens?"

"They wouldn't let me get hold of you." His voice shook with fury ready to burst free, like a U-235 nucleus waiting for a neutron. "First. off, General Patton wouldn't let me send a message into Chicago because he was afraid it would foul up his attack on the Lizards. Then they wouldn't let me do anything to draw attention to the Met Lab. I went along. I thought it made sense; if we don't make ourselves an atomic bomb, our goose is probably cooked- But, Jesus--2'

"I know," she said. She still would not look at him. "What about Yeager?" he demanded.

More rage came out in his voice. Another mistake: now

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Barbara did look up, angrily. If he attacked the bum, she was going to defend him. Why shouldn't she? Larssen asked himself bitterly. If she hadn't had a feel for him, she wouldn't have married him (God), wouldn't have let him get her pregnant (God oh God).

"After you-went away, I got a job typing for a psychology professor at the university," Barbara said. "He was studying Lizard prisoners, trying to figure out what makes them tick. Sam would bring them around-he helped capture them, and he's sort of their keeper, I guess you'd say. He's very good with them."

"So you got friendly," Jens said.

"So we got friendly," Barbara agreed.

"How did you get-more than friendly?" With an effort, Larssen kept his voice steady, neutral.

She looked down at her hands again. "A Lizard plane strafed the ship that was taking us out of Chicago." She gulped. "A sailor got killed- horribly killed-right in front of us. I guess we were both so glad just to be alive that-thatone thing led to another."

Jens nodded heavily. Things like that could happen. Why do they have to happen to me, God? he asked, and got no answer. As if twisting the knife in his own flesh, he asked, "And when did you get married to hini)"

"Not even three weeks ago, up in Wyoming," Barbara answered. "I needed to be as sure as I could that that was something I really wanted to do. I figured out I was expecting the evening we got into Fort Collins." Her face twisted. "A soldier on horseback brought your letter the next morning."

"Oh, for Christ's sake," Jens groaned.

"What's the matter?" Barbara asked, worry in her voice. "Nothing anybody can help now," he said, though he wanted to twist a knife, not in his own flesh, but in Colonel Hexham's. If the miserable blunder-brained, brass-bound, regulation- and security-crazy son of a bitch had let him write a letter when he first asked, most of this mess never would have happened.

Yeah, she and Yeager still would have had their fling, but he could deal with that-she'd thought he was dead, and so had Yeager. She wouldn't have married the guy, or got pregnant by him. Life would have been a hell of a lot simpler. Jens asked himself a new and unsettling question: how

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would things go between Barbara and him if she decided v give Yeager the brush and come back to him forever? Ho would he handle her giving birth to the other man's kid an then raising it? It wouldn't be easy; he could see that much He sighed. So did Barbara, at almost the same moment. Sh smiled. Jens stayed stony-faced. He asked, "Have the two you been sleeping together since you found out?"
 "In the same bed, you mean?" she said. "Of course w
have. We traveled all the way across the Great Plains li
that-and it still gets cold at night."

Though he habitually worked with abstractions, he wasn deaf to what people said, and he sure as hell knew evasioi when he heard it. "That's not what I meant," he told her. "Do you really want to know?" Her chin went up defiantly

Pushing her made her angry, all right; he'd been afraid i would, and he was right. Before he could answer what migh have been a rhetorical question, she went on, "As a matter fact, we did, night before last. And so?"

Jens didn't know and so. Everything he'd looked forw to--everything except work, anyhow-4iad crumbled to piece

inside the last half hour. He didn't know whether he wanted pick up those pieces and try to put them together again. But he didn't, what did he have left? The answer to that was pain fully obvious: nothing.

Barbara was still waiting for her answer. He said, "I wish t God it had been me instead."

"I know," she said, which was not the same as I wish it hat too. But something-maybe the naked longing in his voic seemed to soften her. She continued, "It's not that I don't lov you, Jens-don't ever think that. But when I thought you w ... gone forever, I told myself life went on, and I had to g on with it. I can't turn off what I feel about Sam as if it w a light switch."

"Obviously," he said, which made her angry again. 'T sorry," he added quickly, though he wasn't sure he meant i "The whole thing is just Man"

"Fubar9 What's thatV Barbara's eyes lit up. She lived R words. When she found one she didn't know, she pounced.

"I picked it up from the Army guys I was with for a while he answered. "It stands for 'fouled'-but that's not what the usually say-'up beyond all recognition.' "

"Oh, like snafu," she said, neatly cataloging it.

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After that, silence stretched between them. Jens wanted to ask the one question he hadn't put to her ~'Will you come back to rne?'~-but he didn't. Part of him was afraid she'd say no. A different part was just as much afraid she'd say yes. When he didn't say anything, Barbara said: "Khat are we

going to do?"

"I don't know," he answered, which was honest enough to make her nod soberly He went on, "In the end, it's more or less up to you, isn't it?"

"Not altogether." Her left hand spread over her belly; he wondered if she knew it had moved. "For instance, do you want me back-under the circumstancesT'

Since he'd been asking himself the same thing, he couldn't exclaim Yes! the way he probably should have. When a couple of seconds passed without his saying anything, Barbara looked away. That frightened him. He didn't want to throw her out, either. He said, "I'm sorry, dear. Too much landing on me all at once.,,

"Isn't that the sad and sorry truth?" She shook her head wearily, then got to her feet. "I'd better get downstairs and help with the work, Jens. I've sort of turned into assistant Lizard liaison person."

"Wait" He had work, too, a load that was going to quadruple now that the Met Lab was finally here. But that didn't have to start at this precise instant. He got up, too, hurried around the desk and took her in his arms. She held him tight; her body molded itself to his. It felt so familiar, so right. He wished he'd had the sense to lock his office door: he might have tried to drag her down to the floor then and there. It had been so long ... He remembered the last time they'd made love on the floor, with Lizard bombs falling all over Chicago.

She tilted her face up, kissed him with more warmth than she'd shown down on East Evans. But before he could try dragging her down to the floor even with the door unlocked, she pulled away and said, "I really should go."

"Where will you stay tonight?" he asked. There. That brought it out in the open. If she said she'd stay with him, he didn't know what he'd do-not go back to the BOQ, that was 'or sure.

But she just shook her head and answered, "Don't ask me that yet, please. Right now I don't even know which end is UP."

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"All right," he said reluctantly; he'd been up when they hel each other.

Barbara walked out of the office. He listened to her foot steps receding down the hallway and then in the stairwell. went back to his desk, looked out the window behind it. Th she came, out of Science Hall.

And there she went, over to Sam Yeager. No doubt who h was, even from three floors up: plenty of men in Army uni forms standing around, but only one of them stayed by the tw Lizard prisoners. Jens felt like a Peeping Tom as he watch his wife hug and kiss the tall soldier, but he couldn't in himself tear his eyes away. When he compared the way sh held Yeager to how she'd embraced him, a cold, inescapabl conclusion formed in his mind: wherever she slept tonight, wouldn't be with him.

At last Barbara broke free of the other man, but her h lingered affectionately at his waist for an extra few seconds Jens made himself turn away from the window and look at hi desk. No matter what happens to the rest of my life, there's sti a war on and I have a ton of work to do, he told himself.

He could make himself lean forward in the chair. He coul make himself pull a report from the varnished pine IN baske and set it on the blotter in front of him. But, try as he would he couldn't make the words mean anything. Misery and strangled his brains. If that was bad, pedaling back to the BOQ with a silent Os car right behind him felt ten times worse. "I won't take it," h whispered again and again, not wanting the guard to hear. won't."

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Normal life. Moishe Russie had almost forgotten such thing could exist. Certainly he'd known nothing of the sort the past three and a half years, since the Stukas and bro winged Heinkel. I I Is and other planes of the Nazi war machin began dropping death on Warsaw.

First the bombardment. Then the ghetto: insane crowdin disease, starvation, overwork--death for tens of thousand served up a centimeter at a time. Then another spasm of w as the Lizards drove the Germans from Warsaw. And then th strange time as the Lizards' mouthpiece. He'd thought that w close to normal; at least he and his family had had food on table.

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But the Lizards were as eager to put shackles on his spirit as the Nazis had been to squeeze work out of his body and then let it die ... or to ship him away and just kill him, regardless of how much work was left in him.

Then God only knew how long underground in a dark sardine tin, and then the flight to Lodz. None of that had been even remotely normal. But now here he was, with Rivka and Reuven, in a flat with water and electricity (most of the time, at least), and with no sign the Lizards knew where he'd gone.

It wasn't paradise-but what was? It was a chance to live like a human being instead of a starving draft horse or a hunted rabbit. This, by now, is my deflnition of normal? Russie asked himself as he strode down Zgierska Street to see what the market had to offer.

He shook his head. "Not normal," he insisted aloud, as if someone had disagreed with him. Normal would have meant going back to medical school, where the worst he would have had to endure was hostility from the Polish students. He itched to be able to start leaming again, and to start practicing what he'd learned.

Instead, here he came, ambling along down a street in a town not his own, clean-shaven, doing his best to act like a man who'd never had a thought in his life. This was safer than the way he'd been living, but ... normal? No.

As usual, the Balut Market square was packed. Some new posters had gone up on the dirty brick walls of the buildings surrounding the square. Bigger than life, Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski looked down on the ragged men and women gathered there, his arms and hands outstretched in exhortation. WORK MEANS MEDOM! the poster cried in Yiddish, Polish, and German.

ARBEIT MACHT FREi. A shiver ran down Russie's back when he saw that in German. The Nazis had put the same legend above the gates of their extermination camp at Auschwitz. He wondered if Rumkowski knew.

He got in line to buy cabbage. More of Rumkowski's posters stood behind the peddler's cart. So did other, smaller ones with big red letters that announced WANTED FOR THE. RAPE AND MURDER OF A LIT-FLF GIRL in the three most widely spoken languages of Lizard-held Poland.

V1%o could be such a monster? Russie thought. His eyes, drawn by those screaming red letters, looked to the picture on

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the poster. It was one of the fancy photographs the Liz took, in full color and giving the effect of three dimension Moishe noticed that before he realized with horror that he reA ognized the face on the poster. It was his own.

The poster didn't call him by his proper name-that won have given the game away. Instead, it styled him Israel Got lieb. It said he'd coninfitted his ghastly crimes in Warsaw was being sought all over Poland, and it offered a large rew for his capture.

His head whipped wildly back and forth. Were people s ing at him, at the poster, getting ready to shout at him or him and drag him to the cobblestones? He'd never imagin the Lizards would come up with such a devilish way of tryi to bring him back into their hands. He felt as if they'd set tl mark of Cain on his forehead.

But none of the men in hats or caps, none of the women head scarves, acted as if the mark were visible. Few eve glanced at the poster; of those who did, none looked from it Russie.

His eyes went to it once more. On that second examinatia he began to understand. The Lizards' photo showed him as

had been when he was speaking on the radio for Zolraag: i other words, bearded and in a dark homburg rather than cleai shaven and with a flat gray cloth cap of the sort he wore thes days. To him, the difference seemed minuscule: it was, all, his own face. But nobody else seemed to have the fainte suspicion he was the alleged monster whose visage would u doubtedly be used to frighten children.

Bristles rasped under his fingers as he rubbed his chin. needed a shave. From here on out, he'd shave every day, matter what: putting it off till tomorrow was liable to in him resemble himself too much.

He finally reached the head of the line, bought a couple cabbages, and asked the price of some green onions the pe(dler had in a little wicker basket on his cart. When the fell told him, he clapped a hand to his forehead and exclaime("Ganef! You should grow like an onion-with your head in th ground."

"An onion should grow from your pippuk," the vegetabl seller retorted, answering one Yiddish execration with anothe "Then it would be cheaper."

They haggled for a while, but Russie couldn't beat the

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down to a price that woul-~'t leave Rivka furious at him, so he gave up and left, carry;ng bi-, cabbages in a canvas bag. He thought about stopping zo a cup of tea from a fellow with a battered tin samovar, 1,L:1 -afcided that would be tempting fate. The sooner he got out of square, the fewer eyes would have a chance to light on hi-ni.

Going out, though, was swin-,--ning against the tide. The Balut Market square had fillej ~~ven fuller when he stood in line. Then, abruptly, the swarm cfj~eoplc coming in slowed. Russic looked up just in time to kcep ft om being run over by Chaim Rumkowski's coach.

The horse that drew the four-wheeled carriage snorted in annoyance as the driver, a hard-faced man in a gray greatcoat and quasimilitary cap, hauled back on the reins to stop it. The driver looked annoyed, too. Russie touched the brim of his own cap and mumbled, "Sorry, Sir." He'd had plenty of practice fawning on the Germans, but doing it for one of his own people grated even harder on him.

Mollified, the driver dipped his head, but from behind him came the querulous voice of an elderly man:

"You up there--come here." Heart sinking, Russie obeyed. As he walked back toward Rumkowski, he saw that the driver's bench still sported a neat sign left over from the days of German domination: WAGEN DES AELTESTEN DER JUDEN (coach of the Eldest of the Jews), with the same in smaller letters in Yiddish below.

He wondered if the Eldest still wore a yellow Star of David on his right breast, as the Nazis had required the ghetto Jews to do. No, he found to his relief, although he could still see where the star had been sewn onto Rumkowski's herringbone tweed overcoat.

Then Moishe stopped worrying about small things, for sitting beside Rumkowski, almost hidden by his bulk, was a Lizard. Russie didn't think he had ever seen this particular alien, but he couldn't be sure. He felt as if all the posters with his picture on them were growing hands and pointing straight at him.

Rumkowski pointed straight at him, too, with a stubby forefinger. "You should be careful. You were almost badly hurt." "Yes, Eldest. I'm sorry, Eldest." Russie looked down at the ground, both to show humility and to keep Rumkowski and the Lizard from getting a good look at him. The aliens had as

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in that bag?"

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much trouble telling people apart as people did with their ki but he did not want to find himself an exception to the rul(The Lizard leaned forward to see him without being blocke by Rumkowski's body. Its eye turrets swiveled in a way Russi knew well. In fair German, it asked him, "What do you hav "Only a couple of cabbages." Russie had the presence mind not to add superior sir, as he had learned to do back i Warsaw. That would just let the Lizard know he was famili with the usages of its kind. "How much did you pay for these cabbagesT' Rumkows

"Ten zlotys, Eldest," Moishe said.

asked.

Rumkowski turned to the Lizard and said, "You see, Bunin how we have flourished under your rule. A few months ag these cabbages would have been many times as dear. We always grateful for your aid, and will do whatever we can continue deserving your favor."

"Yes, of course," Bunim said. Had he been a human, Russi would have thought his voice full of contempt: how could o

not feel contemptuous of such an abject thing as Rumkows had become? Yet the Lizards, even more than the Germans, a sumed themselves to be the Herrenvolk, the master race. Pe haps Bunim accepted sycophancy from the Eldest simply his due.

Rumkowski pointed to his own propaganda posters on t walls of the market square. "We know our debt, Bunim, an we work hard to repay it."

Bunim swung one eye toward the posters while keeping other on Russie. Moishe made ready to fling the cabbages his scaly face and flee. But the Lizard just said, "'Continue this course and all will be well."

"It shall be done, superior Sir," Rumkowski said in the his ing language of the Race. Moishe had all he could do to kee his face blank and stupid; if he was just an ordinary shlem on the street, he had no business understanding the Lizard speech. ne Eldest seemed to remember he was there. ' your food home to your family," he said, dropping back in Yiddish. "We may not be so hungry as we once were, but know the memory lingers."

"You're right about that." Russie touched the brim of h cap. "Thank you, Eldest." He scuttled away from the carriag

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as fast as he could without seeming to be running for his life. Acrid sweat dripped from his armpits and down his back.

Along with the fear came anger. Rumkowski had chutzpah and to spare, if he thought to impress anyone by talking about how hungry "we" had been. His fleshy frame didn't look to have missed many meals under German control of the ghetto, and he'd earned his food with the sweat and the blood of his fellow Jews.

But that, dreadful as it was, was also by the way. For now, the only thing that truly mattered to Russie was that he'd got away with the toughest test his flimsy disguise was ever likely to face. He wasn't surprised the Lizard had failed to recognize him; the Lizard might not have known who he was even if he'd still had his beard.

But Chaim Rumkowski ... Rumkowski was a Lizard puppet as Moishe had been a puppet. It wouldn't have been too surprising if he'd seen Moishe's face in a Lizard photograph or in one of the propaganda films Zolraag and his minions had taken back when he and Russie got along. But if he had, he didn't associate it with a shabby Jew carrying cabbages home to his wife.

"And a good thing, too," Moishe said.

When he got back to his block of flats, he waved to Reuven, who was kicking a ball around with a couple of other boys and dodging in and out amongst passersby on the street. That game would have been impossibly dangerous before the war, when whizzing motorcars killed children every week.

These days, even the Eldest of the Lodz ghetto rode in a carTiage like a nineteenth-century physician on his rounds; the only motor vehicle in the ghetto that Moishe knew about was the fire engine. People got about on bicycles or in carts hauled by their fellow men, or most often, afoot. And so sport got safer for little boys, Even the worst wind blows in a little good with it, Russie thought.

He carried the cabbages upstairs to his apartment. Rjvka pounced on them. She did no more than raise an eyebrow when he told her how much he'd paid, from which he concluded he hadn't done too badly. "What else did they have down there?" she asked.

"Tzibeles-green onions-but I couldn't get a decent price for them, so I didn't buy any," he said. Rivka positively beamed; by her expression, she'd expected him to spend all

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their money for One dried_Up little onion. He went on, "Mat not all," and told her about the posters.

"Mat's terrible, , she said, before he even had a chance I let her know what they claimed he'd done. When he did, st clenched her fists and ground out, "It's worse than terribleit's filthy."

"So it is," Moishe answered. "But the pictures show me tt

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way I used to be, and I look different now. I proved it after got these cabbages." "Oh? How?"

"Because the Eldest of the Jews and the Lizard he had in tb carriage with him both spoke to me, and neither one of thei had the least idea who I was even though inypicture was pl&, tered all over the market square." Russie spoke as if he'd bee through something that happened every day, hoping not t alarm Rivka. He alarmed himself instead; all the fright he' felt came back in a rush.

And he frightened his wife. "Ibat's it," she said in a voic that brooked no argument. "From now on, you don't go out c the flat unless it's a matter of life or death-any time you d go out, it turns into a matter of life or death."

He could not disagree with that. He did say, "I had beei thinking of going to the hospital and offering my service there. Lodz-and especially its Jews--still has far too mucl sickness and not enough people trained in medicine."

"If you were only putting your own neck in the noose, tha would be one thing," Rivka said. "But if they catch you Moishe, they catch Reuven and me, too. They won't be ver happy with us, either; remember, we disappeared right unde their snouts when we went into biding.

"I know," he answered heavily. "But after being cooped ul so long under Warsaw, the idea of having to stay here leave: me sick."

"Better you should be left sick than left dead:' Rivka said to which he had no good reply. She went on, "Fin a bettei sh than you, anyhow, and you know it. We'll save mone3

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with you at home."

He knew that, too. Had he gone straight from the Warsa" bunker to close confinement in this flat, he could have borne it easily enough. But a taste of freedom left him hungry foi more. it had been the same in Warsaw. If the Lizards ha~ treated its Jews the same way the Germans had, people there

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might well have accepted it, simply because it was what they'd grown used to. After a spell of mild rule, though, tough strictures would have been hard to reimpose. He'd certainly rebelled when the Lizards tried to make him into nothing but their mouthpiece.

Rivka inspected the cabbages, peeled off a couple of wilted outer leaves, and threw them away. That was a measure of how far they'd come. In the days when the Nazis ruled the ghetto, wilted cabbage leaves would have been something to fight over. Their being just garbage again showed that the family wasn't in the last stages of. starving to death any more. The rest of the cabbage, chopped, went into the soup pot

with potatoes and a big white onion from a vegetable basket by the counter. Moishe wished for a roasted pullet or barley and beef soup with bones full of marrow. Cabbage and potatoes, though, you could live a long time on that, even without meat.

"It certainly seems like a long time, anyhow," he muttered. "What's that?" Rivka asked.

"Nothing," he answered loyally, thinking of all the vitamins and other nutrients in potatoes and cabbages and onions. But man did not live by nutrients alone, and the soup, however nourishing the medical part of him knew it to be, remained uninspiring despite Rivka's best efforts.

She put a lid on the soup pot. The hot plate would eventually bring it to a boil. Moishe had given up on quickly cooked food-not that soup cooked quickly any which way. Rivka said, "I wonder how long Reuven will play outside."

"Hhun." Moishe sent her a speculative look. She smiled back. Just for a moment, the tip of her tongue appeared between her teeth. He did his best to sound severe: "I think you're just trying to butter me up." He listened to himself. Severe? He sounded eager as a bridegroom.

As a matter of fact, he was eager as a bridegroom. He took a couple of quick steps across the kitchen. Rivka's arms went around him at the same time his went around her. After a few seconds, she said, "For this, I may even like you better cleanshaven. Your mustaches used to tickle my nose when we kissed."

"If you like it so well-2' he said, and resumed. His hand cupped her breast through the wool of her dress. She made a

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small noise deep in her throat and pressed herself tight
against him.
The door opened.
Moishe and Rivka jumped away from each other as if
had springs in their shoes. From the doorway, Reuven cal
"Is there anything to eat? I'm hungry."
"Mere's a heel of bread in here you can have, and I'm
ing soup," Rivka answered. "Your father brought home a c

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ple of lovely cabbages." Her shrug to Moishe was full humorous frustration.

He understood the feeling because he shared it. In the i sanely overcrowded Warsaw ghetto, concerns about priva(had fallen to pieces, because so little was to be had. People d what they did, and the other people crammed into a flat wi them, no matter how young, pretended not to notice. But dec rum had returned to the family as soon as they were out of th desperate overcrowding.

Reuven wolfed down the bread his mother gave him th sat on the kitchen floor to stare expectantly at the soup p Above him, Rivka said "Tonighf' to Moishe.

He nodded. His son let out an indignant squawk: "Me won't be ready till tonight?"

"No, I was talking about something else with your fathe Rivka said. Partway appeased, Reuven resumed his pot watching.

idea of privacy had come back after they were no long stuffed into a flat like sardines. But food ... they all still w ried about food, even though they weren't starving any If they hadn't, Moishe wouldn't have noticed Rivka throwi out the wilted cabbage leaves, wouldn't have counted that as sign of their relative affluence.

"Do you know," he said out of the blue, "I think I u stand Rumkowski better."

"Nu?" Rivka said. "Tell me. How he could go on deali with the Lizards, and with the Nazis before them---2' She shi ered.

Moishe explained his thoughts about the cabbage leave then went on, "I think Rumkowski's the same way, only ab power, not food- However he thought of it when this was Nazis ghetto, he can't change his mind now. He's-fixate that's the word." It came out in German; Yiddish didn't ha, file:///C//2590%20Sci-Fi%20and%20Fantasy%20E-books/Harry%20Turtledove%20-%20Worldwar%2002%20-%20Tilting%20the%20Balance.txt

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a term for the precise psychological concept Moishe was trying to get across. Rivka nodded to show she followed.

Reuven said, "You threw out some cabbage leaves, Mama?" He got up and went over to the garbage can. "May I eat them?"

"No, just leave them there," Rivka said, and then again, louder, "Leave them there, I told you. You're not going to starve to death before the soup is done." She stopped with a bemused look on her face.

Progress, Moishe thought. He shook his head. To such had he been reduced that he measured progress by the existence of garbage.

Rasputitsa-the time of mud. Ludmila Gorbunova squelched across the airstrip, her boots making disgusting sucking and plopping noises at every step. Each time she lifted one, more mud clung to it, until she thought she was carrying half a kolkhoz's worth on each foot.

The mud came to Russia and the Ukraine twice a year. In the fall, the rains brought it. The fall rasputitsa could be heavy or light, depending on how much rain fell for how long before it turned to snow and froze the ground.

The spring rasputitsa was different. When the spring sun melted the snow and ice that had accumulated since last fall, millions of square kilometers turned into a bog. That included roads, none of which was paved outside the big cities. For several weeks the only ways to get around were by panje wagons, which were almost boat-shaped and had wheels high enough to get down through the glop to solid ground, and by wide-tracked T-34 tanks.

That also meant most aviation came to a halt during the rasputitsa. The Red Air Force flew off dirt strips, and all the dirt was liquid for the time being. Taxiing for takeoffs and landings wasn't practical; just keeping aircraft from sinking into the swamp wasn't easy.

As usual, one model proved the exception: the U-2. With skis of the same sort the little biplane used to operate in heavy snow, it could skid along the surface of the mud until it gained enough speed to take off, and could also land in muck ... provided the pilot set it down as gently as if eggs were under the skis. Otherwise it dug its nose into the ground and sometimes flipped, with unfortunate results for all concerned.

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The mud in the revetment that housed Ludmila's U-2 heavily strewn with straw, which meant she didn't even sink her ankles, let alone to midealf as she had outside. She di squelch as much, either.

Georg Schultz was adjusting one of the struts that joined U-2's upper and lower wings when she came into the rev ment. "Guten Tag," he said cautiously.

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"Good day," she returned, also in German, also cautiou He hadn't made any unwelcome advances since she'd roun on him for trying it, and he had kept on maintaining Kukuruznik with his usual fanatic attention to detail. They s weren't easy around each other: she'd caught him watching when he didn't think she'd notice, while he had to be nerv she'd speak to her fellow Russians about what he'd done. thoroughgoing fascist, he was tolerated only for his niechani skills. If the Russians found a reason not to tolerate him, wouldn't last long.

He stuck a screwdriver into a pocket of his coveralls, c to attention so stiff it mocked the respect it was supposed convey. "The aircraft is ready for flight, Comrade Pilot," he ported.

"Thank you," Ludmila answered. She did not call h "Comrade Mechanic" in return, not because it sounded unn ural to her in German, but because Schultz used for sarca what should have been a term of egalitarian respect. She w dered how he'd survived in Hitlerite Germany; in the Sov Union that attitude would surely have seen him purged.

She checked the fuel level and the ammunition loads hers no such thing as being too careful. When she was satisfied, stepped out of the revetment and waved for groundcrew m She, they, and Schultz manhandled the Kukuruznik out onto runway. It stayed on top of the mud more easily than they

When Schultz yanked at the prop, the little Shvetsov fi cylinder radial'began to buzz almost at once. The engine's haust fumes made Ludmila cough, but she nodded approvin at its note. Nazi and lecher though he was, Georg Schu knew his work.

Ludmila released the brake, applied the throttle. The t slid down the airstrip, mud splattering in its wake. When sh built up the speed she needed (not much), she eased back the stick and the biplane abandoned the boggy earth for freedom of the sky.

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With the rasputitsa below her, Ludmila could savor the beginnings, of spring. ne slipstream that slid over the windscreen no longer turned her nose and checks to lumps of ice. The sun shone cheerily out of a blue sky with only a few plump white clouds, and would not disappear below the horizon when later afternoon came. The air smelled of growing things, not of the mud in which they grew.

She wished she could fly higher to see more. This was a day when flying was a joy, not a duty. But just when, for a moment, she was on the verge of forgetting why she flew, she skimmed low over the rusting hulks of two T-34s, one with its turret lying upside down fifteen meters away from the hull. She wondered whether the Germans or Lizards had killed the Soviet tanks.

Either way, the melancholy sight reminded her someone would kill her, too, if she failed to remember she was in the middle of a war. With every second, Lizard-held territory drew closer.

After so many missions, flying into country the alien imperialist invaders controlled had begun to approach the routine. She'd dropped small bombs on them and shot at them, smuggled in weapons and propaganda for the partisans. Today's mission was different.

"You are to pick up a man," Colonel Karpov had told her. "His name is Nikifor Sholudenko. He has information valuable to the Soviet Union. What this information is, I do not know, only its importance."

"I understand, Comrade Colonel," Ludmila had answered. The more one knew, the more one could be ... encouraged to tell if captured.

An apple orchard halfway between Konotop and Romni. That's what he'd said, at any rate. It would have been easy if she'd been able to fly straight over Konotop on a course for Romni- Well, it would have been easier, anyhow. But the Lizards held Konotop in their little clawed hands. Flying over it would have resulted in the untimely dernise she'd so far managed to forestall.

And so, as usual, she flew a track that reminded her of what she'd learned in biology of the twists of the intestines within the abdominal cavity, all performed less than fifty meters off the ground. If everything went perfectly, the last jink would

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put her right at the orchard. If things went as they usualldid-well, she told herself, I'll manage somehow.

Off to her left, she watched a Lizard tank struggling to pull three or four trucks from the morass into which they'd blundered. The tank wasn't having a much easier time moving than the trucks. Ludmila's lips skinned back from her teeth in a predator's grin. If she hadn't been under orders, she could have shot up the convoy. But deviating from the mission assigned file:///C//2590%20Sci-Fi%20and%20Fantasy%20E-books/Harry%20Turtledove%20-%20Worldwar%2002%20-%20Tilting%20the%20Balance.txt

would have caused her more grief than it was worth. Another change of course and-if everything had gone right-the apple orchard should have been a couple of kilometers dead ahead. It wasn't, of course. She began a search spiral, not something she was happy to do in broad daylight: too much chance of flying past Lizards who weren't so preoccupied as that last bunch had been.

There! Bare-branched trees beginning to go green, with here and there the first white blossoms that before long would make the orchard look as if snow had fallen on it, though all the rest of the world was verdant with spring. A man waited in amongst the trees.

Ludmila looked around for the best place to land her plane. One stretch of boggy ground seemed no different from another. She'd hoped the partisans would have marked off a strip, but no such luck. After a moment, she realized no one had told her this Sholudenko was connected with the partisans. She'd assurned as much, but what were assumptions worth? Not a kopeck.

"As close to the orchard as I can," she said, making the decision aloud. She'd landed on airfields which were just thatfields-so often that she took one more such landing for granted. Down she came, killing her airspeed and peering ahead to make sure she wasn't about to go into a hole or anything of the sort.

She was down and sliding along before she saw the old gnarled roots sticking out of the ground. She realized then, too late, that the orchard had once been bigger than it was now. She couldn't wrench back on the stick and take off again; she wasn't going fast enough.

The Kukuruznik didn't need much room to land. God willing (a thought that welled up unbidden through her Marxist-Leninist education and training), everything would be all right. She almost made it, But just when she started to believe she

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would, the tip of her left ski caught under a root as thick as her arm. The U-2 tried to spin back around the way it had come. A wing dug into the ground; she heard a spar snap. The prop smacked the ground and snapped. One wooden blade whined past her head. Then the Kukuruznik flipped over onto its back, leaving Ludmila hanging upside down in the open pilot's cabin.

"Bozhemoi-my God," she said shakily. No, the dialectic somehow didn't spring to mind when she'd just done her best to kill herself.

Squelch, squelch, squelch. Someone, presumably the fellow who'd been standing in the apple orchard, was coming up to what had been her aircraft and was now just so much junk. In a dry voice, he said, "I've seen that done better." "So have I," Ludmila admitted.Comrade Sholudenko?"

"The same," he said. "They didn't tell me you would be a woman. Are you all right? Do you need help getting out?"

Ludmila took mental inventory. She'd bitten her lip, she'd be bruised, but she didn't think she'd broken anything but her aircraft and her pride. "I'm not hurt," she muttered. "As for the odier--2' She released the catches of her safety harness, came down to earth with a wet splat, and, filthy, crawled out from under the U-2. "Here I am."

"Here you are," he agreed. His Russian, like hers, had a Ukrainian accent. He looked like a Ukrainian peasant, with a wide, high-cheekboned face, blue eyes, and blond hair that looked as if it had been cut under a bowl. He didn't talk like a peasant, though: not only did he sound educated, he sounded cynical and worldly-wise. He went on, "How do you propose to take me where I must go? Will another aircraft come to pick up both of us?"

It was a good question, one for which Ludmila lacked a good answer. Slowly, she said, "If they do, it won't be soon. I'm not due back for some hours, and my aircraft has no radio." No U-2 that she knew of had one; poor communications were the bane of all Soviet forces, ground and air alike.

"And when you do not land at your airstrip, they are more likely to think the Lizards shot you down than that you did it to yourself," Sholudenko said. "You must be a good pilot, or you would have been dead a long time ago."

"Till a few minutes ago, I thought so," Ludmila answered

ruefully. "But yes, you have a point. How important is this formation of yoursT'

"I think it has weight," Sholudenko said. "Someone in an thority must have agreed with me, or they would not have sen you to do tumbling routines for my amusement. How large in news bulks in the world at large ... who can say?"

Ludmila slapped at the mud on her flying suit, which spre it around without getting much of it off. Tumbling routines . . she wanted to hit him for that. But he had influence, or wouldn't have been able to get a plane sent after him. She con tented herself with saying, "I don't think we should linge here. The Lizards are very good at spotting wreckage from th air and coming round to shoot it up."

"A distinct point," Sholudenko admitted- Without a back wards glance at the U-2, he started north across the fields. Ludn-dla glumly tramped after him. She asked, "Do yo have access to a radio yourself? Can you transmit the inform tion that way?"

"Some, at need. Not all." He patted the pack on his back "The rest is photographs." He paused, the first sign of uncel tainty he'd shown. Wondering whether to tell me anythinA Ludmila realized. At length he said, "Does the name Stepaj Bandera mean anything to you?"

"The Ukrainian collaborator and nationalist? Yes, but noth ing good." During the throes of the Soviet Revolution, th

Ukraine had briefly been independent of Moscow and Lenin grad. Bandera. wanted to bring back those days. He was one the Ukrainians who'd greeted the Nazis with open arms, onl to have them throw him in jail a few months later. No on loves a traitor Ludniila thought. You may use him if tha proves convenient, but no one loves him.

"I know of nothing good to hear," Sholudenko said. "Whe the Lizards came, the Nazis set him free to promote solidarit, between the workers and peasants of the occupied Ukraine an their German masters. He paid them back for their treatment o him, but not in a way to gladden our hearts."

Ludmila needed a few seconds to work through the iniplica tions; of that. "He is collaborating with the Lizards?"

"He and most of the Banderists." Sholudenko spat on th ground to show what he thought of that. "They have a Corn mittee of Ukrainian Liberation that has given our patriotic par tisan bands a good deal of grief lately."

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"What is the rodina, the motherland, coming to?" Ladmila said plaintively. "First we had to deal with those who would sooner have seen the Germans enslave our people than live under our Soviet government, and now the Banderists prefer the imperialist aliens to the Soviet Union and the Germans. Something must be dreadfully wrong, to make the people hate government so."

No sooner were the words out of her mouth than she wished she had them back again. She did not know this Nikifor Sholudenko from a hole in the ground. Yes, he dressed like a peasant, but for all she knew, he might be NKVD. In fact, he probably was NKVD, if he had pictures of Banderists in his knapsack. And she'd just criticized the Soviet government in front of him.

Had she been so foolish in 1937, she'd likely have disappeared off the face of the earth. Even in the best of times, she'd have worried about a show trial (or no trial) and a stretch of years in the gulag. She suspected the Soviet prison camp system still ftinctioned at undiminished efficiency; most of it was in the far north, where Lizard control did not reach. Sholudenko murmured, "You do like to live dangerously,

don't you?"

With almost innneasurable relief, Ludmila realized the world wasn't going to fall in on her, at least not right away. "I guess I do," she mumbled, and resolved to watch her tongue more closely in the future.

"In the abstract, I could even agree with you," Sholudenko said. "As things are---2' He spread his hands. That meant that, as far as he was concerned, this conversation was not taking place, and that he would deny anything she attributed to him if the matter came to the attention of an interrogator.

"May I speak-abstractly--too?" she asked.

"Of course," he said. "Me constitution of 1936 guarantees free expression to all citizens of the Soviet Union, as any schoolgirl knows." He spoke without apparent irony, yet his hypothetical schoolgirl had to know also that anyone trying to exercise her free speech (or any of the other rights guaranteed--or entombed-in the constitution) would discover she'd picked a short trip into big trouble.

Somehow, though, she did not think Sholudenko, for all his cynicism, would betray her after giving her leave to speak.

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Maybe that was naive on her part, but she'd already said enough to let him ruin her if that was what he had in mind, and so she said, "It's terrible that our own Soviet government has earned the hatred of so many of its people. Any ruling class will have those who work to betray it, but so many?" "Terrible, yes," Sholudenko said. "Surprising, no." He ticked off points on his fingers like an academician or a political commissar. "Consider, Comrade Pilot: a hundred years ago, Russia was entirely mired in the feudal means of production. Even at the time of the October Revolution, capitalism was far less entrenched here than in Germany or England. Is this not so?" "It is so," Ludmila said. "Very well, then. Consider also the significance of that fact. Suddenly the revolution had occurred-in a world that hated it, a world that would crash it if it could. You are too young to remember the British, the Americans, the Japanese who invaded us, but you will have learned of them." "Yes, but--?' Sholudenko held up a forefinger. "Let me finish, please. Comrade Stalin saw we would be destroyed if we could not

match our enemies in the quantity of goods we turn out. Any-

thing and anyone standing in the way of that had to go. Thus the pact with the Hitlerites: not only did it buy us almost two years' time, but also land from the Finns, on the Baltic, and from the Poles and Rumanians to serve as a shield when the fascist murderers did attack us."

All that shield had been lost within a few weeks of the Nazi invasion. Most of the people in the lands the Soviet,Union had annexed joined the Hitlerites in casting out the Communist Party, which spoke volumes on how much they'd loved falling under Soviet control.

But did that matter? Sholudenko had a point. Without ruthless preparation, the revolution of the workers and peasants would surely have been crushed by reactionary forces, either during the civil war or at German hands.

"Unquestionably, the Soviet state has the right and duty to survive," Ludmila said. Sholudenko nodded approvingly. But the pilot went on, "But does the state have a right to survive in such a way as to make so many of its people prefer the vicious Germans to its own representatives?"

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If she hadn't still been shaky from flipping her airplane, she wouldn't have said anything so foolish to a probable NKVD man, even "abstractly." She looked around the fields through which they were slogging. No one was in sight. If Sholudenko tried to place her under arTest ... well, she carried a 9min Tokarev pistol in a holster on her belt. The comrade might have a tragic accident. If he did, she'd do her best to get his precious pictures back to the proper authorities.

If he contemplated arresting her, he gave no sign of it. Instead, he said, "You are to be congratulated, Comrade Pilot; s is a question most would not think to pose." It was a question most would not dare to pose, but that was another matter. Sholudenko went on, "I'lie answer is yes. Surely you have been trained in the historical use of the dialectic?"

"Of course," Ludmila said indignantly. "Historical progress comes through the conflict of two opposing theses and their resulting synthesis, which eventually generates its own antithesis and causes the struggle to recur."

"Congratulations again-you are well instructed. We stand in the historical process at the step before true communism. Do you doubt that Marx's ideal will be fulfilled in our children's time, or our grandchildren's at the latest?"

"If we survive, I do not doubt it," Ludmila said.

"There is that," Sholudenko agreed, dry as usual. "I believe we should have beaten the Hitlerites in the end. The Lizards are another matter; Party dialecticians still labor to put them into proper perspective. Comrade Stalin has yet to speak definitively on the subject. But that is beside the point-you might have asked the same question had the Lizards never come, daT'

"Yes," Ludmila admitted, wishing she'd never asked the question at all.

Sholudenko said, "If we abandon the hope of our descendants' living under true communism, the historical synthesis will show that reactionary forces were stronger than those of progress and revolution. Whatever we do to prevent that is justified, no matter how hard it may be for some at present."

By everything she'd learned in school, his logic was airtight, however much it went against the grain. She knew she ought to shut up; he'd already shown more patience with her than she had any right to expect. But she said, "What if, in seeking

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to move the balance our way, we are so harsh that we tilt il against us?" "This, too, is a risk which must be considered," he said, "Are you a Party member, Comrade Pilot? You argue most as-

tutely."
 "No," Ludmila answered. Then, having come so far, shc
took one step further: "And you, Comrade --- could you be frorr.

the People's Commissariat for the Interior?"

"Yes, I could be from the NKVD," Sholudenko answere~

evenly. "I could be any number of things, but that one will do." He studied her. "You needed courage, to ask such a question of me."

That last step had almost been one step too far, he meant. Picking her words with care, Ludmila said, "Everything that's happened over the past year and a half-it makes one think about true meanings."

-Fhis I cannot deny," Sholudenko said. "But-to get back to matters more important than my individual case-the dialectic makes me believe our cause will triumph in the end, even against the Lizards."

Faith in the future had kept the Soviets fighting even when things looked blackest, when Moscow seemed about to fall late in 1941. But against the Lizards-"We need more than the dialectic," Ludinila said. "We need more guns and planes and tanks and rockets, and better ones, too."

"This is also true," Sholudenko said. "Yet we also need the people to work and struggle for the Soviet state, not on behalf of imperialist invaders, whether from Germany or the depths of space. The dialectic predicts that on the whole we shall have their support."

Instead of answering, Ludmila stooped by the edge of a little pond that lay alongside the field through which she and Sholudenko were walking. She cupped her hands, scooped up water, and scrubbed mud from her face. She pulled up dead grass and did her best to scrape her leather flying suit clean, too, but that was a bigger job. Eventually the mud there would dry and she could knock most of it off. Till then she'd just have to put up with it, Plenty of foot soldiers had gone through worse.

She straightened up, pointed to the pack on Nikifor Sholudenko's back. "And for those who choose to ignore the teaching of the dialecti

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"Da, Comrade Pilot. For those folk, we have people like me." Sholudenko smiled broadly. His teeth were small and white and even. They reminded Ludmila of a wolf's fangs just the same.

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Mutt Daniels crouched in a foxhole on the edge of Randolph, Illinois, hoping and praying the Lizard bombardment would ease up before it smeared him across the small-town landscape.

He felt naked with just a hole in the ground for cover. Back in France during the Great War, he'd been able to dive into a deep dugout when German shells came calling. If you were unlucky, of course, a shell would come right in after you, but most of the time a dugout was pretty safe.

No dugouts here. No proper trench lines, either, not really. This war, unlike the last one, moved too fast to let people build .elaborate field fortifications.

"Plenty of foxholes, though," Matt muttered. The local landscape looked like pictures of craters on the moon. The Lizards had taken Randolph last summer in their drive on Chicago. Patton's men had taken it back in the pincers movement that brought them into Bloomington, six or eight miles north. Now the Lizards were moving again. If Randolph fell, they'd be well positioned to drive back into BloomiDgton.

Yet another shell crashed into the ground, close enough to lift Daniels into the air and fling him back to earth as if bodyslammed by a wrestler. Dirt pattered down on him. His lungs ached from the blast when he drew in a shaky breath.

"Might as well be between Washington and Richmond, the way we're goin' back and forth here," Daniels said. Both his grandfathers had fought for the South in the War Between the States; as a small boy, he'd listened avidly to the tales they told, tales that grew taller with each passing year. No matter

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how tall the tales got, though, France and now this convinced him his grandfathers hadn't had it as tough as they'd thought.

More shells whistled overhead, these southbound from Bloomington. Mutt hoped they were registered on the Lizard guns, but they probably weren't; the Lizards outranged American artillery. Giving Lizard infantry a taste of what he was going through wasn't the worst thing in the world, either. A flight of prop-driven fighters screamed by at treetop height. Mutt touched his helmet in salute to courage; pilots who flew against the Lizards didn't last long.

Once the planes zipped out of sight, he didn't spot them again. He hoped that meant they were returning to base by a different route instead of getting knocked down. "No way to find out for sure," he said.

He abruptly stopped being interested, too, because Lizard shelling picked up again. He embraced the ground like a lover, pressed his face against her cool, damp neck.

Some of the blasts that shook him where he lay were explosions of the same sort he'd known in France. Others had a sound he'd first met retreating toward Chicago: a smaller bang, followed by a pattering as of hail.

"Y'all want to look sharp," he called to the scattered members of his squad. "Fhey're throwin' out them goddamn little mines again." He hated those little baseball-sized blue explosives. Once a regular shell went off, at least it was gone. But the Lizards' fancy ammo scattered potential mutilation over what seemed like half an acre and left it sitting there waiting to happen. "Instant goddamn mine field," Mutt said resentfully.

After a while, the barrage let up. Daniels grabbed'his tommy gun and took a cautious peek out of the foxhole. If the Boches had been doing that shelling, they'd follow up with an infantry attack just as sure as you were supposed to hit the cutoff man. But the Lizards didn't always play by the book Mutt knew. Sometimes they fooled him on account of that. More oftel4 he thought, they hurt themselves.

So here: if they wanted to drive the Americans out of Randolph, they'd never have a better chance than now, while the shelling had stunned and disorganized their human foes. But they stayed back in their own lines south of town. The only sign of action from them was a single plane high overhead, its path through the sky marked by a silvery streak of condensation.

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Mutt gave the aircraft a one-finger salute. "Gonna see how bad you beat on us before you send in the ground-pounders are you?" he growled. "Mis'able cheap bastards." What was infantry for, after all, if not to pay the butcher's bill? His battered eardrums made the quiet that followed the b rage seem even more intense than it was. The short, bang! that punctuated it wouldn't have seemed worth noticing save for the shriek right after. "Oh, shit," Mutt exclaimed. "Somebody went and did somethin' dumb. Goddamn it to hell, why don't nobody nev listen to me?" He'd thought minor-league ballplayers were bad at paying attention to what a manager told them. Well, they were, but they looked like Einsteins when you set 'em next to a bunch of soldiers.

He scrambled out of the foxhole. His body was skinnier and sprier than it had been while he was wearing his Decatur Commodores uniform, but he'd have cheerfully gone back to fat and flab if anybody offered him the choice.

No one did, of course. He crawled over battered ground and through ruined buildings toward where that shriek had come from. Memory wasn't his only guide; a low moaning kept him on course. Kevin Donlan lay just outside a shell hole, clutching his left ankle. Below it, everything was red ruin. Mutt's stomach did a slow lurch. "Jesus Christ, kid, what did you do?" he said, though the answer to that was all too obvious.

"Sarge?" Donlan's voice was light and clear, as if his body hadn't really told him yet how bad he was hurt. "Sarge, I just got out to take a leak. I didn't want to piss in my hole, you know, and--2'

Next to what he had, swimming a river of piss was nothing. No point telling him that, though, not now. "Miss Lucille!" Mutt bawled. While he waited for her, he got a wound bandage and a packet of sulfa powder out of a pouch on Donlan's belt. He dusted the powder onto the wound. He wondered if he ought to get the remains of Donlan's shoe off his foot before he started bandaging it, but when he tried, the kid started screaming again, so he said the hell with it and wrapped the bandage over foot, shoe, and all.

Lucille Potter scrambled up a minute later, maybe less. In dirty fatigues and a helmet, she looked like a man except that

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she didn't need a shave. The helmet bore a Red Cross on a white circle; the Lizards had learned what that mark meant, and weren't any worse than people about respecting it. She looked at the way blood was soaking through the bandage, clicked her tongue between her teeth. "We've got to get a tourniquet on that wound, Sergeant."

Mutt looked down at Donlan. The kid's eyes had rolled up in his head. Mutt said, "You do that, Miss Lucille, he's gonna lose the foot."

"I know," she said. "But if we don't do it, he's going to bleed to death. And he'd lose the foot anyhow; no way to save it with a wound like that." Her sharp stare dared him to argue. He couldn't; he'd seen enough wounds in France and Illinois to know she was right.

She cut Donlan's tom trousers, took out a length of bandage and a stick, and set the tourniquet. "Hell of a thing," Daniels said, to himself and her both: another young soldier on crutches for the rest of his life.

"It's hard, I know," Lucille Potter answered. "But would you rather have him dead? Ten years from now, if this war ever ends, would he rather we'd let him die?"

"I reckon not," Daniels said. In his younger days in Mississippi, a lot of the older white men he'd known were shy an arm or a leg or a foot from the States War. They weren't glad of it, naturally, but they got on better than you'd expect. When you got right down to it, people were pretty tough critters. He sent a runner over to Captain Maczek. Where the captain

was, the company field telephone would be, too. After that, there was nothing to do but wait. Donlan seemed pretty shocky. When Mutt remarked on it, Lucille Potter said, "It's probably a blessing in disguise-he won't feel that foot as much."

The forward aid station wasn't much more than a quarter of a mile back of the line. A four-man litter team got to Donlan in less than fifteen minutes. The boss of the team, a corporal, looked at the youngster's ruined foot and shook his head. "Nothing much we'll be able to do about that," he said. "Fhey'll have to take him back into Bloomington, and I expect they'll chop it off there."

"You're almost certainly right," Lucille said. All the litter bearers stared when she spoke. She stared right back, daring

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them to make something out of it. None of them did. She went on, "Me sooner he goes back, the sooner they can treat him." The team got Donlan onto the stretcher and carried him away. "Too stinkin' bad," Mutt said. "He's a good kid. Ain't this war a--2' He stopped, inhibited in his language by a woman's presence. After a sigh, he resumed, "Lord, I wish I had me a cigarette, or even a chaw."

"Filthy habits, both of them," Lucille Potter said, her voice

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so sharp he turned to give her an irritated look. Then, with a wry chuckle, she added, "I wish I had a smoke, too. I ran out of tobacco months ago, and I miss it like anything." "Might be some back in Bloomington," Mutt said. "We ever get a real lull, could be I'd send Szabo back there to see how the foraging is. You want to liberate somethin' from where it rightly belongs, ol' Dracula's the man for the job." "He's certainly good at coming up with home brew and

moonshine," Lucille said, "but people make those around here. Illinois isn't tobacco country, so we can't get hold of bootleg cigars."

"Can't get hold of much of anything these days," Mutt said. "I'm skinnier'n I've been for close to thirty years." "It's good for you," she answered, which made him give her another resentful glance. She was on the lean side, and looked to have always been that way: not an ounce of excess flesh anywhere. What did she know about what felt comfortable and what didn't9

He wasn't in a mood to argue, though, so he said, "I just hope Donlan's gonna make out okay. He's a good kid. Hell of a thing to be crippled so young."

"Better than dying. I thought we already settled that," Lucille Potter answered. "I'm just glad the field telephone was working and the fitter crew was on the ball. If they hadn't gotten here inside of about another ten minutes, I was going to take his foot off myself." She tapped her little black bag. "I've got some ether in here. He wouldn't have felt anything."

"You know how?" Daniels asked. Battlefield wounds were one thing, but cutting into a man on purpose ... He shook his head. He was sure he couldn't do it.

Lucille said, "I haven't had to do an amputation yet, but I've read up on the technique. 1--2'

"I know that," Mutt broke in. "Every time I see you, you got a doctor's book in your hand."

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"I have to. Nurses don't operate, and I wasn't even a scrub nurse to watch doctors work. But a combat medic had better be able to do as much as she can, because we're not always going to have a lull like this one to get our casualties back to the aid station. Does that make sense to you?"

"Yeah," Daniels said. "You usually do--2' Off to the left, small arms began to chatter on both sides of the line. Mutt interrupted himself to scramble into the shell hole from which unlucky Kevin Donlan had emerged to relieve himself. Lucille Potter jumped in beside him. Her only combat experience was what she'd had in the past few weeks, but take cover was a lesson you learned in a hurry, at least if you wanted to keep on living.

Then the artillery started up again, the Lizards firing steadily, the Americans in bursts of a few rounds here, a few rounds there, a few somewhere else. They'd learned the hard way that if their pieces stayed in one place for more than a short salvo, the Lizards would zero in on them and knock them out.

The ground began tossing like the stormy sea, though Mutt had never been in a natural storm that made such a god-awful racket. He pushed Lucille down flat on her belly, then lay on top of her to protect her from splinters as best he could. He didn't know whether he did it because she was a woman or because she was the medic. Either way, he figured, she needed to stay as safe as possible.

As suddenly as it had begun, the barrage stopped. Mutt stuck his head up right away. Sure as hell, Lizard ground troops were scurrying forward. He squeezed off a long burst with his tommy gun. The Lizards flattened out on the ground. He didn't know whether he'd hit any of them; the tommy gun wasn't accurate out past a couple of hundred yards.

He wished he had one of the automatic weapons the Lizards carried. Their effective range was something like double that of his submachine gun, and their cartridges packed a bigger kick, too. He'd heard of dogfaces who toted captured specimens, but keeping them in the right ammo was a bitch and a half. Most of the weapons the Lizards lost went straight back to the high-forehead boys in G-2. With luck, the Americans would get toys just as good one of these days.

That train of thought abruptly got derailed. He moaned, down deep in his throat. The Lizards had a tank with them.

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Now he understood what the poor damned Germans had fe like in France in 1918 when those monsters came clankin their way and they couldn't stop them or even do much slow them down.

The tank and the Lizard infantry screening it slowly a(vanced together. The aliens had learned something since th winter before; they'd lost a lot of tanks then for lack of infai try support. Not any more. file:///C|/2590% 20 Sci-Fi% 20 and % 20 Fantasy% 20 E-books/Harry% 20 Turtled ove% 20-% 20 Worldwar% 2002% 20-% 20 Tilting% 20 the% 20 Balance.txt

Lucille Potter peered over the forward lip of the foxhole b side Mutt. "nat's trouble," she said. He nodded. It was bi trouble. If he ran, the tank's machine gun or the Lizard fo soldiers would pick him off. If he stayed, the tank would pe etrate the position and then the Lizard infantry would get hin Off to the right, somebody fired one of those new b rockets at the Lizard tank. The rocket hit the tank right in th turret, but it didn't penetrate. "Dan-in fool," Mutt ground on Doctrine said you were supposed to shoot a bazooka only the rear or sides of a Lizard tank; the frontal armor on th aliens' machines was just too thick for you to kill one with straight-on shot.

Being too eager cost the fellow who'd fired at the tank. turned toward him and his buddies and opened up first with i machine gun and then its main armament. For good measun the Lizard infantry moved in on the bazooka man, too-the job was to make sure nobody got a good shot at the fighting vehicle. By the time they were done, there probab wasn't enough of the American and his buddies left to bur3

Which meant they forgot about Mutt. For a second, h didn't think that would do him any good: if the line was ove run, he would be, too, in short order. Ever so cautiously, h raised his head again. There sat the tank, maybe a hundred fe away, ass end on to him, still pouring fire at a target more nec essary to destroy than he was.

He ducked back down, turned to Lucille Potter. "Gi that ether," he snapped.

"What? Why?" She took a protective grip on the black baj "Me--stuff'll bum, won't itT9 His pa's hard hand on hi backside and across his face had taught him never to swe where a woman could hear, but he almost slipped that tim("Now ginime it!"

Lucille's eyes widened. She opened the bag, handed him

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glass jar. It was about half full of a clear, oily-looking liquid. He hefted it thoughtfully. Yeah, it would throw just fine. His bat had kept him from having a decent big-league career; nobody'd ever complained about his arm. He'd been a good man with a grenade in France, too.

It wasn't even as if he had to throw all of a sudden, as he would have with a runner breaking for second. He could take a few moments, think through what he was going to do, see every step of it in his mind before it actually happened.

Doing that took longer than the throw itself. He popped up as if exploding out of his crouch behind a batter, fired the jar for all he was worth, and ducked back down again. Nobody who wasn't looking right at him would have known he'd appeared.

"Did you hit it?" Lucille demanded.

"Miss'Lucille, I tell you for a fact, I didn't stay up long enough to find out. I tried to smash it off the back of the turret so it'd drip down into that nice, hot engine compartment." Mutt's shoulder twinged; he hadn't put that much into a snap throw in years. It had felt straight, but you never could tell. A little long, a little short, and he might as well not have bothered.

Then he heard hoarse yells from the Americans in other scattered foxholes. That encouraged him to take another cautious peek. When he did, he yelled himself, in sheer delight. Flames danced a over the engine compartment and were licking up the back of the turret. As he watched, an escape hatch popped open and a Lizard jumped onto the ground.

Mutt ducked down for his tommy gun. "Miss Lucille, that there is one Lizard tank that's out stealing."

She pounded him on the back as any other soldier would have. He wouldn't have tried to kiss another soldier, though. She let him do it, but she didn't do much in the way of kissing back. He didn't worry about that; he popped up out of the foxhole and started blazing away at the fleeing Lizard tank crew and the foot soldiers, who were much less terrifying without armor to back them up.

The Lizards fell back. The tank kept burning. A Sherman would have brewed up a hell of a lot faster than it did, but eventually its ammunition and its fuel tank went up in a spectacular blast.

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Mutt felt as if he'd been hit over the head with a sledg hammer. "Lord!" he exclaimed. "You couldn't make a faric explosion in the movies."

"No, probably not," Lucille Potter agreed, "nor one that d more for us. We'll hold Randolph a while longer now, I e

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pect. That was a wonderful throw; I've never seen a better You must have been a very fine baseball player."

"You don't make the majors unless you're pretty fair," said, shrugging. "You don't stick there unless you're better that, and I wasn't." He brushed a hand across the front of h shirt, as if he'd been a pitcher shaking off a sign rather than catcher; baseball wasn't what he wanted to talk about at d moment. After a couple of tentative coughs, he said, "Mi Lucille, I hope you don't think I was too forward there."

"When you kissed me, you mean? I didn't mind," she sai but not in a way that encouraged him to try it again; by tone, once had been okay but twice wouldn't be. He kicked the churned-up dirt inside the foxhole. Lucille added, "I'm interested ' Mutt, not that way. It's not you-you're a go man. But I'm just not."

"Okay," he said; he was too old to let his pecker do b thinking for him. But that didn't mean he'd forgotten he h one. He pushed up his helmet so he could scratch his he above one ear. "If you like me, why--2' He broke off there. she didn't want to talk about it, that was her business. For the first time since he'd met her, he found her at a to for words. She frowned, obviously not caring for that herse Slowly, she said, "Mutt, it's not something I can easily explai or care to. 1--2'

Easily or not, she didn't get the chance to explain. Follo ing a cry of "Miss Lucille!" a soldier from another squad the platoon came scrambling over to the foxhole and gasIX out, "Miss Lucille, we've got two men down, one hit in shoulder, the other in the chest. Peters-die guy with the che wound-he's in bad shape."

"I'm coming," she said briskly, and climbed out of the ho she'd shared with Mutt. As she hurried away, he scratched h head again.

Even in these times, David Goldfarb had expected things be handled with more ceremony. The Prime Minister, after al

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did not visit the Bruntingthorpe Research and Development Test Flying Aerodrome every day.

But there was no line of RAF men in blue serge standing to attention for Winston Churchill to inspect, no flyby of a squadron of Pioneers or Meteors to impress him with what Fred Hipple and his team had accomplished in jet propulsion. In fact, up until an hour before Churchill got to Bruntingthorpe, no one knew he was coming.

Group Captain I-Epple brought the news back from the administrative section's Nissen hut. It produced a brief, startled silence from his subordinates, who were laboring mightily to pull secrets from the wreckage of the Lizard fighter-bomber that had been brought down not far from the aerodrome.

T~rpically, Flight Officer Basil Roundbush was first to break that silence: "Generous of him to give us notice enough to make sure our flies are closed."

"I can't tell you how delighted I am to be confident yours is, dear boy," Hippie returned. Roundbush covered his face with his hands, acknowledging the hit. The group captain might have been shorter than his subordinates, but gave away nothing in wit. He continued, "I gather no one knew until moments ago: quite a lot of security laid on, for reasons which should be plain enough."

"Wouldn't do for the Lizards to pay us a visit just now, would it, sir?" Goldfarb said.

"Yes, that would prove--embarTassing," Hipple said, an understatement Roundbush might have coveted.

And so, just as Goldfarb had, the Prime Minister came down from Leicester by bicycle, pedaling along on an elderly model like a grandfather out for a constitutional. He dismounted outside the meteorology hut, where Hipple and his team still labored after the latest Lizard bombing raid. When Goldfarb saw the round pink face and the familiar cigar through the window, he gulped. He'd never expected to meet the leader of the British Empire.

Wing Commander Julian Peary's reaction was more prosaic. In the big deep voice that went so oddly with his slight physique, he said, "I do hope he's not damaged any of the beets."

it was only half a joke. Like everyone else at Bruntingthorpe-like everyone else in Britain, or so it seemed-Hipple's team cultivated a garden. The British Isles held more

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people than they could easily feed, and shipments from America were down, not so much because the Lizards bombed them (they still took much less notice of ships than of air or rail o road transport) as because the Yanks, beset at home, had little to spare. So, gardens. Beets, potatoes, peas, beans, turnips, parsuips cabbages, maize ... whatever the climate would permit, peopl(grew-and sometimes guarded with cricket bats, savage dogs or shotguns against two-legged thieves too big to be frightene(by scarecrows.

Everyone did come to attention when the Prime Minister accompanied by a bodyguard who looked as if he neve smiled, walked into the Nissen hut. "As you were, gentlemen please," Churchill said. "After all, officially I am not here, bu speaking over the BBC in London. Because I am in the habi of speaking live, I can occasionally use the subterfuge of soun(recordings to let myself be in two places at once." He let ou a conspiratorial chuckle. "I hope you won't give me away." Automatically, Goldfarb shook his head. Hearing Churchill' voice without the static and distortion of a wireless set was t(him even more intimate than seeing the Prime Minister in th tubby flesh rather than through photographs: pictures capture(his image more accurately than the airwaves did his voice.

Churchill strode over to Fred Hipple, who was standing be side a wooden table on which lay pieces of the turbine fron the crashed Lizard fighter's jet engine. Pointing to them, thi Prime Minister asked, "How long before we shall be able v duplicate that engine, Group Captain?"

"Duplicate it, sir?" Hipple said. "It won't be soon; the Liz ards are far ahead of us in control mechanisms for, the engine in machining techniques, and in the materials they employ they do things with titanium and ceramics we've never dream of, much less attempted. But in determining how and why the make things as they do, we learn how to do better ourselves!

"I see," Churchill said thoughtfully. "So even though yoi have the book in front of you'~-he pointed to the disassem bled chunks of turbine again-"you cannot simply read o what is on its pages, but must decode it as if it were writte in a cipher."

"That's a good analogy, sir," Hipple said. "The facts of th, engine are relatively straightforward, even if we can't yet pro duce one identical to it ourselves. When it comes to the file:///Cl/2590%20Sci-Fi%20and%20Fantasy%20E-books/Harry%20Turtledove%20-%20Worldwar%2002%20-%20Tilting%20the%20Balance.txt

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"So I have been given to understand," Churchill said, "al though I do not fully grasp where the difficulty hes."

"Let me take you over to Radarman Goldfarb, then, sirl Hipple said. "He joined the team to help emplace a radar se in production Meteors, and has labored valiantly to unlock th secrets of the Lizard unit that fell into our hands."

As the group captain brought the Prime Minister over to hi workbench, Goldfarb thought, not for the first time, that Fre Hipple was a good man to work for. A lot of superior officer would have done all the explaining to the brass themselves and pretended their subordinates didn't exist. But Hipple intro duced Goldfarb to Churchill, then stood back and let him speak for himself.

He didn't find it easy at first. When he stammered, th Prime Minister shifted the subject away from radar: "Gold farb," he said musingly. "Was I not told you are the lad with a family connection to ME Russie, the former Lizard spokes man from Poland?"

"Yes, that's true, sir," Goldfarb answered. "We're cousins When my father came to England before the Great War, he urged his sister and her husband to come with him, and he kept urging them to get out until the second war started in '39. They wouldn't listen to him, though. Moishe Russie is their son."

"So your family kept up the connection, then?"

"Till the war cut us off, yes, sir. After that, I didn't know what had happened to any of my relatives until Moishe began speaking on the wireless." He didn't tell Churchill most of his kinsfolk had died in the ghetto; the Prime Minister presumably knew that already. Besides, Goldfarb couldn't think about their ate without filling up with a terrible anger that made him wish England were still at war with the Nazis rather than the Lizards.

Churchill said, "I shan't forget this link. It may yet prove useful for us." Before Goldfarb could work up the nerve to ask him how, he swung back to radar: "Suppose you explain to me how and why this set is so different from ours, and so baffling."

"I'll try, sir," Goldfarb said. "One of our radars, like a wireless set, depends on valves-vacuum tubes, the Americans

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would say-for its operation. The Lizards don't use valves. Instead, they have these things." He pointed to the boards with little lumps and silvery spiderwebs of metal set across them. "And soT' Churchill said. "Why should a mere substitution pose a problem?"

"Because we don't know how the bloody things work," Goldfarb blurted, Wishing the ground would open up and swallow him, he tried to make amends: "That is, we have no theory to explain how these little lumps of silicon-which is what they are, sir---can perform the function of valves. And, because they're nothing like what we're used to, we're having to find out what each one does by cut and try, so to speak: we run power into it and see what happens. We don't know how much power to use, either."

Churchill fortunately took his strong language in stride. "And what have you learnt from your experiments?"

"That the Lizards know more about radar than we do, sir," Goldfarb answered. "Mat's the long and short of it, I'm afraid. We can't begin to make parts to match these: a chemical engineer with whom I've spoken says our best silicon isn't pure enough. And some of the little lumps, when you look at them under a microscope, are so finely etched that we can't imagine how, let alone why, it's been done."

"How and why are for those with the luxury of time, which we have not got," Churchill said. "We need to know what the device does, whether we can match it, and how to make it less useful to the foe."

"Yes, sir," Goldfarb said admiringly. Churchill was no boffin, but he had a firm grip on priorities. No one yet fully understood the theory of the magnetron, or how and why the narrow channels connecting its eight outer holes to the larger central one exponentially boosted the strength of the signal. That the device operated so, however, was undeniable fact, and had given the RAF a great lead over German radar-although not, worse luck, over what the Lizards used.

Group Captain Hipple said, "What have we learnt which is exploitable, Goldfarb?"

"Sorry, sir; I should have realized at once that was what the Prime Minister needed to know. We can copy the design of the Lizards' magnetron; that, at least, we recognize. It gives a signal of shorter wavelength and hence more precise direction than any we've made ourselves. And the nngi-. di-h thnt re.-

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ceives returning pulses is a very fine bit of engineering which shouldn't be impossible to incorporate into later marks of the Mete,or."

"Very good, Radarman Goldfarb," Churchill said. "I shan't keep you from your work any longer. With the aid of men like you and your comrades in this hut, we shall triumph over this adversity as we have over all others. And you, Radarman, you may yet have a role to play even more important than your work here."

The Prime Minister looked uncommonly cherubic. Three years in the RAF had taught Goldfarb that rankers who wore that expression had more -up their sleeves than their arms. They'd also taught him he couldn't do anything about it, so he said what he had to say: "I'll be happy to serve in any way I can, sir."

Churchill nodded genially, then went back to Hipple and his colleagues for more talk about jet engines. After another few minutes, he put his hat back on, tipped it to Hipple, and left the Nissen hut.

Basil Roundbush grinned at Goldfarb. "I say, old man, after Winnie makes you an MP, do remember the little people who knew you before you grew rich and famous."

"An MPT' Goldfarb shook his head in mock dismay. "Lord, I hope that's not what he had in mind. He said he had something important instead of this."

That sally met with general approval. One of the meteorologists said, "Good job you didn't tell him you're a Labour supporter, Goldfarb."

"It doesn't matter, not now." Goldfarb had backed Labour, yes, as offering more to the working man than the Tories could (and, as was true of a lot of Jewish immigrants and their progeny, his own politics had a slant to the left). But he also knew no one but Churchill could have rallied Britain against Hitler, and no one else could have kept her in the fight against the Lizards.

Thinking of the Nazis and the Lizards together made Goldfarb think of the invasion so many had feared in 1940. The Germans hadn't been able to bring it off, not least because radar kept them from driving the RAF from the skies. If the Lizards came, no one could offer any such guarantee of success. Ironically, the Germans holding northern France served as England's shield against invasion by the aliens.

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But the shield was not perfect. The Lizards had control the air when they chose to use it. They could leapfrog ov northern France and the Channel both. Just because they hadn' done it didn't mean they wouldn't or couldn't.

Goldfarb snorted. The only thing he could do about that was try to make British radar more effective, which would in turn make the Lizards pay more if they decided to invade. It wasn' as much as he'd have wanted to do in an ideal world, bu it was more than most people could say, so he supposed i would do.

And he'd not only met Winston Churchill, but talked busi ness with him! That wasn't something everyone could say. He couldn't write home to his family that the Prime Minister h been here-the censors would never pass it-but he could tel them if he ever got down to London. He'd almost given up on the notion of leave.

Fred Hipple said, "Churchill's full of good ideas. The only difficulty is, he's also full of bad ones, and sometimes telli the one from the other's not easy till after the fact."

"What he said about tackling the Lizards' radar circuitry was first-rate," Goldfarb said. "What is more important for u

now an w or why; we can use what we learn withou knowing why it works, just as some stupid clot can drive motorcar without cluttering his head with the theory of internal combustion."

"Ali, but someone must understand the theory, or your stu pid clot would have no motorcar to drive," Basil Roundbus said.

"Mat's true only to a limited degree," Hipple said. "Even now, theory takes you only so far in aircraft design; eventually, you just have to go out and see how the beast flies. That wa much more the case during the Great War, when practically ev erything, from what the older engineers have told me, was cu and try. Yet the aircraft they manufactured did fly."

"Most of the* time," Roundbush said darkly. "I'm bloody glad I never had to go up in them."

Goldfarb ignored that. Roundbush made wisecracks t same way other men fiddled with rosaries or cracked the knuckles or tugged at one particular lock of hair: it was a vous tic, nothing more.

Clucking softly to himself, Goldfarb fixed a power source to one side of a Lizard circuit element and an ohmmeter to the file:///C//2590%20Sci-Fi%20and%20Fantasy%20E-books/Harry%20Turtledove%20-%20Worldwar%2002%20-%20Tilting%20the%20Balance.txt

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other. He'd measure voltage and amperage next: with these strange components, you couldn't tell what they were supposed to do to a current that ran through them except by experiment. He turned on the power. The ohmmeter swung; the component did resist the current's flow. Goldfarb grunted in satisfaction. He'd thought it would: it looked like others that had. He noted down the reading, as well as where the circuit element sat on its board and what it looked like. Then he turned off the power and hooked up the voltage meter. One tiny piece at a time, he added to the jigsaw puzzle.

As Vyacheslav Molotov turned the knob that led him into the antechamber in front of Stalin's night office, he felt and suppressed a familiar nervousness. Elsewhere in the Soviet Union, his word went unchallenged. In negotiating with the capitalist states that hated the Soviet revolution, even in discussions with the Lizards, he was the unyielding representative of his nation. He knew he had a reputation for being inflexible, and did everything he could to play it up.

Not here, though. Anyone who was unyielding and inflexible with Stalin would soon know the stiffness of death. Then Molotov had no more time for such reflections, for Stalin's orderly--oh, the fellow had a fancy title, but that was what he was-nodded to him and said, '~Go on in. He expects you, Vyacheslav Mikhailovich."

Molotov nodded and entered Stalin's sanctum. This was not where the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was photographed with diplomats or soldiers. He had a fancy office upstairs for that. He worked here, at hours that suited him. It was one-thirty in the morning. Stalin would be at it for at least another couple of hours. Those who dealt with him had to adjust themselves accordingly.

Stalin looked up from the desk with the gooseneck lamp. "Good morning, Vyacheslav Mikhailovich," he said with his throaty Georgian accent. His voice held no irony; morning it was, as far as he was concerned.

"Good morning, losef Vissarionovich," Molotov replied. Whatever his feelings about the matter were, he had schooled himself not to reveal them. He found that important at any time, doubly so around the ruler of the Soviet Union. Stalin waved Molotov to a chair, then stood up himself.

Though well-proportioned, he was short, and did not like other

"We also had such a program in place," Stalin answere placidly.

That relieved Molotov, who had heard of no such program He wondered how far along Soviet scientists had been com pared to those in the decadent capitalist and fascist countries Faith in the strength of Marxist-Leninist precepts made hi hope they might have been ahead; concern over how far Soviet Union had had to come since the revolution made hi fear they might have been behind. With hope and fear so com $file:///C|/2590\%\,20Sci-Fi\%\,20 and\%\,20F antasy\%\,20E-books/Harry\%\,20Turtledove\%\,20-\%\,20Worldwar\%\,2002\%\,20-\%\,20Tilting\%\,20 the\%\,20B alance.txt$

mingled, he dared not ask Stalin which was the true state of fairs,

Stalin went on, "We now have an advantage over both th United States and the Hitlerites: in that raid against the Lizard last fall, we obtained a considerable supply of the explosiv metal, as you know. I had hoped the German taking the met back to the Hitlerites would be waylaid in Poland, and hi share lost." Stalin looked unhappy. So did Molotov, who said, "This much I did know, and ho

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men looming over him. What he did not like did not occur. filled his pipe from a leather tobacco pouch, lit a match, an got the pipe going. The harsh smell of rwkhorka, cheap Russian tobacco, in Molotov's nose twitch in spite of himself Under the iron-g mustache, Stalin's lip curled. "I know it's vile, but it's all I c find these days. What shipping we get has no room aboard f(luxuries."

That said as much as anything about the plight in whic mankind found itself When the leader of one of the thre greatest nations on the planet could not get decent tobacc even for himself, the Lizards were the ones with the upp hand. Well, if he understood what was in Stalin's mind, th meeting was to be about how to tilt the balance back the oth way.

Stalin sucked in more smoke, paced back and forth. A length he said, "So the Americans and Germans are pressin ahead with their programs to make bombs of this explosiv metal?"

"So I have been given to understand, Iosef Vissarionovich, Molotov answered. "I am also told by our intelligence service that they had these programs in place before the Lizards beg their invasion of the Earth." Ι

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he had to give up half his share, though not all, to the Polish Jews, who then passed it on to the Americans."

"Yes," Stalin said. "Hitler is a fool, do you know that?" "You have said it many times, losef Vissarionovich," Molotov answered. That was true, but it had not kept Stalin from making his nonaggression pact with Germany in 1939, or from living up to it for almost the next two years, or from being so confident Hitler would also live up to it that he'd ignored warnings of an impending Nazi attack, ignored them so completely that the Soviet state had almost crashed in ruins because of it. Since Molotov had supported Stalin in those choices, he could hardly bring them up now (if he hadn't supported him then, he would be in no position to bring them up now).

Stalin drew on his pipe again. His cheeks, pitted from a boyhood bout of smallpox, twitched. with distaste. "Not even from so close as Turkey can I get decent tobacco. But do you know why I say Hitler is a fool?"

"For wantonly anacking the peace-loving people of the Soviet Union, who had done nothing to deserve it." Molotov gave the obvious answer, and a true one, but it left him unhappy. Stalin was looking for something else.

Sure enough, he shook his head. But, to Molotov's relief, he was only amused, not angry. "That is not what was in my mind, Vyacheslav Mikhailovich. I say he was a fool because, when his scientists discovered the uranium atom could be split, they published their findings for all the world to see." Stalin chuckled rheumily. "Had we made that finding here ... Can you imagine such an article appearing in the Proceedings of the Akademia Nauk, the Soviet Academy of Sciences?"

"Hardly," Molotov said, and he chuckled, too. He was normally the most mirthless of men, but when Stalin laughed, you laughed with him. Besides, this was the sort of thing he did find funny. Stalin was dead right here-Soviet secrecy would have kept such an important secret from leaking out where prying eyes could fasten on it.

"I will tell you something else that will amuse you," Stalin said. "It takes a certain amount of explosive metal to explode, our scientists tell me. Below this amount, it will not go off no matter what you do. Do you understand? Oh, it is a lovely joke." Stalin laughed again.

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Molotov also laughed, but uncertainly. This time, he did not see the joke. sensed that; his uncanny skill at scenting Stalin must have weakness in his subordinates was not least among the talents that had kept him in power for twenty years. Still in that jovial mood, he saicL "Never fear, Vyacheslav Mikhailovich; I shall file:///C//2590%20Sci-Fi%20and%20Fantasy%20E-books/Harry%20Turtledove%20-%20Worldwar%2002%20-%20Tilting%20the%20Balance.txt

explain. I would far sooner the Germans and Americans had no explosive metal, but because the Polish Jews divided it between them, neither has enough for a bomb. Now do you see "No," Molotov confessed, but he reversed course a moment later: "Wait. Yes, perhaps I do. Do you mean that we, with an undivided share, have enough to make one of these bombs for ourselves?"

"That is exactly what I mean:' Stalin said. "See, you are a clever fellow after all. The Germans and the Americans will still have to do all the research they would have required anyhow, but we-we shall soon be ready to fight the Lizards fire against fire, so to speak."

Just contemplating that felt good to Molotov. Like Stalin, like everyone, he had lived in dread of the day when Moscow, like Berlin and Washington, might suddenly cease to exist. To be able to retaliate in kind against the Lizards brought a glow of anticipation to his sallow features.

But his joy was not undiluted. He said, "losef Vissarionovich, we shall have the one bomb, with no immediate prospect for producing more, is that right? Once we have used the weapon in our bands, what is to keep the Lizards from dropping a great many such weapons on us911

Stalin scowled. He did not care for anyone going against anything he said, even in the slightest way. Nevertheless, he thought seriously before he answered; Molotov's question was to the point. At last he said, "First of all, our scientists will go on working to produce explosive metal for us. They will be strongly encouraged to succeed." Stalin's smile ren-drided Molotov of that of a lion resting against a zebra carcass from which it had just finished feeding. Molotov had no trouble visualizing the sort of encouragement the Soviet nuclear physicists would get: dachas, cars, women if they wanted them, for success ... and the gulag or a bullet in the back of the neck if they failed. Probably a couple of them would be purged just to focus the minds of the others on V

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what they were doing. Stalin's methods were ugly, but they got results.

"How long before the physicists can do this for us?" Molotov said.

"They babble about three or four years, as if this were not an emergency," Stalin said dismissively. "I have given them eighteen months. They shall do as the Party requires of them, or else suffer the consequences."

Molotov chose his words with care: "It might be better if they did not undergo the supreme penalty, Iosef Vissarionovich. Men of their technical training would be difficult to replace adequately."

"Yes, yes." Stalin sounded impatient, always a danger sign. "But they are the servants of the peasants and workers of the Soviet Union, not their masters; we must not let them get ideas above their station, or the virus of the bourgeoisie will infect us once again."

"No, that cannot be permitted," Molotov agreed- "Let us say that they do all they have promised. How do we protect the Soviet Union in the time between our using the bomb we have made from the Lizards' explosive metal and that in which we begin to manufacture it for ourselves?"

"For one thing, we do not use that one bomb immediately," Stalin answered. "We cannot use it immediately, for it is not yet made. But even if it were, I would wait to pick the proper moment. And besides, Vyacheslav Mikhailovich"-Stalin looked smug-"how will the Lizards be certain we have only the one bomb? Once we use it, they shall have to assume we can do it again, not so?"

"Unless they assume we used their explosive metal for the first one," Molotov said.

He wished he'd kept his mouth shut. Stalin didn't shout or bluster at him; that he would have withstood with ease. Instead, the General Secretary fixed him with a glare as cold and dark and silent as midwinter at Murmansk. That was Stalin's sign of ultimate displeasure; he ordered generals and commissars shot with just such an expression.

Here, though, Molotov's point was too manifestly true for Stalin to ignore. The glare softened, as winter's grip did at last even in Murmansk. Stalin said, "This is another good ar-gument for carefully choosing the time and place we use the bomb. But you also must remember, if we face defeat without

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it, we shall surely use it against the invaders no matter wh they do to us in return. They are more dangerous than the Ge mans, and must be fought with whatever means come t hand."

"True enough," Molotov said. The Soviet Union h

190,000,000 people; throw twenty or thirty million on the fin or even more, and it remained a going concern. Just getting ri of the kulaks and bringing in collectivized agriculture ha killed millions through deliberate faniine. If more deaths we what building socialism in the USSR required, more death there would be.

"I am glad you agreed, Vyacheslav Mikhailovich," Stah said silkily. Under the silk lay jagged steel; had Molotov pe sisted in disagreeing, something most disagreeable would hav happened to turn.

The Foreign Commissar of the Soviet Union was fearles before the leaders of the decadent capitalist states; he had eve confronted Atvar, who led the Lizards. Before Stalin, Moloto quailed. Stalin genuinely terrified him, as he did every oth Soviet citizen. Back in revolutionary days, the little mu tachioed Georgian had not been so much, but since, oh, b since ...

Nevertheless, Molotov owed allegiance not just to Stali but to the Soviet Union as a whole. If he was to serve USSR properly, he needed information. Getting it without ar gering his master was the trick. Carefully, he said, "The Li ards have taken a heavy toll on our bombing planes. Will w be able to deliver the bomb once we have it?"

"I am told the device will be too heavy and bulky to fit i any of our bombers," Stalin said. Molotov admired the courag of the man who had told-had had to tell--4hat to Stalin. Bt the Soviet leader did not seem nearly so angry as Moloto would have guessed. Instead, his face assumed an expressi of genial deviousness that made Molotov want to make sure still had his wallet and watch. He went on, "If we can dispo of Trotsky in Mexico City, I -expect we can find a way to pt a bomb where we want it."

"No doubt you are right, losef Vissarionovich," Molo said. Trotsky had thought he was safe enough to keep plotti against the Soviet Union, but several inches of tempered ste(in his brain proved that a delusion. 11

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"No doubt I am," Stalin agreed complacently. As undisputed master of the Soviet Union, he had developed ways not altogether different from those of other undisputed masters. Molo_ tov had once or twice thought of saying as much, but it remained just that-a thought.

He did ask, "How soon can the Germans and Americans begin producing their own explosive metal?" The Americans didn't much worry him; they were far away and had worries closer to home. The Germans ... Hitler had talked about using the new bombs against the Lizards in Poland. The Soviet Union was an older enemy, and almost as close.

"We are working to learn this. I expect we shall be informed well in advance, whatever the answer proves to be," Stalin answered, complacent still. Soviet espionage in capitalist countries continued to function well; many there devoted themselves to furthering the cause of the socialist revolution. Molotov cast about for other questions he might safely ask. Before he could come up with any, Stalin bent over the papers on his desk, a sure sign of dismissal. "Thank you for your time, losef Vissarionovich," Molotov said as he stood to go. Stalin grunted. His politeness was minimal, but then, so was Molotov's with anyone but him. When Molotov closed the door behind him, he permitted himself the luxury of a small sigh. He'd survived another audience.

For getting his consignment of uranium or whatever it was safely from Boston to Denver, Leslie Groves had been promoted to brigadier general. He hadn't yet bothered replacing his eagles with stars; he had more important things to worry about. His pay was accumulating at the new rate, not that that meant much, what with prices going straight through the roof.

At the moment what galled him worse than inflation was the lack of gratitude he was getting from the Metallurgical Laboratory scientists. Enrico Fermi looked at him with sorrowful Mediterranean eyes and said, "Valuable as this sample may be, it does not constitute a critical mass."

"I'm sorry, that's not a term I know," Groves said. He knew nuclear energy could be released, but nobody had done much publishing on matters nuclear since Hahn and Strassmann split the uranium atom, and, to complicate things further, the Met Lab crew had developed a jargon all their own.

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"It means you have not brought us enough with which to make a bomb," Leo Szilard said bluntly. He and the other physicists round the table glared at Groves as if he were deliberately holding back another fifty kilos of priceless metal. Since he wasn't, he glared, too. "My escort and I risked our lives across a couple of thousand miles to get that package to you," he growled. "If you're telling me we wasted our time, smiling when youtsay it isn't going to help." Even relatively lean as the journey had left him, he was the biggest man at the conference table, and used to using his physical presence to get what he wanted.

"No, no, this is not what we mean," Ferrni said quickly. "You could not have known exactly what you had, and we could not, either, until you delivered it."

"We did not even know that you had it until you deliveri it," Szilard said. "Security-pah!" He muttered something under his breath in what might have been Magyar. Whatever it was, it sounded pungent. Groves had seen his dossier. His politics had some radical leanings, but he was too brilliant for that to count against him. Fermi added, "The material you brought will be invaluable in research, and in combining with what we eventually produce ourselves. But by itself, it is not sufficient."

"All right, you'll have to do here what you were going to do at Chicago," Groves said. "How's that coming?" He tamed to the one man from the Met Lab crew he'd met before. "Dr. Larssen, what is the status of getting the project up and running again here in Denver?"

"We were building the graphite pile under Stagg Field at the University of Chicago," Jens Larssen answered. "Now we're reassembling it under the football stadium here. The work goes-well enough." He shrugged.

Groves gave Larssen a searching once-over. He didn't seem to have the driving energy he'd shown in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia, the summer before. Then, he'd passionately urged the federal goverment-in-hiding to do all it could to hold Chicago against the Lizards. But the Met Lab had had to move even though Chicago was held, and now-well, it just didn't seem as if Larssen gave a damn. That kind of attitude wouldn't do, not when the work at hand was so urgent. The meeting with the physicists went on for another half

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hour, over lesser but still vital issues like keeping electricity coming into Denver and into the University of Denver in particular so the men could do their jobs. People in the United States had taken electricity for granted until the Lizards came. Now, over too much of the country~ it was a vanished luxury. But if it vanished in Denver, the Met Lab would have to find somewhere else to go, and Groves didn't think the country--or the world-could afford the delay.

Unlike nuclear physics, electricity was something with which, by God, he was intimately familiar. "We'll keep it going for you," he promised, and hoped he could make good on the vow. If the Lizards got the idea humans were experimenting with nuclear energy here, they'd have something to say about the matter. Keeping them from finding out, then, was going to be a sizable part of keeping the lights on.

When the meeting broke up, Groves fell into step with Larssen and ignored the physicist's efforts to break away. "We need to talk, Dr. Larssen," he said.

"No we don't, Colonel-sorry, Generab-Groves," Larssen said, loading the title with all the scom he could. "The Army's already done enough to screw up my life, thanks very much. I don't need any more help from you." He turned his back and started to stamp off.

Groves shot out a big, meaty hand and caught him by the arm. From the way Larssen whirled around, Groves thought he was going to swing on him. Decking a physicist wasn't part of his own job description, but if that was what it took, that was what he'd do.

Maybe Larssen saw that in his eyes, for he didn't throw the punch. Groves said, "Look, your life is your business. But when it makes you have trouble with your job, well, your particular job is too important to let that happen. So what's eating you, and how come you think it's the Army's fault?"

"You want to know? You really want to know?" Larssen didn't wait for an answer from Groves, but plowed ahead: "Well, why the hell shouldn't I tell you? Somebody else will if I don't. After I saw you last year, I managed to get all the way to western Indiana on my own. That's when I ran into General Patton, who wouldn't let me send my wife a message so she'd know I was alive and okay." "Security-" Groves began.

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"Yeah, security. So I couldn't get her a message then, and by the time I got to Chicago, it was too late-the Met Lab team had already taken off. And I couldn't get a message to Barbara after that-security again. So she figured I was dead. What was she supposed to think?"

"Oh," Groves said. "I'm sorry. That must have been a shock when she came into Denver. But I'll bet you had quite a reunion." "It was great," Larssen said, his voice deadly cold. "She thought I was dead, so she fell for this corporal who rides herd on Lizard POWs. She married him up in Wyoming. I was already in Denver, but Colonel Hexham, God bless him, still wouldn't let me write. Security one more time. Now she's gonna have the guy's baby. So as far as I'm concerned, General Groves, sir, the U.S. Army can go fack itself And if you don't like it, throw me in the brig." Groves opened his mouth, closed it again. He'd been through Chugwater just after that wedding in Wyoming. He'd known something was eating Larssen, but not what. No

wonder the poor bastard was in a blue ftmk. Mahatma Gandhi wouldn't have stayed cool, calm, and collected with this land-

ing on him.

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"Maybe she'll come back to you," he said at last. It sounded lame, even in his own ears.

Larssen laughed scornfully. "Doesn't look that way. She's still going to bed with Sam stinking Yeager, that's for sure. Women!" He clapped a hand to his forehead. "You can't live without 'em and they won't five with you."

Groves hadn't seen his own wife in months, either, or sent her a note or anything else. He didn't worry about her running around, though; he just worried about her being all right. Maybe that just meant he was older and more settled than Larssen and his wife. Maybe it meant his marriage was in better shape. Or maybe (unsettling thought) it meant he didn't know what to worry about.

He fell back on his own training: "Dr. Larssen, you cannot let it get you down to the point where it affects your work. You cannot. More than just you and your wife depends on what you do here, more even than your country. I am not exaggerating when I say the fate of humanity rests on your shoulders."

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"I know that," Larssen said. "But it's hard to give a damn about the fate of humanity when the one human being who really matters to you goes and does something like this."

There Groves could not argue with him, nor did he try. He said, "You're not the only one in that boat. It happens all the time-maybe more in war than in peace, because things are more broken up nowadays-but all the time. You have to pick up the pieces and keep going."

"You think I don't know that?" Larssen said. "I tell myself the same thing twenty times a day. But it's damned hard when I keep seeing her there with that other guy. It hurts too much to stand."

Groves thought about shipping out the other guy-Yeager, Larssen had said his name was. With the war on, keeping a physicist happy counted for more than the feelings of a Lizard liaison. man. But even if he did that, he had no guarantee it would bring Barbara back into Jens' arms, not if she was carrying Yeager's baby.

And she and Yeager wouldn't have got married if they hadn't thought Larssen was dead. They'd tried to make things right, the best way they knew how. It hadn't worked, but they hadn't had all the data they needed, and humans couldn't be engineered like electrons, anyhow.

Just the same, Groves wished he could order Barbara to go to bed with Jens for the good of the country. It would have made things a lot simpler. But, while a medieval baron might have gotten away with an order like that, a twentieth-century woman would spit in his eye if he tried it. That was what freedom was about. He believed in freedom ... no matter how inconvenient it was at the moment.

"Professor Larssen, you've got yourself a mess," he said heavily.

"Yeah. Now tell me one I haven't heard."

When Larssen broke away this time, Groves didn't try to stop him. He just stood and watched till the physicist turned a comer and disappeared. Then he shook his head- "That's trouble, waiting to happen," he muttered, and started slowly down the hall himself.

Atvar turned one eye turret to the left side of the audience chamber, the other to the right. The assembled shiplords stared

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back at him. He tried to gauge their temper. They'd been struggling for close to two years, almost one of Tosev 3's slow revolutions around its star, to bring the miserable world into the Empire. By all they'd known when they left from Home, the conquest should have been over in a matter of days-which file:///C|/2590% 20Sci-Fi% 20 and% 20 Fantasy% 20 E-books/Harry% 20 Turtled ove% 20-% 20 Worldwar% 2002% 20-% 20 Tilting% 20 the% 20 Balance.txt

only proved they hadn't known much. "My fellow males, let us consider the status of our enterprise," he said.

"It shall be done, Exalted Fleetlord," the shiplords chorused in a show of the perfect obedience the Race so esteemed. No virtue was more fundamental than obedience. So Atvar had been taught since he came from his egg; so he'd believed till he came to Tosev 3.

He still believed it, but not as he had back on Home. Tosev 3 corroded every assumption the Race made about how fife should be lived. The only thing the Big Uglies knew about obedience was that they weren't very good at it. They'd even overthrown and murdered emperors: to Atvar, whose ruling dynasty had held the throne for tens of thousands of years, a crime almost incomprehensibly heinous.

He said, "We do continue to make progress in our campaigns. Our counterattacks south of the Tosevite city known as Chicago on the smaller continental mass have pushed back the enemy, and-"

Straha, shiplord of the 206th Emperor Yower, raised a hand. Atvar wished he could ignore the male. Unfortunately, Straha was next most senior shiplord after Kirel, who commanded the bannership itself. Even more unfortunately, from Atvar's point of view, Straha headed a loud and vocal faction of males whose principal amusement seemed to be carping about the way the war against the Tosevites was going.

Having been (reluctantly) recognized, Straha said, "May it please the exalted fleetlord, I would respectfully note that the campaign continues to have obvious shortcomings. I hope I shall not try his patience if I elucidateT'

"Proceed," Atvar said. Maybe, he thought hopefully, Straha will say something really unforgivable and give me the excuse I've been looking for to sack him. It hadn't happened yet, worse luck.

Straha stood a little straighter, the better to display his elaborate, punctiliously applied body paint. He had his own agenda, Atvar knew: if he could persuade enough males that the f

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fleetlord was botching his leadership of the war, he might become fleetlord himself. It would be irregular, but everything about the conquest-the attempted conquest--of Tosev 3 was irregular. If Straha succeeded where Atvar had failed, the Emperor would turn his eye turrets away from the irregularity. The fractious shiplord said, "First and most important is the increased punishment our armor is taking at the hands of the Big Uglies. Loss rates are up significantly from last year's fighting to this. Such a toll cannot continue indefinitely."

There Atvar, try as he would, could not disagree with Stralia. He made his voice, sharp, though, as he answered, "I cannot produce landcruisers out of thin air, nor can the Big Uglies under our control manufacture any that meet our needs Meanwhile, those out of our control continue to improve their models, and to introduce new weapons such as antilandcruiser rockets. Thus our losses are higher of late."

"The Tosevites out of our control always seem capable o more than those we have conquered," Straha said acidly. With an effort, the fleetlord ignored the sarcasm and replied to the literal sense of Straha's words: "This is not surprising

Shiplord. The most technologically advanced regions of this inhomogeneous planet are precisely the ones most capable of extended resistance and, I suppose, of innovation."

He spoke the last word with a certain amount of distaste. In the Empire, innovation came seldom, and its effects were tightly controlled. On Tosev 3, it ran wild, fueled by the endless squabbling among the Big Ughes' tiny empires. Atvar thought such quick change surely malignant for the long-term health of a civilization, but the Tosevites cared nothing for the long term. And in the short term, quick change made them more dangerous, not less.

"Let that be as you say, Exalted Fleetlord," Straha answered Atvar gave him a suspicious look; he'd yielded too easily. Sure enough, he went on, "Some of our losses, however, may be better explained by causes other than Tosevite technical progress. I speak in reference to the continued and growing use among our fighting males of the herb termed ginger."

"I concede the problem, Shiplord," Atvar said. He could hardly do otherwise, what with some of the after-action reports he'd seen from the landcruiser combats in France. Had things gone as planned, the Race would have been pushing into

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Deutschland. Instead, they'd taken a pounding almost as costly as the one that had held them out of Chicago, and without the excuse of winter.

Atvar continued, "Surely, though, you cannot hold me responsible for the effects of an unanticipated alien herb. We are making every effort to diminish its consequences on our operations. If you have any concrete suggestions in that regard, I would gratefully receive them."

He'd hoped that would shut Straha up. It didn't; nothing seemed to. But it did make the shiplord change the subject: "Exalted Fleetlord, what have we learned of the Big Uglies' efforts to produce their own nuclear weapons?"

Where Straha had been playing to his own faction before, now he seized the attention of all the assembled males. If the Tosevites got their clawless hands on nuclear weapons, the campaign stopped being a war of conquest and turned into a war of survival. And what would the onrushing colonization fleet do if, between them, the Big Uglies and the Race rendered Tosev 3 uninhabitable?

Hating Straha, Atvar answered, "Though they did steal nu-

clear material from us, we have found no sign that they can yet produce a weapon with it." The fleetlord had expected that question to arise, if not from Straha, then from someone else. He touched a recessed button on the podium. A holograph of one of the Race's power plants appeared. Seeing the familiar egg-shaped protective dome over the reactor made him long bitterly for Home. Forcing down the emotion, he went on, "We have also detected no indications of any structures like this one, which would be required for them to utilize their own radioactive materials."

Most of the shiplords relaxed when they heard that. Even Straha said, "So they won't be able to use nuclear weapons against us for the next few years, eh? Well, there's something, anyhow." If that wasn't praise, it wasn't carping criticism, either. Atvar gratefully accepted it.

Loyal, steadfast Kirel raised a hand. Atvar was delighted to recognize him. Then Kirel said, "Excuse me, Exalted Fleetlord, but the Big Uglies are good at camouflage. And besides, some of their primitive structures look very little like those of ours which perform equivalent functions. Are we truly as certain as we would like to be that their nuclear weapons programs are file:///C//2590%20Sci-Fi%20and%20Fantasy%20E-books/Harry%20Turtledove%20-%20Worldwar%2002%20-%20Tilting%20the%20Balance.txt

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not progressing under our very snouts, to emerge as unexpectedly as some of their other weapons?"

Aside from the difficulty of proving a negative, Atvar had no answer prepared for that. The meeting did not dissolve on the note for which he'd hoped.

X

Teerts was coming to look forward to mealtimes. For on thing, the Nipponese had been feeding him better lately, wit] many more bits of meat and fish mixed in with the rice th made up the greater part of his diet. For another, they'd als taken to spicing his food instead of leaving it bland and boring his tongue tingled pleasantly when he ate now. The spice weren't the same as the ones cooks back on Home would hav used, but they livened up meals in a similar way.

And for a third, food these days gave him a lift that carrie him altogether out of the depression that had gripped him sinc his killercraft went down near Harbin. For a while after he ate he felt bright and strong and ever so wise. The feeling nev lasted as long as he wished it would, but having it even for little while was welcome.

The Nipponese seemed to notice his changed attitude, too `fhey'd developed the habit of interrogating him right after h ate. He didn't mind. Food made him seem so omniscient th he dealt with their questions with effortless ease.

He heard a squeak and a rattle down the hall: the food cart He sprang to his feet, waited eagerly by the bars of his cell the cart to arrive. One guard unlocked the cell. Another st watch with a knife-tipped rifle. The fellow who actually serv the food handed Teerts his bowl.

"Tbank you, superior sir," he said in Nipponese, bowing a he did so. The guard locked the cell door again. The cart clat tered away.

Out of necessity, Teerts; had become adept with the littl paired sticks the Nipponese used to manipulate food. H brought a chunk of fish to his mouth, twisted his tongu

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around it. It didn't taste the way it had for a good many meals. It wasn't bad, though. They've changed the herbs they're using, he thought, and gulped it down.

He got to the bottom of the bowl in a hurry; although the Nipponese were feeding him better than they had, he wasn't any great threat to get fat. As he ran his tongue over his hard outer mouthparts to clean them, he waited for the wonderful feeling of well-being that had come to accompany each meal.

He didn't get it, not this time. He'd been more than unusually gloomy when the feeling passed away after a meal. Now, failing to find it at all, he felt desperate, betrayed; the iron bars of his cell seemed to be closing in around him. He paced restlessly back and forth, his tailstump jerking like a metronome.

He hadn't realized how much he'd depended on that mealtime burst of euphoria till it was denied him. He opened his mouth, displaying his full set of small, sharp teeth. If Major Okamoto came by, he'd gnaw a chunk off him. That would give him a good feeling, by the Emperor!

Not much later, Major Okamoto did come down the hallway. He stopped in front of Teerts' cell. The captured killercraft pilot's dreams of vengeance turned to fear at the sight of the Big Ugly, as they always did.

"Good day," Okamoto said in the language of the Race. He'd become quite fluent, much more so than Teerts was in Nipponese. "How are you feeling today?"

"Superior sir, I am not so well as I would like," Teerts answered; among the Race, that question was taken literally. Okamoto's rubbery face twisted into what Teerts had come to recognize as an expression of amusement. That worried the male; Okamoto's amusement often came at his expense. But the Big Ugly's words were mild enough: "I may know what is troubling you, and may even have a medicine to cure your trouble."

"Honto?-Really?" Teerts asked suspiciously: From all he'd seen of what the Big Uglies called medicine, he'd sooner have taken his chances on being sick.

"Hai, honto, " Okamoto answered, also failing back into Nipponese. From a pocket of his uniform, he pulled out a small waxed-paper bag. He poured a little of the brown powder it held into the palm of his hand, then held the hand out to Teerts through the bars. "Here, put your tongue on this." Teerts sniffed first. The powder had a pungent, spicy odor

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that seemed familiar, though he could not place it at once. H reflected that the Tosevites could kill him any time they chose they did not need to put on an elaborate charade if they wante him dead. Therefore he flicked out his tongue and licked the powder.

As soon as he tasted it, he knew what it was: the flavor th had been missing from his latest bowl of food. A mome

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later, he realized the Nipponese must have been feeding it him in tiny doses till now. He didn't just feel good; he felt if the sacred Emperor were some sort of lowly cousin of his Ruling the Race would have been too small a job for him keeping track of all the planets in all the galaxies seemed abou right.

Through the omnipotence that blazed in him, he s Okamoto's face contort again. "You like that, nehT' the Bi Ugly asked, all but the last word in Teerts' tongue.

"Yes," Teerts said, as if from very far away. He wishe Okamoto were very far away, so he would not pester him this transcendent moment.

But the interrogator and interpreter did not pester him. Th Big Ugly just leaned back against the bars of the empty cel across from Teerts' and waited. For a while, Teerts igno him as being beneath notice, let alone contempt. The gloriou feeling from the powder he'd licked up, though, didn't last a long as he'd hoped it would. And when it was gone ...

When it was gone, Teerts crashed into depths deeper th the heights he had scaled. The weight of all the worlds he'd s blithely imagined he could oversee came down on his narTo shoulders and crushed him. Now he ignored Okamoto becaus the Big Ugly was outside his sphere of intensely personal mis ery. Nothing the Nipponese did to him could be worse th what his own body and brain were doing. He huddled in a c ner of the cell and wished he could die.

Okamoto's voice pursued him: "Not so good? Want anoth taste?" The Big Ugly held out his broad, fleshy hand, a sm mound of powder in the middle of the palm.

Even before his conscious mind willed him to action, Teert was on his feet and bounding toward the bars between whic that hand so temptingly protruded. But before his tongue coul touch that precious powder, Okamoto jerked the hand back Teerts almost slammed his muzzle against the cold, unyieldi

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iron that caged him. Careless of his own safety, he cursed Okamoto as vilely as he knew how.

The Tosevite threw back his head and let out several of the loud barking noises his kind used for laughter. "So you want more ginger, do you? I thought you might. We have learned males of the Race are-how do you say it?-very fond of this herb."

Ginger. Now Teerts had a name for what he craved. For some reason, that only made him crave it more. His fury collapsed into depression once again. Instead of hissing at Okamoto, he pleaded with him: "Give it to me, I beg. How can you hold it away from me if you know how badly I need it?" Okamoto laughed again. "One who lets himself be captured

does not deserve to have anything given to him." When it came to prisoners of war, the Nipponese knew only scom. Okamoto went on, "Maybe, though, just maybe, you can eam more ginger for yourself. Do you understand?"

Teerts understood too miserably well. The trap's teeth were sharp, sharp. His captors had given him a taste for ginger in his food, withheld it, shown him exactly what he craved, and now were withholding it again. They expected that would make him submit. They were, he admitted to himself, dead right. Hating the cringing whine he heard in his own voice, he said, "What do you want me to do, superior sir?"

,,More exact answers to the questions we have been putting to you on explosive metals might make us more pleased with you," Okamoto said.

Teerts knew that was a lie. Because he'd let himself be taken prisoner, the Nipponese would never be happy with him, no matter what he did. But they might find him more useful; he'd already seen how his treatment varied with their perception of his value. If he satisfied them, they would give him ginger- The thought tolled in his head like the reverberations from a big bass drum.

Despite it, he had to say, "I have already given you the best and truest answers I can."

"So you claim now," Okamoto answered. "We shall see how you reply when you want ginger more than you can imagine now. Maybe then you will remember better than you do today.,,

The teeth of the trap were not only sharp, they were jagged as well. The Nipponese didn't just want Teerts to be their pri's-

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oner; they wanted him to be their slave. Slavery had vanished from the culture of the Race long before Home was unified, but the Rabotevs (or was it the Hallessi?-Teerts had always dozed through history lessons) practiced it whenever their world, whichever it was, came into the Empire. They returned the concept, if not the institution, to the notice of the Race. Teerts feared it wasn't just a concept on Tosev 3. file:///C|/2590% 20 Sci-Fi% 20 and % 20 Fantasy% 20 E-books/Harry% 20 Turtled ove% 20-% 20 Worldwar% 2002% 20-% 20 Tilting% 20 the% 20 Balance.txt

He also feared that if he went without ginger, he would go mad. The craving ate at him like acid dripping on his scaly skin. "Please, let me taste it now," he begged.

Some of his Nipponese captors had been wantonly cruel, and exulted in their cruelty in the exact proportion that th enjoyed power over his helplessness. They would have reftised, merely to experience the pleasure they took from watching him suffer. Okamoto, to give him his limited due, did not daub on that pattern of body paint. Having shown Teerts he was indeed trapped, the Big Ugly let him sample the bait once more.

The feeling of power and wisdom flooded through Teerts again. While he reached that ecstatic, exalted peak, he did his best to come up with a way to escape the prison where the Nipponese held him. For an all but omnipotent genius, it should have been easy.

But no brilliant ideas came. Maybe the ginger did sharpen his analytical faculty a little: he swiftly concluded the feeling of brilliance it gave him was just that, a feeling, and nothing more. Had the powder not been coursing through his veins, he would have been bitterly disappointed. As things were, he noted the problem, then dismissed it.

Tosevites were impetuous, hot-blooded, always doing things. The Race's virtues were study, patience, careful planning. So Teerts had been indoctrinated, and little he had seen inclined him to doubt what his killercraft squadron's briefing officers had said. But now, out in the hallway, Okamoto stood quietly and waited as patiently as any male of the Race.

And Teerts? As the joy from the ginger ebbed in him, leaving only a memory of sensation, Teerts became a veritable parody of a Big Ugly, grabbing at the bars of his cell, shouting curses, reaching uselessly for Okamoto in a foredoomed effort to get more ginger onto his tongue: in short, he acted blindly, without the slightest concern for consequences. He should have

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been ashamed of himself. He was ashamed of himself-but not enough to stop.

Okamoto waited until his blustering had died away, swallowed in the crushing depression that followed ginger euphoria. Then, at just the right instant, the Nipponese said, "Tell me everything you know about the process that transforms element 92 to element 94."

"T'he special word for this in our language is 'transmutes,' Teerts said. "It takes place in several steps. First--2' He wondered how much Okamoto would make him talk before he got another taste.

Bobby Fiore threw an easy peg to the young Chinese man who stood waiting to catch the ball. The fellow actually did catch it, too; it slapped into the leather glove (a duplicate of Fiore's) he wore, and he covered it with his bare hand.

"Good job!" Fiore said, using tone and expression and dumb show to get across what he still had trouble saying in Chinese. "Now throw it back." Again, gesture showed what he wanted.

The Chinese, whose name was Lo, threw high. Fiore sprang and caught the ball. He landed lightly, ready to throw again himself. after so many years on so many infields, he could probably do that in his sleep. Drop a ball anywhere near him and he'd be on it like a cat.

"Don't throw like a girl," he told Lo; this once, it was just as well that his pupil didn't understand exactly what he had to say. He demonstrated, exaggerating the from-the-elbow style the Chinese had used and shaking his head violently to show it wasn't the best way to do the job. Then he showed the fullarm motion American kids picked up on farmyards, parks, and vacant lots.

Lo didn't seem to think one better than the other. Instead of Using his handmade, expensive baseball to prove the point, Bobby Fiore bent down to get an egg-sized rock. He and Lo were not far from the razor-wire fence around the Lizards' camp. He turned and threw the rock as far as he could into the green fields beyond the perimeter.

He found another rock, tossed it underhand to Lo. "Let's see you top that, throwing like you do," he said. Again, gestures eked out meaning. Lo nodded and let fly, grunting with effort. His rock flew barely half as far as Fiore's had. He looked at

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the American, nodded thoughtfully, and tried the full-arm motion. Fiore clapped his hands. "That's the idea!" The truth was, he couldn't antagonize a cash customer. He and Liu Han still put on their baseball show, but it didn't pul in as much as it had when it was new. A few Chinese had been interested enough to pay to learn more, so he was teaching them to hit and catch and throw. Had the camp had enough open space, they could have put on a real game. He didn't care to kowtow to Chinamen, but he'd grown used to the little luxuries spare cash allowed him to buy. And it wasn't as if he was selling something they had to have. If he got 'ern mad at him, they'd just leave. So he did his best to stay on good behavior.

"Come on, try it with the ball," he said, and tossed it to LD The Chinese threw it back, still not too straight but with a better motion. "That's the way to do it!" Fiore said, clapping his hands in encouragement.

After several more throws that showed he was starting to get the idea, Lo picked up another rock and flung it out over the razor wire into the field. Tbrowing with his whole arm, he made it go a good deal farther than he'd managed before, but still not as far as Fiore had flung it The ballplayer puffed out his chest, thinking no Chink was going to get the better of him. Maybe Lo thought the same thing, for he bowed to Fiore and spoke several sharp sentences. Almost in spite of himself, Fiore was starting to understand Chinese. He didn't follow all of this, but got the idea that Lo was praising his arm and wanted to bring by some friends who would also be interested in the way he threw.

"Yeah, sure, that'd be fine," Fiore answered in English, and then did his best to turn it into Chinese. Evidently Lo got the idea, because he bowed again and nodded, then gave the glove back to Fiore and went on his way.

Well enough pleased with how the afternoon had gone, Fiore headed back toward the house he shared with Liu Han. He started whistling "Begin the Beguine" to himself as he walked along, but had to cut it out when the Chinese he walked past stared at him. As far as he was concerned, Chinese music sounded as if it were made by stepping on cats' tails--out-of-tune cats, at that. The locals returned the sentiment when he made melodies he liked. Since there were lots of them and one of him, he shut up.

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When he opened the door to the hut the Lizards had given him and Liu Han, his nostrils twitched appreciatively. Some thing tasty was cooking, even if the vegetables that went wi it would be strange and underdone for his taste. "Smell good," he said, and added the Lizards' emphatic cough.

Liu Han looked up from the pan in which she was cooking It was, to Fiore's way of thinking, a funny kind of pan, being shaped like the wide, conical hats a lot of Chinese wore. It had a funny name, too: she called it a walk. Whenever he heard that, he pictured the pan tossing away its bat and trotting dow to first base.

Liu Han tilted the walk on its stand so he could see the bite sized pieces of chicken in it. "Cooked with five spices," she said. He nodded, smiling. He didn't know what 0 five spice were, but they made for mighty tasty cooking.

After supper, he gave her the trade dollars Lo had paid him for learning the art of throwing straight. "He has other peopl he may want me to teach, too," he said. "If they all pay as well as he did, that should keep us in groceries a good long while."

He said it first in English, then added Chinese and Lizard words till he was sure she'd got the idea. When she talked to him, she used a Chinese frame padded with English and Liz ard. As time passed, they gained more and more words i common.

She said, "If they pay silver like this Lo, I be fat even with out baby." She was starting to show now, her belly pressing against the cotton tunic that had been loose.

"Babe, you still look good to me," he said, which made her smile. He got the idea she was surprised he kept wanting he even though she was pregnant. He hadn't been sure he would either, but the growing mound of her belly didn't bother him It meant he couldn't just climb on top all the time, but doing it other ways was broadening his horizons.

Thinking about it made him want to do it. One nice thing about the way Liu Han cooked was that it didn't leave him feeling as if he'd swallowed an anvil, the way pasta did some times. If you got too full, you had trouble staying interested i other things. As it was ...

Before he could get up and head for the blankets on th

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kang, somebody knocked on the door. He made a sour face Liu Han giggled; she must have known what was on his mind

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"Whoever it is, I'll get rid of him in a hurry," he said, climbin to his feet. But when he opened the door, there stood Lo with severE other men behind him. Business, Fiore thought. He wave them in. Business counted, too, and Liu Han would still

there after they'd gone. Now she'd be hostess and interpretei

She offered the newcomers tea. Fiore still missed his coffee thick with cream and sugar, but tea, he'd decided, would do i a pinch.

The last of the newcomers shut the door behind him. Lo his friends-six men in all-crowded the hut. They sat quied and seemed polite, but the longer Fiore looked at them, th more he wished he hadn't let them all in at once. They all young and on the hard side and, with their silence, disciplined than the usually voluble Chinese of the carnp. carefully didn't glance over to the comer where he'd leaned hi bat against the wall, but he didn't let them get between hi and it.

He knew about shakedowns. His uncle Giuseppe, a bake had paid protection money for a while for the privilege of go ing to work every day without getting his arms broken. H wasn't going to let that happen to him, not from a bunch o Chinamen. They could do their stuff on him tonight, but he' have the Lizards on them tomorrow.

Then he realized the only one whose name he knew was L(and even Lo was only half a name. The rest-would he recog nize them again? Maybe. Maybe not.

He grabbed the bull by the homs, asking, "What can I d for you guys? You're interested in learning to throw the righ way, yeah?" He made a proper, full-arm throwing motion with out any ball.

"We are interested in throwing, yes," Lo answered throug Liu Han. Then he asked a question of his own: "Are you an your woman lackeys and running dogs of the little scaly devil or just their prisonersT'

Bobby Fiore and Liu Han looked at each other. Though h had been thinking of siccing the Lizards on these guys if the turned out to be hoodlums, that question had only one possib answer. "Prisoners," he said, and mimed holding his hands u to the bars of a cell.

Lo smiled. So did two or three of his buddies. The other just sat, still and watchful. Lo said, "If you are prisoners, y

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must want to help the oppressed peasants and workers strike a blow for freedom."

Liu Han's translation wasn't anywhere near as smooth as that. Fiore cocked his head to one side anyway. Traveling through small and medium-sized towns in an America staggered by the Depression, he'd heard plenty of guys standing on crates at street comers who talked like that. He pointed a finger at Lo. "You're a Red, that's what you are-a Communist, a Bolshevik."

Liu Han didn't recognize any of the English (or Russian). She stared and spread her hands, at a loss to interpret. But one of the terms made sense to Lo. He nodded soberly to Bobby Fiore, as if to say he was smarter than the Chinese had figured. Then he spoke to Liu Han, letting her know what was going on.

She didn't gasp as if she'd just seen a rat scurry across the floor, the way a lot of American women would have. She just nodded and tried to explain to Fiore, then fell silent when she realized he already understood. "They not bad," she told him. "They fight Japanese, more than Kuomintang does."

"Okay," he said. "Me Reds were on our side before the Lizards came, sure. And everybody wants to give them a good swift kick. But what do these guys want with me?"

Lo didn't answer, not with words. Instead, he nudged one of his comrades. The young man reached under his tunic and pulled out a grenade. He didn't say anything, either. He just let it sit in the palm of his hand.

Bobby didn't need more than a heartbeat before the light went on in his head. He started to laugh. "So you want me to do your pitching for you, huh?" he said, not caring that neither Lo nor Liu Han understood what he was talking about. "I wish Sam Yeager was here. You think my arm's hot stuff, you oughta see his."

Lo politely waited till he was done before speaking. Liu Han hesitantly translated: "They want you ---- 2' She forgot the English for throw, but made a gesture to show what she meant. Fiore nodded. Then she pointed at the grenade.

"Yeah, I already worked that out," Fiore said. He'd worked out some other things, too: if he said no, for instance, he and Liu Han were liable to end up wearing whatever Chinamen used for concrete overshoes. This wasn't just a shakedown. If he said no, he was a big danger to these people. From every-

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thing he'd ever heard, Bolsheviks didn't let people who wen dangerous to them keep walking and breathing.

And besides, he didn't want to say no. He wished he coulo have chucked some grenades at the Lizards back in Cairo, E finois, after they caught him the first time. That would hav kept him out of this whole mess. Even though he did care fo Liu Han, he would have given a lot to be back in the good ol file:///C|/2590% 20Sci-Fi% 20 and % 20 Fantasy% 20 E-books/Harry% 20 Turtled ove% 20-% 20 Worldwar% 2002% 20-% 20 Tilting% 20 the% 20 Balance.txt the state of the state of

U.S. of A. Since he couldn't have that, giving the little scaly bastards hard time here on the other side of the world would have do. "So what do you want me to blow up?" he asked Lo. Maybe the Red hadn't expected such enthusiastic c tion. He talked in low tones with his friends before he tume back to Liu Han. She sounded worried as she told Fiore "Th-ty want you to go with them. No say where." He wondered if he ought to insist that Lo tell Liu where he'd be. After a second's doubt, he decided that w be stupid. If she didn't know, she couldn't tell anybody, espe cially the Lizards ... and, if she didn't know, the Reds woul have less reason to come after her to shut her up in case thing went wrong. He got to his feet. "Let's go take care of it," he said to Lo He felt edgy, almost bouncy, as he walked, as if Mutt Dan iels (and he wondered what had happened to old Mutt) h flashed him the sign to steal home on the next pitch. Well, w not? He wasn't just trying to steal home. He was going i combat.

Sooner or later, he was sure, he would have volunteered the Army. But even then, he would have trained for month before he got the chance to see action. Now-it was as if he' got his rifle and headed up to the front line one right after other. No wonder he felt all loosey-goosey.

He blew Liu Han a kiss. Lo and his fellow Bolshe snickered and said things that were probably rude to one ar other: Chinese men weren't in the habit of showing they gav a damn about their women. Well, to hell with thent, too, thought. Liu Han managed a return smile, but he could see s was frightened about this whole business.

Night in the prison camp was darker than anything Fi had known back in the States, even in the panicky blackou that had followed Pearl Harbor. Few of the huts had any wir dows, and few of what windows there were had lights showi file:///C//2590%20Sci-Fi%20and%20Fantasy%20E-books/Harry%20Turtledove%20-%20Worldwar%2002%20-%20Tilting%20the%20Balance.txt

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through diem. If the moon was up in the sky, a thick layer of clouds made sure nobody could see it. Though that made Fiore stumble along, he didn't bellyache, not even to himself. darkness would give the Lizards a harder time spotting him. That he liked.

The Chinese picked their way through the black as if they had headlights. A couple of times, Bobby Fiore heard people getting out of their way in a hurry. A large group of disciplined men traveling confidently was something few wanted to mess with. He liked that, too.

Before long, he had no i " dea where in the camp Lo was taking him. It all looks alike to'me, he thought, and stifled a nervous giggle. He didn't know if the Bolsheviks were walking him around in circles to get him lost or if it just worked out that way, but lost he undoubtedly was.

Lo opened the door of a shabby little hut, gestured for his companions and Fiore to go in. The inside of the hut was darker than the alley had been. That didn't stop Lo. He shoved aside a heavy wooden chest-by all appearances, the only furniture in the place--and pulled up a square piece of board underneath it. He and two of his friends dropped down into the tunnel the board concealed.

One of the remaining Reds nudged Fiore and pointed to the round mouth of the tunnel. He went into it with all the eagerness of a man walking to the electric chair. As he had when he left the hut he shared with Liu Han, he learned new lessons about how dark darkness could be. As far as his eyes were concerned, he'd just gone blind. But with Chinese ahead and Chinese pushing him on from behind, he could have no doubt about winch direction to go.

The tunnel wasn't tall enough for him to stand upright, or even to crouch. He had to crawl along on hands and knees, and even then the top of his head kept bumping on the roof and showering clods of dirt down onto his neck. The air in the tunnel smelled like moist earth, dank and musty, and felt dead, as if nobody had any business breathing down here.

He had no idea how long he crawled, either in time or distance. It seemed forever, either way. He imagined the tunnel was sloping up several times, but each one proved to be just that: imaginary. Without eyes to help it, his sense of balance played tricks on him.

At last, though, he smelled fresh air. He hurried forward,

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and now found himself going unmistakably upward as well. He scrambled out and lay gasping in relief in a hollow in a field. After the tunnel, that seemed a wonderful luxury. It also seemed almost bright as day. The other three Chinese Reds came out of the hole just as eagerly as he had. That made him feel better.

Lo cautiously raised his head. He turned to Bobby Fiore, pointed. Fiore raised his head, too. Off in the distance sat a Lizard guard station on the camp perimeter. Fiore mimed lobbing a grenade in that direction. Lo smiled, his teeth startlingly white in the darkness. Then he reached out and thumped Fiore on the shoulder, as if to say, You're okay, Mac.

He whispered something to one of the other young men who handed Bobby Fiore a grenade. He felt for the pin, found it. Lo held up fingers close to his face--one, two, three. Then he, too, mimed throwing. "Yeah, I know I gotta get rid of it,' Fiore said laconically. The fellow who'd given him the grenade proved to have three more, which he also passed on. Fiore took them, but less enthusiastically each time. He figured he could throw one maybe two, and get away in the confusion, but anything that and he'd be asking to get blown to pieces.

But the Reds weren't asking him to do anything they weren't game for themselves. Some of them pulled out pistol from the waistbands of their trousers; Lo and one other fellow had submachine guns instead-not tommy guns like gangsters but stubbier, lighter weapons of a make Fiore didn't recognize He wondered if they were Russian. Any which way, he wa glad he hadn't tried using that baseball bat back in his hut. Lo started crawling through the field-beans were growin in it, Fiore discovered-toward the Lizard outpost. The raiders and Fiore trailed after him. The reek of night soil (a poetic a way of saying shit as he'd ever heard) filled his nos

trils; the Chinese used it for fertilizer.

The Lizards obviously weren't expecting trouble from th outside. The humans easily got within fifty yards of their pe rimeter. Lo looked a question to Bobby Fiore: was this clos enough? He nodded. Lo nodded back and thumped him on shoulder again. For a Chinaman and a Communist, Lo was al right.

The raiders slithered out into a rough skirmish line. L stayed close by Fiore. He gave his comrades maybe a rni

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and a half to find firing positions, then pointed first to Fiore and then to the guard station.

I get to open the show, huh? It was an honor Fiore could have done without, but nobody'd asked his opinion. He yanked the pin out of one of the grenades, hurled it as if he'd just taken a relay in short right and was trying to nail a runner at the plate. Then he flung himself flat on the stinking ground.

Bang! The blast was oddly disappointing; he'd expected more. But it did what it was supposed to do: it got the Lizards' attention. Fiore heard hissing shouts, saw motion in and around the guard post.

That was what the Chinese had been waiting for. Their guns opened up with a roar quite satisfyingly loud. Lo went through a whole magazine in what seemed no more than a heartbeat; his submachine gun spat a flame bright and searingly yellow as the sun: He rammed in another clip and started shooting again. Did the hisses turn to screams? Did Lizards fall, pierced by bullets? Fiore didn't know for sure. He jumped up and threw another grenade. Its boom added to the cacophony all around.

For somebody who'd never seen action till that moment, he'd gauged it pretty well. No sooner had he hit the dirt again than the Lizards woke up. Searchlights came on. If the muzzle flash from Lo's submachine gun had been sun-bright, they were like looking at the naked face of God. And the machine guns they opened up with reminded Fiore of God, too, or at least of His wrath. Bobby even wished he were back in the tunnel.

Off to his left, one of the Chinese raiders started screaming and wouldn't stop. Off to his right, fire from the second submachine gun cut off in the middle of a burst and didn't start up again. Just over his head, bullets clipped off the tops of growing bean plants like a harvester from hell.

Lo kept right on shooting, which made him either brave or out of his ever-loving mind. Two searchlights swung toward him, which meant that for a moment none was pointing at Bobby Fiore. He threw his third grenade, got down, and started rolling away from where he had been. 'Me location didn't seem healthy any more.

Lo's weapon fell silent. Fiore didn't know whether he was dead or also moving. He kept rolling himself until he fetched up against a long obstruction: a dead Chinese, pistol still in

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hand. Fiore took it and scuttled away from the Lizard gun He'd done all the fighting he intended to do today. He put all the distance he could between himself and th terrible fire. Bullets lashed the plants all around him, kickin up dirt that spattered his hands, his feet, his neck. Someho none of the bullets hit him. If Lizard infantry came out afte him, he knew he was dead. But the aliens relied on firepowe instead, and however awesome it was, it wasn't perfect-n(file:///C|/2590% 20Sci-Fi% 20 and % 20 Fantasy% 20 E-books/Harry% 20 Turtled ove% 20-% 20 Worldwar% 2002% 20-% 20 Tilting% 20 the% 20 Balance.txt the state of the state of

quite. The last Chinaman stopped shooting and starte shrieking.

Alternating Hail Marys with under-his-breath mutters o "Where the fuck's that tunnel?" Fiore slithered back tow where he thought it was. After a while, he realized he mu have gone too far. At the same instant, he also realized couldn't possibly go back, not if he wanted to keep on breatt ing.

"If I can't get back into camp, that means I better get ass outta here," he mumbled. He crawled and scuttled as fa as he could. No searchlights picked him up as he dodged Ix tween rows of beans. Then he tumbled into a muddy ditch tiny creekbed in the poorly tended field that providentially diagonally away from the Lizard guard post. He hoped Chinese Reds had done some damage there, but was whatev they'd done worth six fives?

He didn't know. He was damned sure it wasn't worth seve though.

After an eternity that might have lasted fifteen minutes, beans on either side of the ditch gave way to bushes and s lings. About then, a helicopter came rattling over the field raked it with fire. Dust and pulverized bean plants flew i the sky. The noise was like the end of the world. Bobb Fiore's teeth chattered in terror. The same sort of flying gin ships had strafed his train and the fields around it back in I linois.

After a while, the gunship flew away. It hadn't lashed th place where Fiore lay trembling. That still didn't mean he w safe. The farther out of there he got, the better off he'd be. made himself move even though he shook. He didn't feel as he were in a tight baseball game any more. Combat against t Lizards was more like the fly taking on the swatter.

He was altogether alone and on his own. He counted up h assets- he had one grenade, a pistol with an uncertain numb

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of cartridges, and a tiny smattering of Chinese. It didn't seem like enough.

"Mild bloody climate," George Bagnall muttered, stamping snow from his boots and brushing it from his shoulders. "Sod Jerome bloody Jones."

"Not so bad in here," Ken Embry answered. "Shut the door. You're letting in the bloody spring."

"fught." Bagnall slammed the door with a satisfying crash. He promptly started to sweat, and divested himself of fur cap and leather-and-fur flying suit. As far as he could tell, the Soviet Union in general and Pskov in particular had only two temperatures, too cold and too hot. The wood-burning stove in the comer of the house he and Embry had been assigned was more than capable of keeping it warm: too much more than capable. But none of the windows opened (the notion seemed alien to the Russian mind), and if you let the fire go out, you were facing chilblains again within the hour

"Want some teaT' Embry asked, pointing to a dented samovar that added its quotient of warmth to the close, tropical air. "Real tea, by God?" Bagnall demanded eagerly.

"Not likely," the pilot answered with a sneer. "Same sort of leaves and roots and muck the Bolshies are drinking these days. No milk, either, and no cups, same as always." The Russians drank tea-and their ersatz, too-from glasses, and used sugar but no milk. Considering that at the moment there was no milk in Pskov, save from nursing mothers and a few officers' closely guarded cows and goats, the Englishmen had had to get used to it that way, too. Bagnall consoled himself by thinking he was less likely to catch tuberculosis without milk in his tea; the Reds didn't fret over attestation.

He poured himself a glass of the murky brown brew, stirred in sugar (plenty of beets around Pskov), and tasted- "I've had worse , he admitted. "Where'd you come by it?"

"Bought it from a babushka," Embry answered. "God knows where she got it-probably grew the herbs herself, then fixed them up to sell. Not what you'd call perfect communism, but then not much here seems to be."

"No, hardly," Bagnall agreed. "I wonder if it has to do with the Germans' having been here most of a year before the Lizards arrived."

"I have my doubts," Embry said. "From all I've seen, my

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guess is that the Russians did what they had to do for the co lective farm and the factory and then turned around and did a they could for themselves."

"Min-you're likely right." Even after some weeks i Pskov, Bagnall did not know what to make of the Russians. admired their courage and resilience. About everything else had doubts. Had Englishmen so tamely submitted to thos above diem, no one would ever have questioned the divi right of kings. Only their resilience had let the Russians s vive the string of incompetents and tyrants who ruled them. "And what is the news of the day?" Embry asked. "I was just thinking I find Russians difficult to fathom, Bagnall said, "but in one regard they are perfectly compreher sible: they still hate the Germans. And, I assure you, the sen timent is most generously returned." Ken Embry rolled his eyes. "Oh, God, what now?"

"Here, wait, let me get some more of this. It isn't tea, it isn't too bad, either." Bagnall poured his glass full, sippe(and went on, "One of the things we shall have to do, on unlikely assumption the ground ever unthaws, is build mile upon miles of antitank ditches. Let me merely state that wh to site these ditches, the personnel to excavate them, and th troops to defend them once dug are matters which remain i dispute."

"Do you care to give me the particulars?" Embry aske(with an expression that said he wasn't particularly eager hear them but felt he should. Bagnall understood that expres sion; he suspected his own matched it.

He said, "General Chill is willing to have his Wehrmach lads do some of the digging, but feels the rest should fall o the shoulders of what he terms the 'otherwise useless popula tion.' Typical German tact there, what?"

"I am certain his Soviet colleagues received that in the sp in which it was, intended," Embry said.

"No doubt," BagnO said dryly. "They were also particu larly pleased with his proposal that Russian soldiers and parti sans be those particularly concerned with stopping the Lizards tanks once they traverse said ditches."

"I can see that they would be. How generous of the distin guished German officer to offer his Soviet allies the opportur to commit suicide under such distinguished circumstances." "If you stick that tongue any farther into your cheek, you'n

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liable to bite it off," Bagnall said. As long as he'd known Embry, he and the pilot had dueled to see which of them could wield the twin scalpels of irony and understatement more effectively. He feared Embry had just taken the lead on points. The pilot asked, "And why has General Chill been so extraordinarily gracious?"

"His justification is that the Nazis, with their heavier weapons, would be better used as a reserve to meet any possible Lizard breakthroughs."

"Oh," Embry said in a slightly different tone.

"Just what I thought,". Bagnall answered. The rationale made just enough military sense to force one to wonder whether Chill's plan shouldn't be carried out as proposed. The flight engineer added, "Germans are bloody good at coming up with plausible reasons for things that are to their advantage."

"To their short-term advantage," Embry amended. "Setting the Russians up to be massacred will not endear Chill to them."

Bagnall snorted. "Somehow I doubt that will cause him to lose any great quantity of sleep. He wants to keep his own forces intact first."

"He also wants to hold Pskov," Embry said. "He won't do that without the Russians' help--nor will they, without his. A lovely muddle, wouldn't you say?"

"If you want my opinion, it would be even lovelier if viewed from a distance-say from a London pub-than when we're caught in the middle of it."

"Sometjiing to that," Embry sighed. "Real springtime ... leaves ... flowers ... birds ... a pint pot of best bitter ... perhaps even Scotch."

The pain of longing pierced Bagnall like a stiletto. He feared he'd never see England or its loveliness again. As for Scotch ... well, the spirit the Russians brewed from potatoes would warm a man, or send him to sleep if he drank enough of it, but it didn't taste like anything. He'd also heard that drinking neutral spirits kept you from feeling the effects the next morning. He shook his head. He'd shot that theory right behind the ear more often than he cared to remember.

Embry said, "Speaking of getting stuck in the middle, is there more talk of turning us into infantrymen again?" Bagnall didn't blame him for sounding anxious; their one

foray against the Lizard outpost south of Pskov had been

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plenty to put the flight engineer off the life of a foot soldier forever. The choice, unfortunately, did not rest with him. He said, "They didn't say anything about that when I was in die Krom. But then, they might not have wanted to, either." "For fear we'd bugger off, you mean?" Embry said. Bagnal file:///C//2590%20Sci-Fi%20and%20Fantasy%20E-books/Harry%20Turtledove%20-%20Worldwar%2002%20-%20Tilting%20the%20Balance.txt

nodded. The pilot went on, "Nothing I'd like better. Onlywhere would we goT'

It was a good question. The short answer, unfortunately for both of them, was nowhere, not with the woods full of partisan bands, German patrols, and just plain bandits. Next to some diem, the prospect of facing the Lizards seemed less disastrous The Lizards wouldn't do anything worse than killing you Bagnall said, "You don't really believe those stories about the cannibals in the forest, do you?"

"Let's just say it's something I'd sooner not find out by experiment."

"Too right there."

Before Bagnall could go on, someone knocked at the door. The plaintive voice that came through the thick boards was

London-accented: "Can you let me in? I'm fair frozen." "Radarman Jones!" Bagnall threw the door wide. Jerome Jones came in. Bagnall quickly shut the door after him, and waved him over to the samovar. "Drink some of that. It's fairly good."

"Where's the beautiful Tatiana?" Ken Embry asked Jones as he poured himself a glass of herb tea. Embry sounded jealous. Bagnall didn't blame him. Somehow Jones had managed to connect with a Russian sniper who was even more decorative than she was deadly.

"She's off trying to kill things, I suppose," the radarman answered. He sipped the tea, made a face. "Maybe not bad, but it could be better."

"Being all alone, then, you deigned to honor us with a visit, eh?" Bagnall said.

"Oh, bloody hell," Jones muttered, then hastily added, "sir." His position in Pskov was, to put it mildly, irregular. While Bagnall and Embry were both officers and he very much from the other ranks, he had the specialization in which the Russians-and the Nazis-were interested.

Ken Embry said, "It's all right, Jones. We know they treat you like a field marshal everywhere else in town. Decent of

you to remember your military manners around low camoi fodder types like ourselves."

The radarman winced Even Bagnall, used to such sareast sallies, had trouble being sure how much was intended as w and how much fired with intent to wound. A spell as an infai tryman in an attack that got crushed was enough to jaundic anyone's outlook.

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"Yes, and not all of it good, either," Embry said, evidenq, willing to drop his bitterness. "These people have spent thei entire history being stepped on. Tsars, commissars, what hav you-it'd be a miracle indeed if that didn't show in the I guage.11

"Shall we put Mr. Jones' knowledge of Russian to more practical use?" Bagnall said. Without waiting for a reply froin Embry, he asked the radarman, "What do you bear, going and down in the city?"

"The name is Jones, sir, as you noted, not Job," Jones replied with a grin which rapidly slipped. "People are hungry, people are battered. They don't love the Germans or the Bolsheviks. If they thought the Lizards would feed them and leave them alone otherwise, a lot would just as soon see them as top dogs."

"If I'd stayed safe at home in England, I'd have trouble imagining that," Bagnall said. Of course, flying bomber missions first against the Germans and then against the Lizards had been anything but safe, but Jones and Embry both nodded, understanding what he meant. He went on, "After the Jews rose for the Lizards and against the Nazis, I thought they were the blackest traitors in the history of the world-until their story started coming out. If a tenth part of what they say is true, Germany has more blood on her hands than a thousand years of Hitler's Reich can wash away."

"And they and we are allies," Embry said heavily. "And they and we are allies, yes," Bagnall agreed. "And so

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are they and the Russians, and so are we and the Russians, and Stalin, by all that's said, matches Hitler for butchery any day

of the week, even if he's not so showy about it." "It's a rum old world," Embry said.

Not far away, somebody fired a rifle in the street. Somebody else fired another one, with a report that sounded different: one weapon was German, the other Soviet. Another handful of shots followed, then silence. Bagnall waited tensely, wondering if the shooting would start up again. That would be all anyone needed-war inside Pskov between alleged allies to accompany war outside against foes. But silence held for a couple of minutes.

Then the shooting started again, worse than ever--one of those new German machine guns, the ones with the terrifyingly high cyclic rate that made them sound even more dreadful than they really were, added to the chaos. Several Russian submachine guns gave answer. Through the raucous racket of gunfire came hoarse screams. Bagnall couldn't tell if they were Russian or German.

"Oh, bloody hell," Jerome Jones said.

Embry took hold of one end of a chest of drawers and started pushing it toward the front door, saying, "Best we put up something of a barricade, wouldn't you say?"

Bagnall didn't say anything, but did put his back into helping the pilot manhandle the heavy wooden chest into place. Then he picked up a chair and, grunting, set it on top of the low chest. Together, he and Embry leaned a table against the window by the doorway.

"Jones, you have your pistol with you?" Bagnall asked, then answered himself. "Yes, I see you do. Good." He went into the bedroom and returned with his Mauser, Ken Embry's, and as much ammunition as they had left from the raid on the Lizard base. "I hope we shan't have to use these, but-_2'

"Quite," Embry said. He glanced over at Jones. "No offense, old man, but I'd sooner Tatiana were here than you. She'd be likelier to keep us safe."

"No offense taken, sir," the radarman answered. "I'd sooner Tatiana were here, too. Given any choice at all, I'd sooner be back in Dover, or better yet, London."

Since Bagnall had had almost the same thought not long before, he could only nod. Embry went into the bedroom. He came back with their pair of coal-scuttle hehnets. "I don't

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Since Bagnall had had almost the same thought not long before, he could only nod. Embry went into the bedroom. He came back with their pair of coal-scuttle helmets. "I don't

know whether we ought to put these on. Tbey'll keep out splinters or glancing bullets, but they'll also make the Russians take us for Jerries, which might prove less than ideal under the circumstances."

A random bullet smashed through the wooden front wall, just missed Jones and Bagnall, and buried itself in plaster next to the samovar. "I'll wear a helmet," Bagnall said. "The Russians may ask questions about who we are and whose side we're on, but their ammunition doesn't."

He heard the pop of a mortar and, a moment later, the much louder bang as its bomb went off. He found cover behind another chair and aimed his rifle at the doorway. "The Lizards may not need to take Pskov," he said. "Seems to me more as if the Russians and Germans want to give it to them."

A tracked Lizard troop carrier rattled down the wet dirt road, splattering mud in all directions. Some of it splashed Mordechai Anielewicz as he trudged along on the soft shoulder. The Lizards in the tracked carrier took no special notice of him: to them, he was just another gun-toting Big Ugly on the move.

His lips skinned back from his teeth in a humorless smile. The motion set his whole face itching. Moishe Russie, when he fled the Lizards, had been able to get rid of his beard in one fell swoop. Growing one took longer and, as far as Anielewicz was concerned, was a lot less comfortable.

Also uncomfortable was the Gewehr 98 slung across his back. He valued the rifle all the same: he'd promised himself Zolraag and his minions would not take him alive, and it was the means by which he could keep that promise. He'd also had the sense to take German marching boots a size too large when the time came to disappear from Warsaw. His feet had swollen in them, yes, but he could still take them off and put them on without trouble.

He'd sent Russie west to Lodz. Now that it was his turn to escape the Lizards, he was walking south and east, into the part of Poland the Russians had occupied in 1939 before the Germans ran them out less than two years later. His chuckle sounded anything but mirthful. "Sooner or later, the people who used to work with the Lizards are going to be scattered all over the countryside," he said, and waved his arms to show

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what he meant. The motion startled a magpie, which flew away, chattering angrily.

He sympathized with the bird. Till he'd moved suddenly, it had taken him as harmless. He'd thought the same about the Lizards, or at least that they were a better bargain than the Nazis. For the Jews of Poland, he still thought them a better bargain than the Nazis; had they not come, Poland would have been Judenftei-without Jews-by now.

But he was coming to see that the world was a wider place than Poland. The Lizards might not be out to exterminate mankind, as the Nazis aimed to exterminate Polish Jewry, but they intended to do to humanity as the Germans had done to the Poles themselves: turn them into hewers of wood and drawers of water forever. Anielewicz couldn't stomach that.

A Pole came up the road, heading toward Warsaw with a wheelbarrow full of turnips. The wheel of the wheelbarrow got stuck in a patch the Lizards' troop carrier had chewed to shme. Anielewicz helped the Pole free it from the clinging ooze. It was quite a fight; the wheelbarrow seemed to think it ought to be a submarine.

Finally, though, the two men wrestled it up onto firmer

ground. "God and the Black Virgin of Czestochowa, that was tough," the Pole said, shedding his tweed cap so.he could wipe his forehead with a frayed sleeve. "Thank you, friend." :'Any time," Anielewicz answered. Back before the war,

he d been much more fluent in Polish than Yiddish. He'd tho~ght himself secular then, not so much denying his Judaism as ignoring it, until the Nazis showed him it couldn't be ignored. "Mose are good fat turnips you've got there."

"Take a couple for yourself. You hadn't been here, I might have lost the whole load," the fellow said. His grin showed a couple of missing front teeth. "Besides, you've got a rifle. How am I supposed to stop you?"

"I don't steal,'! Anielewicz answered. Not now I don't, anyway. I'm not starving at the moment. When the Nazis ran the Warsaw ghetto, though ...

The Pole's grin got wider. "Armija Krajowa fighter, are you?" It was a reasonable guess; Anielewicz's looks were more Polish than Jewish, too. Without waiting for an answer, the man went on, "Better I should give you the turnips than sell 'em to the damned Yids in Warsaw, anyhow, eh?" He had no way of knowing how close he came to dying in

the middle of the muddy road without ever learning why. Mordechai Anielewicz took a tight grip on his temper; it wasn't as if he hadn't known plenty of Poles were anti-Semites-and a murder here was liable to make it easier for pursuers to trace him. So he just said, "They're still hungry in there. I expect you'll get a good price."

"Hungry? Why should the Jews be hungry? They've got their mouths pressed to the Lizards' backsides, and they eat their-2' The Pole spat into the roadway in lieu of finishing, but left no doubt about what he'd meant.

Again Anielewicz forced himself to coolness. If the Pole thought he was a countryman rather than a Jew on the dodge, his presence here would attract no notice. So he told himself. But oh, the temptation-

"Here, wait," The turnip seller undid a Polish Army canteen from his belt, yanked out the cork which had replaced the proper stopper. "Have a belt of this to help you on your way."

This was vodka, obviously homemade and strong enough to scar the lining of Anielewicz's throat as it went down. After a small nip, he handed the canteen back to the Pole. "Thank you," he said, wheezing a little.

"Any time, pal." The Pole tilted his head back for a couple of long swallows. "Ahh! Jesus, that's good. Us Catholics got to hang together. Ain't nobody gonna do it for us, am I right? Not the damned Jews, not the godless Russians, not the stinking Germans, and sure as hell not the Lizards. Am I right?"

Anielewicz made himself nod. The worst thing was that the Pole was right, at least from his parochial perspective. No one would give his people any special help, so they'd have to help themselves. But if every people helped itself at the expense of its neighbors, how would any people--or all the peoples together-withstand the Lizards?

With a wave, Anielewicz headed down the road, leaving the Pole to trundle his turnips on toward Warsaw. The Jewish fighting leader (Jewish refugee, he corrected himselfsomeone new would head the fighters now) wondered what the peddler would have done, knowing he was a Jew. Probably nothing much, since he had a gun and the Pole didn't, but he didn't think he would have got the turnips, let alone the belt Of vodka.

A Lizard jet flew by, high overhead. Its vapor trail caught Anielewicz's eye before he heard the thin, attenuated bellow of

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its engines. It probably carried a load of destruction. He hoped someone would shoot it down ... after it had dropped the load of destruction on a Nazi's head.

The road ran through fields of barley, potatoes, and beets. Peasants and their animals plowed those fields as they had every spring for the past thousand years. No tractors snorted chuffed alongside the horses and mules-gasoline was next to file:///C//2590%20Sci-Fi%20and%20Fantasy%20E-books/Harry%20Turtledove%20-%20Worldwar%2002%20-%20Tilting%20the%20Balance.txt

impossible to come by. That had been true under the Germans and was even truer under the Lizards.

Overall, though, the aliens' rule lay lightly on the land. After that armored troop carrier splattered past him, Anielewicz didn't see another Lizard vehicle for the rest of the day. The Lizards garrisoned Warsaw and other towns like Lublin (to which Anielewicz intended to give a wide berth, for just that reason), but used the threat of their power rather than the power itself to hold down the countryside.

"I wonder how many Lizards there are altogether, not just in Poland, but all over the world," he mused aloud. Few enough so that they were stretched thin trying to hold it down and run it, that seemed clear.

He wondered how humanity could best exploit such a weak-

ness. That musing quickly turned to one more practical: he wondered what he was going to do about supper and a place to sleep. Sure, he had hard bread and cheese in his pack to go with the turnips, but none of that was inspiring fare. Similarly he could roll himself in a blanket on the ground, but he didn' want to unless he had to.

The problem soon solved itself: a farmer coming in from the fields waved to him and called, "Are you hungry, friend? Al ways happy to feed an Annija Krajowa man. Besides, I killed a pig yesterday, and I've got more meat than my family can eat. Join us, if you care to."

Anielewicz hadn't touched pork since the ghetto walls came down, but to decline such a feast would only have made the fanner suspicious. 'Thank you very much," he said. "You're sure it's no trouble?"

"Not a bit. Come in, wash up, sit and rest your feet." The farmhouse stood between two thatch-roofed outbuild ings. The farmer shooed some chickens away from the woodpile and into a henhouse in one of those outbuildings, then slammed the door on them. At the fellow's urging, Ardelewicz clumped up the wooden stairs and into the foyer. file:///C//2590%20Sci-Fi%20and%20Fantasy%20E-books/Harry%20Turtledove%20-%20Worldwar%2002%20-%20Tilting%20the%20Balance.txt

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A big brass basin there served for a sink. He washed his hands and face, dried them on a linen towel hung on a nail above the basin. The farmer courteously waited for him to use the water first, then cleaned himself off. After that, introductions were in order: the farmer gave his own name as Wladyslaw Sawatski; his wife was Emilia (a pleasant-looking woman who wore a kerchief over her hair), his teenage son Jozef, and his daughters Maria and Ewa (one older than Jozef, one younget).

Anielewicz said he was Janusz Borwicz, giving himself a good Polish name to go with. his Polish looks. Everyone made much of him. He got the seat at the head of the table in the parlor, he got a mug of apple brandy big enough to make three people shikker, and he got the family's undivided attention. He gave them all the Warsaw gossip he had, especially the part pertaining to the Polish majority.

"Did you fight the Germans when the Lizards came?" Jozef Sawatski asked. He and his father-and both his sisters, tooleaned forward at that.

They wanted war stories, Mordechai realized. Well, he could give them some. "Yes, as a matter of fact, I did," he said truthfully. Again, he edited the tales to disguise his Jewishness.

Wladyslaw Sawatski, who had a brandy mug the size of Anielewicz's, slammed it down on the table with a roar of approval. "Well done, by God!" he exclaimed. "If we'd fought like that in '39, we wouldn't have needed these-creatures-to get the Nazis off our backs."

Anielewicz doubted that. Sandwiched between Germany and Russia, Poland was going to get walloped every so often. Before he could come up with a polite way to disagree with his host, Emilia Sawatski turned to her daughters and said, "Why don't you go and bring in the food now?" Alone in the family, she hadn't cared about tales of conflict.

In came supper, mountains of it: boiled potatoes, boiled kielbasa sausage, big pork steaks, headcheese, fresh-baked bread. Warsaw might be hungry, but the countryside seemed to be doing pretty well for itself.

As Maria, the older girl, plopped a length of sausage onto Anielewicz's plate, she gave him a sidelong glance, then spoke in silky tones to her father. "You're not going to send a hero like Janusz out onto the road after supper, are you, Papa? He'll sleep here tonight, won't he?"

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She wants to go to bed with me, Anielewicz realized with some alarm. That alarm had nothing to do with Maria's person: she was eighteen or nineteen, and quite pretty in a wide-faced, blue-eyed way. Anielewicz didn't particularly worry about angering her father, either. But if he took off his trousers for her, file:///C//2590%20Sci-Fi%20and%20Fantasy%20E-books/Harry%20Turtledove%20-%20Worldwar%2002%20-%20Tilting%20the%20Balance.txt

he wouldn't be able to hide being a Jew.

Wladyslaw Sawatski looked from Maria to Mordechai and back again. The glance was full of understanding: whatever else he might be, Sawatski was no fool. He said, "I was going to let him rest in the barn, Maria, but as you say, he is a hero, and too good for straw. He can sleep on the sofa in the front room there."

He pointed to show Anielewicz where that was. Mordechai was not surprised to discover it lay right outside the doorway to a bedroom that would surely be Wladyslaw's. You'd have to be crazy to try to screw there.

He said, "Thank you, sit. That will be excellent." Sawatski might figure he was lying, but he meant every word of it. Maria had to nod-after all, her father had given her just what she'd said she wanted. Anielewicz hadn't expected to find rabbinic wisdom in a Polish farmer, but there it was. The meat on his plate smelled delicious. Then Ewa Sawatski

asked, "Don't you want any butter on your potatoesT' He stared at her. Mixing meat and dairy products in the same meal-? Then he remembered the meat was pork. If he was eating pork, how could another violation of dietary law matter? "Thank you," he said, and took some butter.

Wladyslaw filled his mug when it got empty. The fanner gave himself a refill, too. His cheeks were red as if he'd rouged them, but that was all the brandy did to him. Mordechai's head was starting to swim, but he didn't think he could decline the drink. Poles poured it down till they couldn't see, didn't they?

The women went into the kitchen to clean up. Wladyslaw sent Jozef off to bed, saying, "We have plenty of work tomorrow." But he still lingered at the table, politely ready to talk as long as Anielewicz felt like it.

That wasn't long. When Mordechai yawned and couldn't stop, Sawatski got him a pillow and a blanket and settled him on the sofa. It was hard and lumpy, but he'd slept on worse in the ghetto and during the fighting afterwards, No sooner had he taken off his boots and stretched himself out at full length

"Drefsab." The new driver swiveled both eye turrets. "What a dismal, ugly hole this is."

"Too right," Ussmak said. "Even for the Big Uglies who used to live here, it was nothing to boast about. For properly civilized males-2' He let that hang. ")Where did they transfer you from?"

"I've been serving in the far east of this continent, against the Chinese and Nipponese," Drefsab answered.

"You must have come out of your eggshell lucky," Ussmak said enviously. "That's easy duty, from all I've heard."

"Me Chinese don't have- much in the way of landcruisers at all," Drefsab agreed- "The Nipponese have some, but they aren't very tough. Hit them and they're guaranteed to brew up--one-shot firestarters, we call them." The new male let his mouth fall open at the joke.

Ussmak laughed, too, but said, "Don't get overconfident here or you'll pay for it. I was in the SSSR just after the invasion, and the Soviets, while their landcruisers weren't too bad, didn't have the faintest idea how to use them. Then I got hurt, and then I came here. I didn't believe what the males told me about the Deutsche, but I've been in action against them now, and it's true."

"I listen," Drefsab said. "rell me more."

"Their new landcruisers have guns heavy enough to hurt us with a side or rear deck shot, and front armor thick enough to turn a glancing shot from one of our guns. You can forget about the one-shot firestarter business here. And they use their machines well: reverse slopes, ambushes, any trick you can think of and too many you've never imagined in your worst nightmares."

Drefsab looked thoughtful. "As bad as that? I've heard of some of the things you're talking about, but I figured half of that, maybe more, was males shooting off steam to haze the new fellow."

"Listen, my friend, we were rolling north from here not long ago when we got our eye turrets handed to us." Ussmak told Drefsab about the push that had started for Belfort and ended up back here at the Besangon barracks.

"We were held-by Big Ughes?" The new driver sounded as if he couldn't believe it. Ussmak didn't blame him. When the Race tried to go somewhere on Tosev 3, it generally got

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there. In lower tones, Drefsab went on, "What happened? Were all the landcruisers tongue-deep in the ginger jar?"

Although Drefsab had spoken quietly, Ussmak scanned the barracks before he answered. No one was paying any particular attention. Good. Ahnost whispering, Ussmak said, "As a matter of fact, that might have had something to do with it. Have you been assigned to a landcruiser crew yet?"

"No," Drefsab said.

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"I'll give you a few names to try to stay away from, then." "Thank you, superior sir." By their paint, Drefsab and Ussmak were of virtually identical rank, but Drefsab honored him not only for the favor but also because of his longer service at this post. Now the new male glanced around the barracks. He too whispered: "Not that I have anything against a taste now and again, you understand-but not in combat, by the Emperor."

After he'd raised his eyes from the ritual gesture of respect for the sovereign, Ussmak said cautiously, "No, that's not so bad." It was what he tried to do himself. But if Drefsab had asked him for a taste, he would have denied keeping any ginger. He had no reason to trust the other male. Instead, though, Drefsab produced a tiny glass vial from one of the pockets of his equipment bag. "Want some of the herb?" he murmured. "We're not in combat now."

Ussmak's suspicions flickered and blew out. When Drefsab poured a little ginger into his hand, Ussmak bent his head down and flicked it off the scales with his tongue. The new driver tasted, too. They sat companionably together, enjoying the surge of pleasure the powdered herb gave them.

"Very fine," Ussmak said. "It makes me want to go out and kill all the Deutsche I can find--or maybe Hessef instead." He had to explain that: "Hessef is my landcruiser commander. If ginger truly made you as smart as it makes you think you are, Hessef would be the greatest genius the Race ever produced. Barracks, battle, it's all the same to him: a good enough time for a taste. And Tvenkel the gunner tastes enough to make him shoot before he takes proper aim. I've seen him do it."

"That doesn't strike me as smart, not if the Deutsche are as good as you make them out to be," Drefsab said.

"They are," Ussmak answered. "When we got to this miserable iceball of a planet, we had equipment and training simulations. The Deutsche had experience in real combat, and their

equipment keeps getting better, while ours doesn't. Let them choose the terms of the fight and they can be a handful." Drefsab made the vial disappear. "You don't taste before you're going into actionT'

"I try not to." Ussmak moved his eye turrets in a way that said he was ashamed of his own weakness. "When the hunger for ginger comes on a male-but you know about that."

"Yes, I know about that," Drefsab agreed soberly. "The way I look on it is this: a male can yield himself up to the herb and let it be all he lives for, or he can taste the herb as it suits him and go on with the rest of his life as best he can. That's the road I try to follow, and if it has some bumps and rocky places in it-well, what road on Tosev 3 doesn't?"

Ussmak stared at him in admiration. Here was a philosophy for a ginger taster-no, after hearing such words, he needed to be honest with himself. a ginger addict-who nonetheless tried to remember he was a male of the Race, obedient to orders, attentive to duty. He said to Drefsab, "Superior sir, I envy you your wisdom."

Drefsab made a gesture of disn-dssal. "Wisdom? For all I know, I may well be fooling myself, and now you. Whatever it is, the price I paid to win it is much too high. Better by far the herb had never set its claws in me."

"I don't know," Ussmak said. "After I've tasted, I feel as if ginger were the only worthwhile thing this miserable world produces."

"After I've tasted, so do I," Drefsab said. "But before, or when I need a taste badly and there's none to be had ... times like those, Ussmak, I'm certain ginger is worst for the Race, not best."

Times like those, Ussmak had the same feeling. He'd heard stories that some males, if they got desperate enough for ginger, traded pieces of the Race's military hardware for the herb. Held never done anything like that himself, but he understood the temptation.

Before he found a safe way to tell that to Drefsab (some things you didn't say directly even to a male who'd given you a taste of ginger, not until you were positive you could trust him with your life as well as with the herb), he heard a brief, shrill whistle in the air, followed by a loud crummp! The glass from a couple of windows in the barracks blew inward in a shower of tinkling shards.

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Ussmak sprang to his feet. As he did so, a loudspeaker blared, "Mortars incoming from forest patch grid 27-Red. Pursuit in force--2' Ussmak didn't wait to hear any more, not with a good taste of ginger running through him. "Come on," he shouted to Drefsab. "Out to the landcruiser park." Another mortar bomb hit in the yard in front of the barracks. His words punctuated by the blast, Drefsab said, "But I've been assigned to no crew."

"So what? Some commander and gunner won't want to wait for their own driver." Ussmak was as sure of that as of his own name. Ginger ran rampant through the base at Besangon; some commander or other would be feeling more intrepid than patient.

The two males ran side by side down the stairs to the yard. Ussmak almost stumbled; the risers were built for Big Uglies, not the smaller Race. Then he almost stumbled again, this time because a blast from a mortar bomb nearly hurled him off his feet. Fragments whistled by; he knew only luck kept them from carving him into jagged, bloody bits. Off to one side of the barracks, guns opened up, flinging blast and sharp-edged bits of hot brass back at the Tosevites who were hurling them at the Race's bastion in Besan~on. With luck, artillery would take care of the raiders before landcruisers had to go in after them.

When no more mortar bombs fell for a little while, Ussmak hoped that had happened. But then the bombs started coming in again. The Big Uglies didn't have antiartillery radar, but they'd learned they had to shift their guns to keep the Race from pounding them to bits. That was the trouble with the Big Uglies: they learned too fast.

Hessef and Tvenkel came dashing up from wherever the investigation team had been questioning them. "Come on!" they shouted together. Ussmak scrambled into his landcruiser the instant he got to it; unless a mortar bomb landed on top of the turret or in the engine compartment, it was the safest place he could be.

The familiar vibration of the big hydrogen-burning engine starting up made him feel this was the purpose for which he'd been hatched. He noted with sober pride that his was the third landcruiser to move out of its revetment. Sometimes the ener-

getic aggression ginger brought wasn't such a bad thing after all.

With the intercom button taped to one hearing diaphragm, he listened to Hessef telling Tvenkel, "Quick, another taste. I want to be all razor wire when we go after those Deutsche or Frangais or whoever's trifling with us."

"Here you go, superior sir," the gunner answered. "And wouldn't the egg-addled snoops who were just grilling us pitch a fit if they knew what we were doing now?"

"Who cares about them?" Hessef said. "They're probably hiding under their desks or else wishing they were back in those addled eggs." Silence followed-likely the silence of the two males laughing together.

Ussmak laughed, too, a little. What the other crewmales said was true, but that didn't mean he was happy about their going into action with heads full of ginger, even if he was doing the same thing himself. It's not my fault, he thought virtuously. I didn't know the Big Uglies would sneak a mortar into range.

Square 27-Red was northeast of the fortress, and east of the river that wound through Besan~on. Following the two landcruiser crews that had managed to get moving ahead of him, Ussmak roared down the hill on which the fortress sat and toward the nearest bridge. Big Uglies stared at the landcruisers as they went by. Ussmak was sure they wished one of those mortar bombs had blown him to bits.

Sometimes when he rumbled through town, he drove unbuttoned and noticed the fancy wrought-iron grillwork that decorated so many of the local buildings. Not today; today action was liable to be immediate, so he had only his vision slits and periscopes to peer through. The streets, even the big ones, were none too wide for landcruisers. He had to drive carefully to keep from mashing a pedestrian or two and making the Franqais love the Race even less than they did already.

He felt the explosion ahead as much as he heard it; for a moment, he thought it was an earthquake. Then gouts of flame shot from the lead landcruiser, which lay on its side. He slammed on the brakes as hard as he could. The murdered landcruiser's ammunition load began cooking off, adding fireworks to the funeral pyre. Ussmak shivered in horror. If I'd been just a clawtip faster out of the revetment, I'd have driven over that bomb in the street, he thought. The Big Uglies must

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have figured out just how the Race would respond to a mortar attack and set their ambush accordingly.

"Reverse!" Hessef yelled into Ussmak's hearing diaphragm. "Get out of here!" The order was sensible, and Ussmak obeyed it. But the commander of the landcruiser behind him didn't have reflexes as fast as Hessef's (maybe they weren't gingerenhanced). With a loud crunch, the rear of Ussmak's machine slammed into the front of that one. A moment later, the file:///C//2590%20Sci-Fi%20and%20Fantasy%20E-books/Harry%20Turtledove%20-%20Worldwar%2002%20-%20Tilting%20the%20Balance.txt

landcruiser in front of Ussmak backed into him.

Had the terrorists who planted the explosive under the road stayed around, they might have had a field day attacking stuck landcruisers with firebombs. Perhaps they hadn't realized how well their plan would work: the multiple accident of which Ussmak found himself a part was far from the only one in the fine of landcruisers. The machines, fortunately, were tough and suffered little damage.

ne same could not be said about the Big Uglies who'd been standing anywhere near where the bomb went off Ussmak watched other Tosevites carry away broken, bleeding bodies. They were only aliens, and aliens who hated him at that, but Ussmak wanted to turn his eye turrets away from them anyhow. They reminded him how easily he could have been broken and bleeding and dead.

With patience, which the Race did have in full measure, the snarls unkinked and the landcruisers chose the next best route out of Besangon. This time a special antiexplosives unit pre ceded the lead machine. Near the bridge over the River Doubs everybody halted: the unit found another bomb buried under new patch of, pavement.

Even though air conditioning kept the interior of the land cruiser's fighting compartment comfortably warm, Ussm shivered. The Big Uglies had known what the males of Race would do, and done their best to hurt them not just onc but twice-and their best had been pretty good-

Eventually, the landcruisers did reach square 27-Red. By then, of course, the raiders and their mortar were long gone. Back at the barracks that evening, Ussmak said to Drefsab "They made idiots of us today"

"Not altogether," Drefsab said. Ussmak waggled one ey turret slightly in a gesture of curiosity. The other male ampli fied: "We did a good job of making idiots of ourselves." Wi that Ussmak could not disagree. It was, however, an opinion t

be shared only among those of inconsequential rank--or so he thought.

But he was wrong. Three days later, inspectors of a sort altogether different from the first lot descended on Besangon. Most of the males whom Ussmak knew to be ginger tasters (and especially ginger tasters who'd let their habits get the better of them) disappeared from the base: Hessef and Tvenkel among them.

Drefsab wasn't seen at Besangon any more after that, either. Ussmak wondered at the connection; before long, wonder hardened into near certainty. He knew more than a little relief that the inspectors hadn't swept him up along with his crewmales.

If I ever see Drefsab again, I'll have to thank him, he thought.

"Jesus Christ, Jager, you're still alive?" The big, deep voice boomed through the German encampment.

Heinrich Jager looked up from the pot of extremely ersatz coffee he was brewing over a tiny cookfire. He jumped to his feet. "Skorzeny!" He shook his head in bemusement. "And you wonder that I'm alive, after the madcap stunts you've pulled off?" He hurried over to shake the SS man's hand.

Otto Skorzeny said, "Pooh. Yes, my stunts, if that's what you want to call them, are maybe more dangerous than what you do for a living, but I spend weeks between them planning. You're in action all the time, and going up against Lizard panzers isn't a child's game, either." He glanced at Jager's collar tabs. "And a colonel, too. You've stayed up with me." His rank badges these days also had three pips.

Jager said, "nat's your fault. That madman raid on the Lizards in the Ukraine-~' He shuddered- He hadn't had a tank wrapped around him like an armored skin then.

"Ali, but you brought home the bacon, or half the rashers, anyhow," Skorzeny said. "For that, you deserve everything you goC,

"Then you should be a colonel-general by now," Jager retorted. Skorzeny grinned; the jagged scar that ran from the corner of his mouth toward his left ear pulled up with the motion of his cheek. Jager went on, "Here, do you have a cup? Drink some coffee with me. It's vile, but it's hot." Skorzeny pulled the tin cup from his mess kit. As he held it

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out, he clicked his heels with mocking formality. "Danke sehr Herr Oberst! "

"Thank me after you've tasted it," Jager said. The advice proved good; Skorzeny's scar made the face he pulled seem only more hideous. Jager chuckled under his breath-wherever he'd seen Skorzeny, in Moscow, in the Ukraine, and now here, the man hadn't cared a fig for military discipline. And now here-Jdger's gaze sharpened. "What does bring you here, Standartenffihrer Skorzeny?" He used the formal SS title with less irony than he would have aimed at any other soldier of Hitler's elite.

"I am going to get into Besangon," Skorzeny announced, as if entering the Lizard-held city were as easy as a stroll around the block.

"Are you?" Jager said noncommittally. Then he brightened. "Did you have anything to do with that bomb last week? I hear it took out one of their panzers, maybe two."

"Petty sabotage has its place, but I do not engage in it." Skorzeny grinned again, this time like a predator. "My sabotage is on the grand scale. I aim to buy something of value which one of our little scaly friends is interested in selling. I have the payment here." He reached over his shoulder, patted his knapsack.

Jager jabbed: "They trust you to carry gold without disappearing?"

"O ye of little faith." Skorzeny sipped the not-quite-coffee again. "That is without a doubt the worst muck I have ever drunk in my life. No, the Lizards care nothing for gold. I have a kilo and a half of ginger in there, Jager."

"Ginger?" Jager scratched his head. "I don't understand." "Think of it as morphine, if you like, then, or perhaps cocaine," Skorzeny said. "Once the Lizards get a taste for it they'll do anything to get more, and anything includes, in thi case, one of the Tangefinders that make their panzers so dead accurate."

"Better than what we have in the Panther?" Jager set an affectionate hand on the road wheel of the brush-covered machine parked by the fire. "It's a big step up from what they into my old Panzer M."

"Get ready for a bigger step, old son," Skorzeny said. "I don't know all the details, but I do know it's a whole new prin ciple."

"Can we use it if you get it?" Jager asked. "Some of the things the Lizards use seem good only for driving our own scientists mad." He thought of his own brief and unhappy stay with the physicists who were trying to turn the explosive metal he and Skorzeny had stolen into a bomb.

If Skorzeny had that same thought, he didn't show it. "I don't worry about such things. That's not my job, no more than setting foreign policy for the Reich. My job is getting the toys so other people can play with them."

"That is a sensible way for a soldier to look at the world." After a couple of seconds, Jager wished he hadn't said that. He'd believed it wholeheartedly until he found out how the SS went about massacring Jews: someone had given them that job, and they went ahead and did it without worrying about anything else. He changed the subject: "All right, you're going into Besanqon to get this fancy new rangefinder. How do you expect me to help? We're still close to eighty kilometers north of it, and if I roll out my panzers for an attack, they'll all be scrap metal before I get a quarter of the way there. Or have you arranged for your Lizard who likes ginger so well to sell you all their rangefinders instead of just one?"

"That would be nice, wouldn't it?" Skorzeny slugged back the rest of his coffee, made a horrible face. "Mis Dreck is even worse after it cools down. Damn, Jager, you disappoint me. I expected you to run me right down the Grande Rue in Besangon and on to the citadel, cannon blazing."

"Good luck," Jager blurted before he realized the other man was joking.

"How's this, then?" Skorzeny said, chuckling still. "Suppose you lay on an attack-a few panzers, artillery, infantry, whatever you can afford to expend and seem convincingly aggressive without hurting your defense too much--on the eastern half of the front. I want you to draw as much attention as you can away from. the western section, where 1, a simple peasant, shall pedal my bicycle-you do have a bicycle around here for me to pedal, don't you?-into Lizard-held territory and on down to Besangon. I have a way to get word to you when I shall require a similar diversion to aid my return."

Jager thought about the men and equipment he would lose in a pair of diversionary assaults. "The rangefinder is as good as all that?" he asked.

"So I've been told." Skorzeny gave him a fishy stare.

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"Would you prefer formal written orders, Colonel? I assure you, that can be arranged. I'd hoped to rely more on our previous acquaintance."

"No, I don't need formal orders," Jager said, sighing. "I shall do as you say, of course. I only hope this rangefinder is worth the blood it will cost."

"I hope the same thing. But we won't find out unless I get

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the gadget, will we?" "No." Jager sighed again. "When do you want us to put in the diversionary attack, Herr StandartenftihrerT' "Do what you need to do, Herr Oberst," Skorzeny answered. "I don't want you to go out there and get slaughtered because you hadn't shifted enough artillery and armor. Will three days give you enough time to prepare?" "I suppose so. The front is narrow, and units won't have far to travel." Jager also knew, but could not mention, that the more men and machines he fed into the assault, the more would be expended. War assumed expending soldiers. The trick was to keep from expending them on things that weren't

He moved men, panzers, and artillery mostly by night, to

worth the price.

keep the Lizards from noticing what he was up to. He didn't completely fool them; their artillery picked up on the eastern sector of the front, and an air strike incinerated a couple of trucks towing 88mm antitank guns caught out in the open. But most of the shift went through without a hitch.

At 0500 on the morning of the appointed day, with dawn staining the eastern sky, artillery began flinging shells at the Lizards' positions near the ChAteau de Belvoir. Rifle-carrying men in field gray loped forward. Jager, standing up in the cupola as a good panzer commander should, braced himself as his Panther rumbled ahead.

The Lizards' advance positions, being lightly held, were soon overrun, though not before one of the aliens turned a Panzer IV to Jdger's right to a funeral pyre with a rocket. He didn't see any enemy panzers, for which he thanked God; intelligence said they'd pulled back toward Besangon after the rough time he'd given them in their latest attack.

But even without armor, the Lizards were a handful. Jager hadn't pushed forward more than a couple of kilometers before a helicopter rose into the sky and peppered his force with rockets and machine-gun fire. Another panzer, this one a Tiger,

brewed up. He winced-not only a powerful new machine, but also a veteran crew, gone forever. A lot of foot soldiers were down, too.

He got in sight of the main Lizard position outside the ChAteau de Belvoir, lobbed a couple of high-explosive shells at the chqteau itself (not without an inward pang at destroying old monuments; he'd thought of archaeology as a career until World War I sucked him into the army for good), and, having taken enough casualties to provide the diversion Skorzeny wanted, withdrew to lick his wounds and wait to be called on to sacrifice again.

"I hope the Lizards don't follow us home," Klaus Meinecke said as the Panther made its way back to the start line. "If they do, they're liable to catch us with our pants down around our ankles."

"Too true," Jager said; the gunner had found an uncomfortably vivid way to put words to his own fears.

Maybe the Lizards suspected the Germans of trying to lure them into a trap. Whatever their reasons, they didn't pursue. Jager gratefully seized the time they gave him to rebuild his defensive position. After that, he went back to watchful waiting, all the while wondering how Skorzeny was going to get word to him that he needed more strong young men thrown into the fire.

A week after the diversionary attack, a Frenchman in a tweed jacket, a dirty white shirt, and baggy black wool trousers came up to him, sketched a salute, and said, in bad German, "Our friend with the'~-his finger traced a scar on his left cheek-"he needs the help you promise. Tomorrow morning, he say, is the good time. You understand?"

" Oui, monsieur Merci, " Jager answered. 'Me Frenchman's thin, intelligent face did not yield to a smile, but one eyebrow rose. He accepted a chunk of black bread, offering in exchange a swig of red wine from the flask on his belt. Then, without another word, he vanished back into the woods.

Jager got on the field telephone to the nearest Luftwaffe base. "Can you give me air support?" he asked. "When their damned helicopter gunships show up, I lose panzers I can't spare.

"When I go after those gunships, I lose aircraft I can't spare," the Luftwaffe man retorted, "and aircraft are just as vital to the defense of the Reich as panzers. Guten Tag." The

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phone fine went dead. Jager concluded he was not going to get his air support.

He didn't. The attack went on nonetheless. It even had a moment of triumph, when Meinecke incinerated a Lizard infantry fighting vehicle with a well-placed round from the Panther's long 75mm gun. But, on the whole, the Germans suffered worse than they had in the first diversionary assault. That had put the Lizards' wind up, and they were ready and waiting this time. Maybe that meant they'd pulled some troops from the western section of their line. Jager hoped so; it would mean he was doing what he was supposed to.

When he'd soaked up enough casualties and damage to make the Lizards believe (with luck) he'd really tried to accomplish something, he retreated once more. No sooner had he returned to the jumping-off point than a runner came panting up and said, "Sir, there's a Lizard panzer advancing on our front line about five kilometers west of here."

"A Lizard panzerT' Jager said. The messenger nodded. Jager frowned. That wasn't as bad as it might have been, but even one Lizard panzer made a formidable foe. Poor Skorzeny, he thought: they must have caught on to his scheme this time. Then anger surged through him at having to mount diversionary attacks in support of a plan that hadn't been likely to succeed anyhow.

"Sir, that's not all," the messenger said.

"What else, then?" Jager asked.

"The panzer has a white flag flying from above the driver's station, sir," the fellow answered, with the air of a man reporting something he doesn't expect to be believed. "I saw it with my own eyes."

"This I must see with my own eyes," Jager said. He hopped into a little Volkswagen light army car, waved the messenger in beside him as a guide, and headed west. He hoped he had enough petrol to get where he was going. The light army car's engine put out less than twenty-five horsepower and didn't use much petrol, but the Wehrmacht had little to spare, either.

As Jager drove, a suspicion began to form in the back of his mind. He shook his head. No, he told himself. Impossible. Not even Skorzeny could-

But Skorzeny had. When Jager and the messenger pulled up in front of the Lizard panzer, the driver's hatch came open and

Again, he noticed refinement. No sharp edges, no outthrust chunks of metal anywhere. You could, if you were Lizardsized, move around without fear of banging your head. Then he noticed the turret had no loader's seat, just as there'd been no hull gunner's position in the Lizard panzer's forward compartment. Did the gunner or commander have to load shells, then? He couldn't believe it. That would badly slow the panzer's rate of fire, and he knew from bitter experience the Lizards could shoot quicker than their German counterparts.

Some of the gadgetry that filled the turret without crowding it had to be an automatic. loader, then. He wondered how it worked. No time to wonder, not now, except to hope German engineers could copy it. The gunner's station, like the driver's instrument panel, was a lot more complex than he was used to. He wondered how the Lizard who sat there could figure out what he needed to do in time to do it. Pilots managed, so maybe the gunner could, too. No--again from experience, certainly the gunner could, too.

Skorzeny's voice, peremptory now, came down through the open cupola: "Get your arse out of there, Jager. I'm going to drive this beast away right now."

Regretfully-he hadn't seen all he wanted-Riger slithered out and dropped down to the ground. The SS man climbed up onto the deck of the Lizard panzer and got back into the forward compartment. He was thicker through the waist than Jager and had a devil of a time squeezing in, but he managed.

Back when the Wehrmacht first ran into the Russian T-34, there'd been talk of building an exact copy. In the end, the Germans didn't do that, although the Panther incorporated a lot of the T-34's best features. If the Reich copied this Lizard panzer Jager thought, they'd have to train ten-year-olds to crew it. Nobody else really fit.

Skorzeny started up the motor. It was amazingly quiet, and didn't belch clouds of stinking fumes-refinement again. Jager wondered what it used for fuel. Skorzeny put it in gear and drove off. Jager stared after him, shaking his head. The man was an arrogant bastard, but he accomplished things nobody in his right mind would dream of trying, let alone pulling off.

Atvar glowered at the male who stood stiffly in front of his desk. "You did not clean out that clutch of ginger-lickers as thoroughly as you should have," he said.

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"The exalted fleetlord is correct," Drefsab replied tonelessly. "He may of course punish me as he sees fit." Some of Atvar's anger evaporated. Drefsab had himself been trapped in ginger addiction; that he worked at all against his corrupted colleagues gave the fleetlord a weapon he would otherwise have had to do without. Nevertheless, he snapped, "A landcruiser disappearing! I never would have thought it file:///Cl/2590% 20Sci-Fi% 20and% 20Fantasy% 20E-books/Harry% 20Turtledove% 20-% 20Worldwar% 2002% 20-% 20Tilting% 20the% 20Balance.txt

possible."
 "Which is probably just how it happened, Exalted Fleetlord," Drefsab said: "No one else thought it was possible, either, and so no one took the precautions that would have kept
it from happening."
 "That Big Ugly with the scar again," Atvar said. "They all
look alike, but that male's disfigurement makes him stand out.
He has given us nothing but grief-die landcruiser now, and
spiriting Mussolini away from right under our muzzles ... and
I have some reason to believe he was involved in the raid
where the Big Uglies hijacked our scattered nuclear material."
 "Skorzeny." Drefsab turned the sibilants at the beginning
and middle of the name into long hisses.

"That is what Deutsch propaganda called him after the

Mussolini fiasco, yes," Atvar said. "In spite of your unfortunate taste for ginger, Drefsab, you remain, I believe, the most effective operative I have available to me."

"Me exalted fleetlord is gracious enough to overestimate my capacities," Drefsab murmured.

"I had better not be overestimating diem," Atvar said. "My orders for you are simple: I want you to rid Tosev 3 of this Skorzeny, by whatever means become necessary. Losing him will hurt the Deutsche more than losing a hundred landcruisers. And the Deutsche, along with the British and the Americans, are the most troublesome and ingeniously obstreperous Big Uglies there are, which, considering the nature of the Big Ugfies, is saying a great deal. He must be eliminated, and you are the male to do it."

Drefsab saluted. "Exalted Fleetlord, it shall be done."

After several months' living and travel in places mostly without electricity, Sam Yeager had all but forgotten how wonderful having the stuff could be. The reasons weren't always the obvious ones, either. Keeping food fresh was great, sure. So was having light at night, even if you did need blackout

curtains so the Lizards wouldn't spot it. But he hadn't realized how much he missed the movies till he got to see one again. Part of the feeling sprang from the company he kept. Having Barbara on the plush seat beside him, her hand warm in his, would have put a warm glow on anything this side of going to the dentist (not a major concern for Yeager anyhow, not with his store-bought teeth). Later, his hand would probably drop to her thigh. In the dim cavern of the movie theater, no-

body was likely to notice, or to care if he did notice. But part of what Sam got from the movies had nothing to do with Barbara. For a couple of hours, he could forget how miserable the world outside this haven on Sixteenth Street looked and pretend what happened on the screen was what mattered.

"Funny," he whispered to Barbara as they waited for the projectionist to start the newsreel: "I can get out of myself with a good story in a magazine or a book, but watching a show is more special somehow."

"Reading lets me get away from things, too," she answered, "but a lot of people can't escape that way. I feel sorry for them, but I know it's true. The other thing is, when you're reading, you're by yourself. Here you're with lots of other people looking for the same release you're after. It makes a difference.,,

"I found what I was after," Sam said, and squeezed her hand. She turned to smile at him. Before she could say anything, the lights dimmed and the big screen at the front of the theater came to sparkling life.

The newsreel wasn't the smoothly professional production it would have been before the Lizards came. Yeager didn't know whether the aliens held Hollywood itself, but the distribution system for new films coming out of California had completely broken down.

What the moviegoers got instead was a U.S. Army production, probably put together right here in Denver. Some of the bits had sound added; some used cards with words on them, something Sam remembered from silent film days but had thought to be gone for good.

EASTERN FRANCE, one of those cards announced. The camera panned slowly, lovingly, across burned-out Lizard tanks. A tough-looking fellow in German uniform walked among the wreckage.

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People cheered wildly. Barbara murmured, "Has everyone forgotten the Nazis were our worst enemies a year ago?" "Yes," Yeager whispered back. He had no love for the Nazis, but if they were hurting the Lizards, more power to 'em. He hadn't loved the Russian Reds last year, either, but he'd been damn glad they were in the fight against Hitler.

Another card flashed: Moscow. There stood Stalin, shaking hands with a factory worker in a cloth cap. Behind them, a row

of almost-completed airplanes stretched as far as the eye-or the camera---could see. Yet another card said, THE SOVIET UNION STAYS IN THE FIGHT. More cheers echoed through the movie theater.

The next segment had sound; a fellow with a flat midwestern accent said, "Outside of Bloomington, the Lizards banged their snouts into tough American resistance as they tried to push north toward Chicago again." Another picture of a wrecked Lizard tank was followed by shots of tired-looking but happy GIs around a campfire.

Yeager almost bounced out of his chair. "There's MutL by God!" he told Barbara. "My old manager, I mean. Jesus, I wonder how he lived through all the fighting. He's got sergeant's stripes, to"d you see?" "I wouldn't have recognized him, Sam. He wasn't my manager," she answered, which made him feel foolish. She added, "I'm glad he's all right."

"Boy, so am I," he said, "I've played for some real hard cases in my day, but he was one of the other kind, the good ones. He---2' People to either side and behind made shushing noises. Yeager subsided, abashed.

The newsreel cut to a card that said, SOMEWHERE IN THE U.S.A. "Ladies and gentlemen, the President of the United States!" the announcer said.

In the black-and-white film, Franklin D. Roosevelt sat behind a desk in what looked Re a hotel room. The drapes were drawn behind him, perhaps merely to give him a backdrop, perhaps to keep the Lizards from figuring out where he was by what the camera showed out the window.

Roosevelt was in his, shirtsleeves, his collar unbuttoned and his tie loose. He looked tired and wom, but kept the cigarette holder at a jaunty angle in his mouth. He still had cigarettes Yeager noted without resentment: FDR was working hard enough to be entitled to them. r

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The President took the holder from his mouth, stubbed out the cigarette instead of letting it smolder to add a picturesque plume of smoke to the scene. He leaned toward the microphone in front of him. "My friends," he said (and Yeager felt Roosevelt was speaking straight to him), "the fight goes on." Applause rippled through the theater, then quickly faded so people could listen to what the President had to say. Even his first half-dozen words gave Sam fresh hope. FDR had always had that gift. He hadn't always made things better, but he'd al-

ways made people feel they would get better, which was half the battle by itself-it made people go to work to improve their own lot instead of moaning about how dreadful everything was.

Roosevelt said, "The enemy is on our soil and in the air above our homes. These creatures from another world believe they can- frighten us into surrender by raining destruction down on our heads. As our gallant British allies did with the Germans in 1940, we shall prove them wrong.

"Every day we have more new weapons to hurl against the Lizards. Every day they have less with which to resist. Those of you who still live free, everything you do to help the war effort helps ensure that your children, and your children's children, will grow up in freedom, too. And to those of you in occupied territory who may see this, I say: do not collaborate with the enemy in any way. Do not work in his factories, do not grow crops for him, do nothing you can possibly avoid. Without human beings to be his slaves, sooner or later he will be helpless.

"For we have hurt him, in America, in Europe, and in Asia as well. He is not superhuman, he is merely inhuman. Our united nations-now all the nations on this planet-will surely triumph in the end. Thank you and God bless you."

The next news segment showed ways to conserve scrap metal. It had a soundtrack, but Yeager didn't pay much attention to it. He didn't think anyone else did, either. Just hearing FDR's voice was a tonic. Roosevelt made you think everything would turn out okay, one way or another.

The newsreel ended with a burst of patriotic music. Sam sighed; now he'd have "The Stars and Stripes Forever" noisily going around in his head for the next several days. It happened every time he heard the song.

"Here comes the real movie," somebody near him said as

the opening credits for You're in the Army Now filled the screen. Yeager had seen it four or five times since it came out in 1941. New movies just weren't getting out these days, and even if they did, they often couldn't have been shown, because electricity was lost in so many places.

When he'd seen the antics of Phil Silvers and Jimmy Durante and the horrified reactions of their superior officers before, they'd left him limp with laughter. Now that he was in the Army himself, they didn't seem so funny any more. Soldiers like that would have endangered their buddies. He wanted to give both comics a swift kick in the rear. Beside him, though, Barbara laughed at the capers they cut. Sam tried to enjoy the escape with her. The musical numbers helped: they reminded him this was Hollywood, not anything real. Getting angry at the actors for doing what was in the script didn't do him any good. Once he'd figured that out, he was able to lean back and enjoy the movie again.

The house lights came up. Barbara let out a long sigh, as if she didn't feel like coming back to the real world. Given its complications, Yeager didn't much blame her. But the world was there, and you had to deal with it whether you wanted to or not.

"Come on," he said. "Let's pick up our bikes and head back

to the university." Barbara sighed again, then yawned. "I suppose so. When we get back there, I think I want to lie down for a while. I'm so tired all the time these days." She managed a wan smile. "I've heard this is what being expecting is supposed to do to you, and boy, it sure does." "We'll take it nice and easy on the way back," said Yeager,

who was still inclined to treat Barbara as if she were made of cut glass and liable to break if jostled. "You rest, and I'll go round up Ullhass and Ristin."

"Okay, Sam." ,

Outside the theater, a herd of bicycles covered the sidewalk and the street by the curb. Keeping an eye on them, in lieu of a sheepdog, was a large, burly fellow with a .45 on his hip. With no gas available for private cars, bikes had become the way of choice to get around, and stealing them as big a problem as horse theft in Denver's younger days. As many people packed a gun now as they had in the old days, too; an unarmed guard wouldn't have done much good.

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Most of Denver was laid out on a north-south, east-west grid. The downtown area, though, nestled into the angle of the Platte River and Cherry Creek, turned that grid at a fortyfive-degree angle. Yeager and Barbara pedaled southeast down Sixteenth Street to Broadway, one of the main north-south thoroughfares.

The Pioneer Monument at the comer of Broadway and Colfax caught Sam's eye. Around the fountain were three reclining bronzes: a prospector, a hunter, and a pioneer mother. At the top of the monument stood a mounted scout.

On him Yeager turned a critical gaze. "I've seen statues that looked realer," he remarked, pointing.

"He does look more like an oversized mantelpiece ornament than a pioneer, doesn't he?" Barbara said. They both laughed.

They turned left onto Colfax. Bicycles, people on foot, horse- and mule-drawn wagons, and quite a few folks riding horses made traffic, if anything, dicier than it had been when cars and trucks dominated. Then everything had moved more or less at the same speed. Now the ponderous wagons were almost like ambulatory roadblocks, but you went around them at your peril, too, because a lot of them were big enough to hide what was alongside till too late.

The gilded dome of the three-story granite State Capitol on Colfax dominated the city skyline. On the west lawn of the capitol building stood a Union soldier in bronze, flanked by two Civil War brass cannon.

Yeager pointed to the statue. He said, "Going up against the Lizards, sometimes I felt the way he would if he had to fight today's Germans or Japs with his muzzle-loader and those guns.,,

"There's an unpleasant thought," Barbara said. They pedaled along; on the east lawn of the capitol stood an Indian, also in bronze. She nodded to that statue. "I suppose he felt the same way when he had to fight the white man's guns with nothing better than a bow and arrow."

'Yeah, he probably did at that," said Sam who'd never thought to look at it from the Indian's perspective. "He got guns of his own, though, and he hit us some pretty good licks, too-at least, I wouldn't have wanted to be in General Custer's boots."

"You're right." But instead of cheering up, Barbara looked glum. "Even though the Indians hit us some good licks, they

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lost-look at the United States now, or the way it was before the Lizards came, anyway. Does that mean we'll lose to the Lizards, even if we do hurt them in the fight?" "I don't know." Sam chewed on that for the next block or so. "Not necessarily," he said at last. "The Indians never did

figure out how to make their own guns and gunpowder; they always had to get 'em from white men." He looked around to make sure nobody was paying undue attention to their conversation before he went on, "But we're well on our way to making bombs to match the ones the Lizards have."

"That's true." Barbara did cheer up, but only for a moment. She said, "I wonder if there'll be anything left of the world by the time we're done fighting the Lizards."

The science-fiction pulps had printed plenty of stories about worlds ruined one way or another, but Sam hadn't really thought about living (or more likely dying) in one. Slowly, he said, "If the choice is wrecking the Earth or living under the Lizards, I'd vote for wrecking it. From what Ullhass and Ristin say, the Race has kept two~ other sets of aliens under their thumbs for thousands of years. I wouldn't wish that on any-body."

"No, neither would I," Barbara said. "But we sure do remind me of a couple of little kids qdarreling over a toy: 'If I can't have it, you can't either!'-and smash! If we end up smashing a whole world ... but what else can we do?"

"I don't know," Yeager answered- He did his best to think about something else. The end of the world wasn't something he wanted to talk about with the woman he loved.

They turned right off Colfax onto University Boulevard. Traffic there was thinner and moved faster than it had in the center of town. Yeager looked around, enjoying the scenery. He'd been up at altitude now, in Wyoming and Colorado, that he could pedal along as readily as he had at sea level.

Just past Exposition Avenue, he saw a couple of cyclists speeding north up University: a skinny blond fellow in civvies followed closely by a burly man in uniform with a Springfield on his back. The skinny guy saw Sam and Barbara, too. He scowled as he whizzed by.

"Oh, dear," Barbara said. "That was Jens." She shook her head back and forth, hard enough to make her bike wobble. "He hates me now, I think." Her voice had tms in it. "He's a fool if he does," Sam said. "You had to choose somebody, honey. I wouldn't have hated you if you'd gone back to him. I just thank God every day that you decided to pick me." That she had still surprised and delighted him.

"I'm going to have your baby, Sam," she said. "That changes everything. If it weren't for the baby--oh, I don't know what I'd do. But with things the way they are, I didn't see that I had any other choice."

They rode along in silence for a while. If I hadn't k7wcked her up, she'd have gone back to Larssen, Sam thought. It made sense to him: she'd known Jens a lot longer, and he was, on paper, more her type. She was a brain and, while Yeager didn't think of himself as stupid, he knew damn well he'd never make an intellectual.

Not quite out of the blue, Barbara said, "Both of you always treated me well-till now. If I'd chosen Jens, I don't think you'd act the way he is."

"I just said that," he answered. "The thing of it is, I've had enough things go wrong in my life that I've sort of learned to roll with the punches. That one would have been a Joe Louis right, but I would've gotten back on my feet and gone on the best I could." He paused again; speaking ill of Larssen was hable to make Barbara spring to his defense. Picking his words carefully, he went on, "I'm not sure Jens ever had anything really tough happen to him before."

"I think you're right," Barbara said. "Mat's very perceptive of you. Even all his grandparents are still alive, or they were before the Lizards came-now, who can say? But he sailed through college, sailed through his graduate work, and had a job waiting for him at Berkeley when he finished. Then he got recruited for the Metallurgical Laboratory--2'

,,-which was every physicist's dream," Yeager finished for her. "Yeah." Not a lot of people had jobs waiting for them when they finished school, not in the Depression they didn't. So Larssen's family had all been healthy, too? And he'd found this wonderful girl. Maybe he'd started getting the idea he was fireproof. "Nobody's fireproof," Yeager muttered with the conviction of a man who'd had to hustle for work every spring training since he turned eighteen.

"What did you say, honey?" Barbara asked.

The casual endearment warmed him. He said, "I was just thinking things go wrong for everybody sooner or later." " 'Count no man lucky before the end,' " Barbara said. It

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sounded like a quotation, but Yeager didn't know where it wa from. She continued, "I don't think Jens has ever had to dea with anything like this before, and I don't think he's dealin with it very well." Again Sam heard unshed tears. "I wish h were."

"I know, hon. I do, too. It would make everything a lo easier." But Sam didn't expect things would always be easy

He was, as he'd said, ready to ride them out when they go tough. And if Jens Larssen wasn't, that was his lookout. Yeager carried his bicycle upstairs to the apartment he an Barbara had taken across the street from the University o Denver campus. Then he went down and carried hers up, too "I'm going to go take my little hissing chums off Smitty' hands," he said. "Have to see what he'll want from me later o for baby-sitting them so I could get free for my Saturday mat inee with you."

Barbara glanced at the electric clock on the mantel. I showed a quarter to four. So did Sam's watch; he was havin to get reused to the idea of clocks that kept good time. Sh said, "It'll still be afternoon for a little while longer, won't it?' As he took her in his arms, Yeager wondered if she jus needed reassurance after the brief, word~ess, but unpleasant en counter with Jens Larssen. If she did, he was ready to give it If you couldn't do that, you didn't have much business bein a husband, as far as he was concerned.

Liu Han felt like a trapped animal with the little scaly devil staring at her from all sides. "No, superior sirs, I don't know where Bobby Fiore went that night," she said in a mixture o the little devils' language and Chinese. "Iliese men wante him to teach them to throw, and he went with them to do that He didn't come bacL"

One of the scaly devils showed her a photograph. It was no a plain black-and-white image; she'd seen those before, an even the color pictures the foreign devils printed in some o their fancy magazines. But this photograph was of the sort th little scaly devils made: not only more real than any humaj could match, but also with the depth the scaly devils put int their moving pictures. It made her feel as if she could reach i and touch the man it showed.

"Have you seen this male before?" the scaly devil holdin the picture demanded in vile but understandable Chinese.

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1-may have, superior Sir," Liu Han said, gulping. Just because she felt she could reach into the picture didn't mean she wanted to. The man it showed was obviously dead, lying in a bean field with his blood and brains splashing the plants and ground around his head. He had a neat hole just above his left eye.

"What do you mean, you may have?" another scaly devil shouted. "Either you have or you have not. We think you have. Now answer me!"

"Please, superior Sir," Liu Han said desperately. "People dead look different from people alive. I cannot be certain. I am sorry, superior Sir." She was sorry Lo-for the dead man in the picture was undoubtedly he-had ever wanted Bobby Fiore to show him how to throw. She was even sorrier he and his henchmen had come to the hut and taken Bobby Fiore away.

But she was not going to tell the little scaly devils anything she didn't have to. She knew they were dangerous, yes, and they had her in their power. But she also had a very healthy respect-fear was not too strong a word-for the Communists. If she spilled her guts to the little devils, she knew she would pay: maybe not right now, but before too long.

The scaly devil holding the picture let his mouth hang open: he was laughing at her. "To you, maybe. To us, all Big Ughes look alike, alive or dead." He translated the joke into his own language for the benefit of his comrades. They laughed, too.

But the little devil who had shouted at Liu Han said, "This is no joke. These bandits injured males of the Race. Only through the mercy of the watchful Emperor"-he cast down his eyes, as did the other little devils-"was no one killed."

No one killed? Liu Han thought. What of Lo and his friends? She was reminded of signs the European devils were said to have put up in their parks in Shanghai: No Docs OR CHINESE ALLOWED. To the little scaly devils, all human beings might as well have been dogs.

"We should give her the drug that makes her tell the truth," the scaly devil with the picture said. "Then we will find out what she really knows."

Liu Han shivered. She was ready to believe the scaly devils had such a drug. They were devils, after all, with powers effectively unlimited. If they gave it to her, they would find out she hadn't told them everything, and then ... then they would do something horrible to her. She didn't care to think about that.

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But then Ttomalss spoke up. The-what had Bobby Fiore named his calfing?-the psychologist, that was it, said, "No, Ssamraff, for two reasons. No first because the drug is not as effective as we believed it would be when we first made it. And no second because this female Big Ugly has a hatchling growing inside her."

Most of that was in Chinese, so Liu Han could follow it. Ssamraff replied in the same language: "Who cares what she has growing inside her?"

"This growth is disgusting, yes, but it is part of a research study," Ttomalss insisted. "Having the Big Ugly male who sired it disappear is bad enough. But drugs could do to Big Ugly hatchlings what they sometimes do to our own as they grow in the egg before the female lays it. We do not want this hatchling to emerge defective if we can avoid it. Therefore I say no to this drug."

"And I say we need to learn who is trying to foully murder

males of the Race," Ssamraff retorted. "This, to me, is more important."- But he spoke weakly; his body paint was less ornate than Ttomalss', which, Liu Han had gathered, meant he was of lower rank.

The little devils had made her give her body to strange men in their experiments. They had watched her pregnancy with the same interest she would have given to a farrowing sow, and no more. Now, though, because she was pregnant, they wouldn't give her the drug that might have made her betray Lo and the other Reds. About time I got some good out of being only an animal to them, she thought.

Ssamraff said, "If we cannot drug the female, how can we properly question her, then?" He swung his turreted eyes toward Liu Han. She still had trouble reading the scaly devils' expressions, but if that wasn't a venomous stare, she'd never seen one. "I am sure she is telling less than she knows."

"No, superior Sir," Liu Han protested, and then stopped in some confusion: not only Ssamraff, but all the devils were staring at her. She realized he'd spoken in his tongue-as had she when she answered.

"You know more of our words than I thought," Ttomalss said in Chinese.

Liu Han gratefully returned to the same language: "I am very sorry, superior Sir, but I did not realize I was not supposed to learn.'

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"I did not say that," the psychologist answered. "But because you know, we have to be more careful with what we say around you."

"Because she knows, we should be trying to find out what she knows," Ssamraff insisted. "This male she was mating with had something to do with the attack on our guard station. I think she is lying when she says she knows nothing of these other males we killed. They are dead, and the one she mates with is missing. Is this not a connection that hisses to be explored?"

"We are exploring it," Ttomalss answered. "But, as I said, we shall not use drugs."

Ssamraff turned one eye turret toward Liu Han to see how she would react as he spoke in his own language: "What about pain, then? The Big Uglies are very good at using pain when they have questions to ask. Maybe this once we should imitate them."

A lump of ice formed in Liu Han's belly. The Communists and the Kuomintang-to say nothing of local bandit chiefsroutinely used torture. She had no reason to doubt the little scaly devils would be devilishly good at it.

But Ttomalss said, "No, not while the hatchling grows inside her. I told you, you may not disturb the conditions under which this experiment is being conducted."

This time, even the little devil who'd shouted at Liu Han supported Ttomalss: "Using pain to force our will even on a Big Ugly i&--2' Liu Han didn't understand the last word he used, but Ssarnraff sputtered in indignation almost laughably obvious, so it must have been one he didn't care for.

When he could speak instead of sputtering, he said, "I shall protest this interference with an important military investigation."

"Go ahead," Ttornalss said. "And I shall protest your interference with an important scientific investigation. You have no sense of the long term, Ssamraff. We are going to rule the Big Uglies for the next hundred thousand years. We need to learn how they work. Don't you see you are making that harder?"

"If we don't root out the ones who keep shooting at us, we may never rule them at all," Ssamraff said.

To Liu Han's way of thinking, he had a point, but the other little scaly devils recoiled as if he'd just said something much worse than suggesting that they torture her to find out what she

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knew of Lo and the Communists. Ttomalss said, "Will you add that to your report? I hope you do; it will show you up as the shortsighted male you are. I shall certainly make a note of your statement when I file my own protest. You were rash to be so foolish in front of a witness." His eye turrets swung toward the

little devil who'd yelled at Liu Han. Ssamraff looked at that little devil, too. He must not have liked what he saw, for he said, "I shall make no protest in this matter. By the Emperor I pledge it." He flicked his glance down at the floor for a moment. So did the other little scaly devils. Then Ttornalss said, "I knew you were a male of sense, Ssamraff. No one wants to have a charge of shortsightedness down on his record, not if he hopes to improve the design of his body paint." "That is so," Ssamraff admitted. "But this I also tell you: to

view in the long term on Tosev 3 is also dangerous. The Big Uglies change too fast to make projections reliable--or else we would have conquered them long since." He turned and skittered out of Liu Han's hut. Had he been a man instead of a scaly devil, she thought he would have stomped away. Ttomalss and the devil who'd shouted at her both laughed as if he'd been funny. Liu Han didn't see the joke. Harry Turtledove

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Sometimes, in the Warsaw ghetto, Moishe Russie had developed a feeling that something was wrong, that trouble (worse trouble,' he amended to himself. just being in the ghetto was tsuris aplenty) would land on him if he didn't do something right away. He'd learned to act on that feeling. He was still alive, so he supposed following it had done him some good. Now, here in Lodz, he had it again.

It wasn't the usual fears he'd known, not the heart-clutching spasm of alarm he'd had, for instance, when he'd seen his face on the wall in the Balut Market square with warnings that he raped and murdered little girls. You'd have to be meshuggeh, he thought, not to be ftightened over something like that.

But what he felt now was different, smaller-just a tickling at the back of his neck and the skin over his spine that something wasn't quite right somewhere. The first day it was there, he tried to make believe he didn't notice it. The second day, he knew it was there, but he didn't tell Rivka. I could be wrong. he thought.

The third day--or rather the evening, after Reuven had gone to bed-he said out of the blue, "I think we should move someplace else."

Rivka looked up from the sock she was darning. "Why?" she asked. "What's wrong here?"

"I don't know," he admitted. "Maybe nothing. But maybe something, too."

"If you were a woman, they'd call that the vapors," Rivka said. But instead of laughing at him as she had every right to do, she grew serious. "Someplace else where? A different flat in Lodz? A different town? A different country?"

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"I'd say a different planet, but the Lizards seem to be using the others, too." Now he laughed, but it wasn't funny.

"Nu, if you think we should go, we'll go," Rivka said. "Better we should move and not need to than need to and not move. Why don't you start looking for a new flat tomorrow, if you think that will be good enough."

"I just don't know," he said. "I wish I could tune the feeling like a wireless set, but it doesn't work that way."

"No, it doesn't," she agreed gravely. "What do you want to do? Do you want to go to Zgierz, for instance? That's not far, but it would probably mean leaving things behind. Still, we've left enough things behind by now that a few more won't matter. So long as the three of us are together, nothing else counts. If the war has taught us anything, that's it."

"You're right." Russie got up from his battered chair, walked over to the bare light bulb by which Rivka sat. He let his hand rest on her shoulder. "But we shouldn't need a war to remind us of that."

She set down the sock and put her hand on top of his. "We

don't, not really. But it has shown us we don't need things to get by in the world, just people we love."

"A good thing, too, because we don't have many things." Moishe stopped, afraid his attempt at a joke had wounded his wife. Not only had they left things behind, they'd left people as well: a little daughter, other loved ones dead in the ghetto. And unlike things, you could not get a new set of people.

If she noticed the catch in Moishe's voice, Rivka gave no sign. She stayed resolutely practical, saying, "You never did answer me. Do you want to get out of Lodz, or shall we stay here9"

'The towns around here, most of them are Judenfreil" he said. "We'd stick out. We don't look Polish. We can't look Polish, I don't think." He sighed. "Litzmannstadt'7--the name the Germans gave Lodz-"would have been Judenftei, too, if the Lizards hadn't come." "All right, we'll stay here, then," Rivka said, accepting his oblique answer. He didn't know if he was doing the right thing. Maybe they would be wiser to flee far from Lodz, even if that meant taking to the road to go to the eastern parts of Lizard-held Poland

where the Nazis had not had time to rout out all the Jews. But

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he couldn't make himself flee like that for what might have been, as Rivka said, a case of the vapors.

To make himself feel he was doing something, he said, "I'll start looking for a new flat tomorrow over by Mostowski Street." That was about as far from where they were as one could go and remain in the Lodz ghetto.

"All right," Rivka said again. She picked up the sock and put another few stitches in it. After a moment, though, she added meditatively, "We'll have to keep on shopping in the Balut Market square, though."

"That's true." Moishe started to pace back and forth. To go? To stay? He still couldn't make up his mind.

"It will be all right," Rivka said. "God has protected us for this long; would He abandon us now?"

That argument would have been more persuasive, Moishe thoug~ht, before 1939. Since then, how many of His people had God allowed to die? Moishe didn't say that to his wife; he didn't even care to think it himself. His own faith was shakier these days than he wished it were, and he didn't want to be guilty of troubling hers.

Instead, he yawned and said, "Let's go to bed." Rivka put down the sock again. She hesitated, then said, "Do you want me to look for the flat? The fewer people who

see you, the smaller the risk we run."

Moishe knew that was true. Nonetheless, his pride revolted at hiding behind Rivka every day-and he had no evidence whatever to back up his hunch. So he said, "It shouldn't be a problem. I'll be only a moment crossing the Balut, and I don't look like my poster picture anyhow, not clean-shaven."

Rivka gave him her best dubious look, but didn't say anything. He reckoned that a victory.

And, indeed, no one paid him any mind as he crossed the market square and turned east into the heart of the ghetto. The shabby brick buildings cast the narrow streets into shadow. Though the Lizards had driven the Germans out of Lodz nearly a year before, the atmosphere of the hellishly crowded ghetto still clung to the place, maybe more strongly than in Warsaw.

Maybe it's the smell, Russie thought. It was a smell of despair and stale cabbage and unwashed bodies and more garbage and sewage than the trash collectors and sewers could handle. Not all the people the Nazis had crammed into Lodz

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had been able to go home. Some had no homes, not after the Germans had fought Poles and Russians, and the Lizards fought the Germans. Some, carTied into the ghetto in cattle cars from Germany and Austria, had homes outside Lizard-held territory. Even now, the ghetto was a desperately crowded place. Posters of Chaim Rumkowski shouted at people from every

blank wall surface. As far as Moishe could tell, people weren't

doing much in the way of listening. In all those teeming streets, he saw only a couple of persons glance up at the posters, and one of those, an old woman, shook her head and laughed after she did. Somehow that made Russie feel a little better about mankind.

His own poster still appeared here and there, too, now beginning to fray and tatter a bit. No one looked up at that any more, either, to his relief.

When he got to Mostowski Street, he started poking his nose into blocks of flats and asking if they had any rooms to let. At first he thought he would have no choice but to stay where he was or else leave town. But at the fourth building he visited, the fellow who ran the place said, "You are a lucky man, my friend, do you know that? I just had a family move out not an hour ago."

"WhyT' Moishe asked in a challenging voice. "Were you charging them a thousand zlotys a day, or did the cockroaches and rats make alliance and drive them out? It's probably a pigsty you're going to show me."

From one Jew to another, that hit hard a couple of ways. The landlord, or manager, or whatever he was, clapped a hand to his forehead in a theatrical display of injured innocence. "A pigsty? I should kick you out of here on your tokhus to talk like that. One look at this flat and you'll be down on your Knees begging to rent."

"I don't get down on my knees for God and I should do it for you? You should live so long," Moishe said. "Besides, you still haven't said what ridiculous price you want."

"You shouldn't even see it, with a mouth like yours." But the landlord was already walking back toward the stairway, Moishe at his heels. "Besides, such a deadbeat couldn't pay four hundred zlotys a month."

"if he lived in Lodz, King Solomon couldn't pay four hundred zlotys a month, you ganef." Moishe stopped. "I'm Sony

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I wasted my time. Good day." He didn't leave. "A hundred fifty I might manage."

The landlord had one foot on the stairs. He didn't put the other one with it. "I might manage to starve, if I didn't have better sense than to listen to an obvious shlemiel like you. I would be giving this lovely flat away at 350 zlotys."

"Then give it away, but not to me. I have better ways to spend my money, thank you very much. A hundred seventyfive would be too much, let alone twice that."

"Definitely a shlemiel, and you think I'm one, too." But the landlord started climbing the stairs, and Moishe climbed with him. The stairwell reeked of stale piss. Moishe didn't know a stairwell in the ghetto that didn't.

By the time they got to the flat, they were only a hundred zlotys apart. There they stuck, because Moishe refused to haggle any further until he saw what he might be renting. The landlord chose a key from the fat ting on his belt, opened the door with a flourish. Moishe stuck in his head. The place was cut from the same mold as the one he was living in: a main room, with a kitchen to one side and a bedroom to the other. It was a little smaller than his present flat, but not enough to matter. "The electricity works?" he asked.

The manager pulled the chain that hung down from the ceiling lamp in the living room. The light came on. "The electricity works," he said unnecessarily.

Moishe went into the kitchen. Water ran when he turned the faucet handle. "How is the plumbing?"

" Verkakte, " the landlord answered, which made Russie suspect he might have some honesty lurking in him. "But for Lodz, for now, it's not bad. Two seventy-five is about as low as I can go, pal,"

"It's not that bad," Moishe said grudgingly. "If I let my little boy go hungry, I might make two twenty-five."

"You give me two twenty-five and my little boy will starve. Shall we split the difference? Two fifty?"

"Two forty," Moishe said.

"Two forty-five."

"Done."

"And you call me a ganef." The landlord shook his head. "Gottenyu, you're the toughest haggler I've run into in a while. If I told you how much more money I was getting out

of the last people in here, you'd cry for me. So when are you and your family coming in?" "We could start bringing our things in today," Moishe answered. "It's not that we have a lot to move, believe me." "This I do believe," the landlord said. "The Germans stole, the Poles stole, people stole from each other-and the ones who didn't had to bum their furniture to cook food or keep from freezing to death last winter or the one before or the one before that. So fetch in whatever you've got, nu? But before one stick of it goes in there, you put your first month's rent right here." He held out his hand, palm up. "You'll have it," Moishe promised, "Mister, uh-2'

"Stefan Berkowicz. And you are who, so I can tell my wife the name of the man who cheated me?" "Emmanuel LaJftmer," Russie answered without hesitation, inventing an easily memorable name so he wouldn't forget it before he got home. He and Berkowicz parted on good terms. When he described the haggle to Rivka, he proudly repeated the landlord's praise for his skill and tenacity. She shrugged and said, "If he's like most landlords, he says that to all the people who take a flat in his building, just to make them feel good. But you could have done worse; you have, often

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enough."

Praise with that faint damn left Moishe feeling vaguely punctured. He let Rivka go downstairs and hire a pushcart in which to haul their belongings. Then it was just carrying things down to the cart till it was full, manhandling it over to the new building, and lugging them up to the flat (Berkowicz got his zlotys first). Except for the bedraggled sofa, there wasn't anything one man couldn't handle by himself

Two small sets of dishes and pans, moved in different loads; some rickety chairs; a pile of clothes, not very clean, not very fine; a few toys; a handful of books Moishe had picked up now here, now there; a mattress, some blankets; and a wooden frame. Not much to make up a life, Moishe thought. But while he was alive, he could hope to gain more.

"It will do," Rivka said when she first set foot in the new flat. Having expected worse sarcasm than that, Moishe grinned in foolish relief. Rivka stalked into the bedroom, prowled the tiny kitchen. She came back nodding in acceptance if not approval. "Yes, it will do."

Without talking about it, they arranged such furniture as

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they owned in about the same places it had occupied in the flat they were leaving. Moishe looked around the new place. Yes, that helped give it the feeling of home.

"Almost done," he said late that afternoon. He was sweaty and filthy and as tired as he'd ever been, but one of the good things (one of the few good things) about moving was that you could see you were making progress.

"What's left?" Rivka asked. "I thought this was just about everything."

"Just about. But there's still one more stool, and a couple of old blankets that went up on the high shelf when spring finally got here, and that sack of canned goods we hid under them for whenever, God forbid, we might be really hungry again." As Moishe knew only too well, he was imperfectly organized. But he had a catchall memory which helped make up for that: he might not put papers, say, in the pile where they were supposed to go, but he never forgot where he had put them. So now he knew exactly what had been moved and what still remained in the old flat.

"If it weren't for the food, I'd tell you not to bother," Rivka said. "But you're right-we've been hungry too much. I never want to have to go through that again. Come back as fast as you can."

"I will," Moishe promised. Straightening his cap, he trudged down the stairs. His arms and shoulders twinged aching protest as he picked up the handles of the pushcart. Ignoring the aches as best he could, he made his slow way through the crowded streets and back to the old flat.

He was just pulling the sack of cans down from the shelf in the bedroom when someone rapped on the open front door. He muttered under his breath and put the sack back as quietly as he could, so the cans didn't clank together-letting people know you had food squirreled away invited it to disappear. He wondered whether it would be one of his neighbors coming to say good-bye or the landlord with a prospective tenant for the flat.

He'd be polite to whoever it was and send him on his way. Then he'd be able to get on his own way. Fixing a polite smile on his face, he walked into the living room.

In the doorway stood two burly Order Service men, both still wearing the red-and-white armbands with black Majen Davids left over from the days of Nazi rule in the Lodz ghetto.

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They carried stout truncheons. Behind them were two Lizards armed with weapons a great deal worse.

"You Moishe Russie?" the uglier Order Service ruffian asked. Without waiting for an answer, he raised his club. "You better come with us."

Flying over the Russian steppe, traveling across it by train,

Ludmila Gorbunova had of course known how vast it was. But nothing had prepared her for walking over what seemed an improbably large chunk of it to get where she was going. "I'll have to draw new boots when we get back to the airstrip," she told Nikifor Sholudenko.

His mobile features assumed what she had come to think of as an NKVD sneer. "So long as you are in a position tc draw them, all will be well. Even if you are in a positior to draw them with none to be had, all will be well enough."

She nodded; Sholudenko was undoubtedly right. Then one of her legs sank almost knee-deep into a patch of ooze she hadn't noticed. It was almost like going into quicksand. She had to work her way out a little at a time. When, slimy am dripping, she was on the move again, she muttered, "Too bac nobody would be able to issue me a new pair of feet." Sholudenko pointed to water glinting from behind an apple

orchard. "Mat looks like a pond. Do you want to clean off?" "All right," Ludmila said. Since she'd flipped her U-2, tht time when they returned to the airstrip, formerly so urgent, hac taken on an atmosphere of nichevo. When she and Sholudenkc weren5t sure of the day on which they'd arrive, an hour or tw(one way or the other ceased to mean anything.

They walked over to the orchard, which did lie in front ol a pond. Ludmila yanked off her filthy boot. The water was bit terly cold, but the mud came off her foot and leg. She'd coatec both feet with a thick layer of goose grease she'd begged frory a babushka. If you were going to get wet, as anyone who trav. eled during the rasputitsa surely would, the grease helped keel rot from starting between your toes.

She washed the boot inside and out, using a scrap of clott from inside her pack to dry it as well as she could. Then sh(splashed more water on her face: she knew how dirty she was and had in full measure the Russian love of personal cleanli ness. "I wish this were a proper steam bath," she said. "Without the heat first, I don't want to take a cold plunge."

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"No, that would be asking for pneumonia," Sholudenko agreed. "Can't take the risk, not out in the field." He spoke like a soldier, not like someone who'd surely enjoyed a comfortable billet in a town until the Nazis invaded the SSSR, and maybe till the Lizards came. Ludmila had to admit he performed the same way: he marched and camped capably and without complaint. She'd viewed the secret police as birds were supposed to view snakes-as hunters almost fascinating in their deadliness and power, men whose attention it was far better never to attract. But as the days went by, Sholudenko seemed more and more just~ another man to her. She didn't know how far she could trust that.

He knelt by the side of the pond and splashed his face, too. While he washed, Ludmila stood watch. What with Lizards and collaborators and bandits who robbed indiscriminately, not a kilometer of Ukrainian territory was liable to be safe.

As if to drive that point home, a column of half a dozen Lizard tanks rolled up the road the pilot and NKVD man had just left. "I'm glad they didn't see us carrying firearms," Ludmila said.

"Yes, that could have proved embarrassing," Sholudenko said. "For some reason, they've developed the habit of firing machine-gun bursts first and asking questions later. A wasteful way to conduct interrogations, not that they asked my opinion of it."

The casual way he talked about such things made the hair prickle up on Ludmila's arms, as if she were a wild animal fluffing out its fur to make itself look bigger and fiercer. She wondered what sort of interrogations he'd conducted. Once or twice she'd almost asked him things like that, but at the last minute she always held back. Even though he was NKVD, he seemed decent enough. If she knew what he'd done instead of having to guess, she might not be able to stomach him any more.

He said, "I wouldn't mind following those tanks to find out where they're going ... if I could keep up with them, and if I had a radio to get the information to someone who could use it." He wiped his face with his sleeve and grinned wryly. "And I might as well wish for buried treasure while I'm about it, eh?"

"As a matter of fact, yes," Ludmila said, which made Sholudenko laugh. She went on, "Those tanks may not be going

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anywhere. If they hit some really thick mud, they'll bog dow I saw that happen more than once last fall." "Yes, I've seen the same thing," he agreed. "Doesn't do

count on it, though. They've swallowed up too much of rodina without bogging down."

Ludmila nodded. Strange, she thought, that an NKVD should talk about the rodina. From the day the Germans

vaded, the Soviet government had started trotting out all tl ancient symbols of Holy Mother Russia. After the Revolutio the Bolsheviks had scomed such symbols as reminders of tl decadent, nationalistic past-until they needed them, to ral the Soviet people against the Nazis. Stalin had even made peace with the Patriarch of Moscow, although the governme remained resolutely atheist.

Sholudenko said, "I think we can get moving again. I don hear the tanks any more."

"No, nor L" Ludmila said after cocking her head and liste ing carefully. "But you have to be careful: their machin aren't as noisy as ours, and could be lying in wait."

"I assure you, Senior Lieutenant Gorbunova, I have disco ered this for myself," Sholudenko said with sarcastic formali Ludmila chewed on her lower lip. She had that comi NKVD man, having to serve on the ground, had earned the u lucky privilege of becoming intimately acquainted with Liz hardware at ranges closer than she cared to think about. f went on, "It is, even so, a lesson which bears repeating: this do not deny."

Mollified by the half apology (which was, by that one more than she'd ever imagined getting from the NKVD Ludmila slid the boot back onto her foot. She and Sholude left the grove together and headed back toward the road. O glance was plenty to keep them walking on the verge; the co umn of Lizard tanks had chewed the roadbed to shiny pu worse than the patch into which Ludmila had stumbled be This muck, though, went on for kilometers.

Tramping along by the road wasn't easy, either. The grour was still squashy and slippery, and the year's new weeds an bushes, growing frantically now that warm weather and I stretches of sunlight were here at last, reached out wi branches and shoots to try to trip up the travelers.

So it seemed to Ludmila, at any rate, after she picked herse up for the fourth time in a couple of hours. She snarled

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something so full of guttural hatred that Sholudenkc, clapped his hands and said, "I've never had a kulak call me worse than you just gave that burdock. It certainly had it coming, I must say." Is face turned incandescent. By Sholudenko's snicker, Ludmila

the blush was quite visible, too. What would her mother have said if she heard her cursing like-like ... she couldn't think Of any comparison dreadful enough. Going on two years in the Red Air Force had so coarsened her that she wondered if she would be fit for anything decent when peace returned.

When she said that aloud, Sholudenko waved his arms to encompass the entire scene around them. Then he pointed at the deep ruts, already filling with water, the treads the Lizard tanks had carved in the road. "First worry if peace will ever return," he said. "After that you can concern yourself with trifles."

"You're right," she said. "From where we stand, this war is liable to go on forever."

"History is always a struggle-such is the nature of the dialectic," the NKVD man said: standard Marxist doctrine. All at once, though, he turned human again: "I wouldn't mind if the struggle were a little less overt."

Ludmila pointed ahead. "There's a village. With luck, we'l be able to lay up for a while. With a lot of luck, we'll ever find some food."

As they drew closer, Ludrnila saw the village looked deserted. Some of the cottages had been burned; others showed bare spots in their thatches, as if they were balding old men. A dog's skeleton, beginning to fall apart into separate bones, lay in the middle of the street.

That was the last thing Ludmila noticed before a shot rang out and kicked up mud a couple of meters in front of her. Her reflexes were good-she was down on her belly and yanking her own pistol out of the holster before she had time for con scious thought.

Another shot-she still didn't see the flash. Her head swiv eled as if on a pivot. Where was cover9 Where was Sholuden ko? He'd hit the dirt as fast as she had. She rolled through muck toward a wooden fence. It wasn't much in the way o shelter, but it was a lot better than nothing.

"Who's shooting at us? And why?" she called to Sholu denko. ,

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"The devil's uncle may know, but I don't," the NKVD in answered. He crouched behind a well, whose stones wardi him better than the fence shielded Ludmila. He raised h voice: "Hold fire! We're friends!"

"Liar!" The shout was punctuated by a burst of submachin gun fire from another cottage. Bullets sparked off the sto facing of the well. Whoever was in there yelled, "You cm fool us. You're from Tolokonnikov's faction, come to run

out."

"I don't have the slightest idea who Tolokonnikov is, yo maniac," Sholudenko said. All he got for an answer was an other shout of "Liar!" and a fresh hail of bullets from that sub machine gun. Whomever the anti-Tolokonnikovites did favo he gave them plenty of ammunition.

Ludmila spied the flame the weapon spat. She was seven or eighty meters away, very long range for a pistol, but sh squeezed off a couple of shots anyway, to take the heat o Sholudenko. Then, quick as she could, she rolled away. The re lentless submachine gun chewed up the place where she' been.

The NKVD man fired, too, and was rewarded by a scre and sudden silence from the submachine gun. Don't get Ludmila willed at him, suspecting a trap. He didn't. Su enough, in a couple of minutes the gunner opened up again By then, Ludmila had found a boulder behind which to shel ter. From that more secure position, she called, "Who is thi Tolokonnikov, and what do you have against him?" If the peo ple who didn't like him acted this way, her guess was that h probably had something going for him.

She got no coherent answer out of the anti-Tolokonnikovites only another magazine's worth of bullets from the submac gun and a yell of, "Shut up, you treacherous bitch!" Deadly shell fragments, rock splinters knocked free by the gunfire fle just above her head.

She wondered how long the stalemate could go on. The an swer she came up with was glum: indefinitely. There wasn' enough cover for either side to have much hope of moving t outflank the other. She and Sholudenko couldn't very well re treat, either. That left sitting tight, shooting every so often, an hoping you got lucky.

Then the equation suddenly grew another variable. Some body showed himself for a moment: just long enough to chuc

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I find out which bearing to followT' He set a finger alongside his nose. "Believe me, there are ways."

Ludmila glanced over at Sholudenko, who was undoubtedly taking all that in. But the NKVD man just asked, "How far from the airstrip are we?"

"Eighty, ninety kilometers, something like that." Schultz looked from him to Ludrnila and back again before asking her, "'W"ho is this fellow?"

"Me man I was supposed to meet. Instead of bringing back the information he had, I find I'm bringing him, too."

By way of reply, Schultz just grunted. Ludmila felt like laughing at him. If he'd found her alone on the steppe, as he'd probably figured he would, he'd have had several days to try to seduce her or, failing that, just to rape her. Now he had to be wondering if she'd slept with Sholudenko.

None of your business, Nazi, she thought. With the first smile of genuine amusement she'd worn since she flipped her aircraft, she said, "Shall we be off, comrades?" The rest of the trek back to the airstrip was liable to be interesting.

Along with the rest of the physicists, Jens Larssen watched tensely as Enrico Fermi manipulated the levers that raised the cadmium control rods from the heart of the rebuilt atoniic pile under the University of Denver football stadium.

"If we have the design correct, this time the k-factor will be greater than one," Fermi said quietly. "We will have our selfsustaining chain reaction."

Beside him, Leslie Groves grunted. "We should have reached this point months ago. We would have, if the damned Lizards hadn't come."

"This is true, General," Fermi said, though Groves still wore colonel's eagles. "But from now on work will be much faster, parldy because of the radioactives we have stolen from the Lizards and partly because they have shown us that what we seek is possible."

Larssen thought about Prometheus stealing fire from the gods and bringing it down to mankind. He thought about what happened to Prometheus afterwards too: chained to a rock somewhere, with an eagle gnawing his liver forever. He suspected a lot of his colleagues had had that image at one time or another.

Unlike most of them, of course, he didn't need the Met Lab

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to have a feel for the myth of Prometheus. Every time he saw Barbara hand in hand with that Sam Yeager, the eagle took another peck at his liver.

'The project was an anodyne of sorts, though the pain never left him, not entirely. He watched the instruments, listened to the growing chatter and then the steady roar of the Geiger counter as it let the world know about the growing cloud of neutrons down in the heart of the pile. "Any second now," he breathed, more than half to himself.

Fermi drew out the rods another couple of centimeters. He too glanced at the dials, worked his slide rule, scrawled a quick calculation on a scrap of paper. "Gentlemen, I make the k-factor here to be 1.0005. This pile produces more free neutrons than it consumes."

A few of the physicists clapped their hands. More just nodded soberly. This was what the numbers predicted. All the same, it remained a solemn moment. Arthur Compton said, "The Italian navigator has discovered the New World."

"Gentlemen, this means you can now produce the explosive metal we need to make bombs like the ones the Lizards use?" Groves said.

"It means we are a long step closer," Fermi said. With that, he lowered the control rods back into the pile. Needles swung to the left on the instrument board beside him; the rhythm of the Geiger counter's clicks slowed. Fermi let out a small sigh of relief. "And, it seems, we can control the intensity of the reaction. This is also of some considerable importance."

Most of the scientists smiled; Leo Szilard laughed out loud. Larssen had the urge to yank the cadmium rods all the way out of the pile and leave them out until the uranium spat radiation all over the stadium, all over the university, all over Denver. He fought it down, as he had other lethal, but less spectacular, impulses over the past weeks.

"What do we -do next?" Groves demanded. "What exactly do we have to accomplish to turn what we've got here into a bombT' The big man was not a nuclear physicist, but he had more determination than any four Nobel Prize winners Jens could think of. If anybody could drive the project to success by sheer force of will, Groves was probably the one.

Leo Szilard, on the other hand, had his own sort of practicality. "There is in my office a bottle of good whiskey," he remarked. "What we do next, I say, is to have a drink."

The motion passed by acclamation. Jens trooped Oer to the science building with everyone else. It was good whiskey; it filled his mouth with the taste of smoke and left a smooth, warm trail down to his stomach. The only thing it couldn't do was make him feel good, which was why people had started distilling whiskey in the first place.

Szilard raised the bottle. A couple of fingers' worth, coppery bright like a new penny, still sloshed there. Jens held out his glass (actually, a hundred-milliliter Erlenmeyer flask he devoutly hoped had never held anything radioactive) for a refill.

"You have earned it," Szilard said, pouring. "All that work on the pile--2'

Jens knocked back the second shot. It hit hard, reminding him he hadn't had any lunch. It also reminded him he didn't have any business celebrating; no matter how well his work was doing, his life was strictly from nowhere.

"Good booze," said one of the engineers who'd worked under him. "Now we all oughtta. go out and get laid."

Larssen set the flask on a bookshelf and slithered out of the crowded office. His eyes filled with tears which he knew came out of the whiskey bottle but which humiliated him all the same. A week before, he'd picked up a floozy in Denver. He'd been drunk then, not two drinks tiddly but plastered. He wasn't able to get it up. The girl had been kind about it, which only made things worse. He wondered when he'd have the nerve to try that again. Failure once was bad enough. Failure twice? Why go on living?

With that cheerful thought echoing in his head, he went downstairs to reclaim his bicycle. Oscar the guard stood by the newly built wooden bike rack to make sure none of the machines walked with Jesus. He nodded when he saw Jens. "Back to BOQ, sir?" he asked.

"Yeah," Jens said through clenched teeth. He hated his Army cot, he hated the base, he hated having to go to the base and sleep on the cot, and he hated Colonel Hexharn with a deep and abiding loathing that matured like a fine burgundy as the days went by. He wished he could have used Hexharn as a control rod in the nuclear pile. If only the man had a neutron capture cross-section like cadmium's ...

And then, to make his day complete, Barbara came strolling up the walk toward the apartment she and Sam Yeager were using. Sometimes she just ignored him; that his own behavior

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might have had something to do with that hadn't crossed his mind. But Barbara wasn't the sort to be rude in public. She nodded to him and slowed down a little.

He walked over to her. Oscar was good at sticking with him-all the physicists had bodyguards these days-but knew better than to follow real close this time. A small voice inside Jens warned him he'd only end up bruising himself, but two nips of Szilard's good hooch made him selectively deaf. "Hello, dear," he said. "Hello," Barbara answered--4he lack of a return endearment set a fire under his temper. "How are you today?" "About the same as usual," he said: "not so good. I want you back." "Jens, we've been over this a hundred times," she said, her voice tired. "It wouldn't work. Even if it might have right after I got to Denver, it wouldn't any more. It's too late." "What the devil is that supposed to mean?" he demanded. Her eyes narrowed; she took half a step back from him. Instead of answering, she said, "You've been drinking." He didn't explain that they were drinks of triumph. "What if I have?" he said. "You going to tell me W Sam Walk-

on-Water Yeager never takes a drink?" He knew the words were a mistake as soon as he said them. That, of course, did him no good. Barbara's face froze. "Goodbye," she said. "I'll see you some other time." She started walking again. He reached out and grubbed her arm. "Barbara, you've got to listen to me-2' "Let me go!" she said angrily. She tried to twist away. He held on. As if by malign magic, Oscar appeared- He stepped between Jens and Barbara- "Sir, the lady asked you to let go," he said, quietly as usual, and detached Larssen's hand from Barbara's forearm. He wasn't what you'd call gentle, but Jens got the feeling he could have been a lot rougher if he felt like it. Sober, he never would have swung on Oscar. With two whiskeys in him, he didn't give a danin any more. He'd seen some action himself, by God-and, by God, Barbara was his

Oscar knocked his fist aside and hit him in the pit of the stomach. Jens folded up like a fan, trying to breathe and not having much luck, trying not to puke and doing a little better

wife ... wasn't she?

with that. Even as he went down on his knees, he was pretty sure Oscar had pulled that punch, too; with arms like those, Oscar could have ruptured his spleen if he really got annoyed. "Are you all right, ma'am?" Oscar asked Barbara.

"Yes," she said, and then, a moment later, 'qbank you. This has been hell on everybody, and on Jens especially. I know that, and I'm sorry, but I've done what I have to do." Only then did her voice change: "You didn't hurt him, did you?"

"No, ma'am, not like you mean. He'll be okay in a minute or two. Why don't you go on back to your place?" Jens kept his eyes on the pavement in front of him, but he couldn't help listening to Barbara's receding-rapidly receding-footsteps. Oscar hauled him to his feet with the same emotionless strength he'd shown before. "Let me dust you off, sir," he said, and started to do just that.

Jens knocked his hands away. "Fuck you," he gasped with all the air he had in him. He didn't care if he turned blue and died after that, and what with the way he still couldn't breathe, he thought he just might.

"Yes, sir," Oscar said, tonelessly still. Just then, Jens' motor finally turned over, and he managed a long, wonderful mouthful of air. Oscar nodded in approval, "I'liere you go, sir. Not too bad. When you get on that bike, I'll ride with you to BOQ, and tomorrow you can see about getting yourself a new guard."

"Won't be soon enough," Jens said, louder now that his lungs were following orders again.

,, If you'll forgive me, sir, I feel the same way," Oscar replied.

Snarling, Jens stalked back to his bicycle, Oscar right on his heels. Jens rocketed away from the university. Oscar stuck with him; he'd already found out he couldn't shake the guard. He wasn't really trying-he was just doing his best to get rid of his own rage.

Gravel kicked up under his wheels as he banked his weight to the side for the right turn from University to Alameda and on to Lowry Field. Of all the places in the world, Lowry Field BOQ was the last one he wanted to go. But where else was he supposed to sleep tonight?

For a moment, he didn't care about that, either. As the air base approached, all he wanted to do was keep on going, past the BOQ, past the endlessly cratered, endlessly repaired run-

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ways, past everything-keep on going to somewhere be than this stinking place, this stinking life.

You keep on going the direction you're headed in, you'll en up in Lizard country, an interior voice reminded him. That w enough, for now, to make him swing the bike up toward BO like a good little boy.

But even as he and Oscar parked their bicycles side by side

he was looking east again.

"Come on, you mis'able lugs-get movin'," Mutt Danie growled. Rain ran off his helmet and down the back of h neck. 77zat never would've happened with an old limey-style ti hat, he thought resentfully. The anger put an extra snap in hi voice as he added, "We ain't on the newsreels today." "We ain't south o' Bloomington no more, neither," Dracu. Szabo put in.

"You are painfully correct, Private Szabo," Lucille said in her precise, schoolmarmish voice. She pointed ahead t the complex of low, stout buildings just coming into vie through the curtains of rain. "That looks to be Pontiac S Penitentiary up there." When they got a little closer, Szabo grunted- "Looks li somebody kicked the sh-uh, the tar out of it, too."

"Us V the Lizards must have done fought over this stretc of ground last year," Mutt said. The penitentiary comple looked like any fortified area that had been a battleground few times, which is to say, not a whole lot of it was left stan ing. A bullet-pocked wall here, half a building a hundred y over that way, another wall somewhere else-the rest was ru ble.

Bloomington lay thirty-five bloody miles behind Mutt no Most of it was rubble, too, now that the Lizards had run Army out agairt. That made three times the town had chang hands in the past year. Even if the Lizards went home and t) war ended tomorrow, Mutt thought, the U.S.A. would be yea pulling itse~f back up on its pins. He'd never imagined his om country turning into something that looked like the worst he seen in France in 1918.

He did his best not to think about that. A sergeant, like manager, had to keep his mind on what was happening now you could lose the trees for the forest if you weren't careft

Officers got paid to worry about forests. Mutt said, "Any place better'n this we can camp?" From behind him, somebody said, "It's got good protection,

Sarge.11 "I know it does, from the ground, anyway," Daniels said.

"But if the Lizards bomb us, we're sittin' ducks."

"There's a park-Riverview Park, I think the name of it is," Lucille Potter said. "I've been there once or twice. The Vermilion River winds around three sides of it. Plenty of trees there, and benches, and an auditorium, too, if anything is left of it It's not far."

.You know how to get there from here?" Mutt asked. When Lucille nodded, he said, "Okay, Riverview Park it is." He raised his voice: "Hey, Freddie, look alive up there. Miss Lucille's comin' up on point with you. She knows where a decent place for us to lay our bodies down is at." I hope, he added to himself.

He'd seen a lot of parks in Illinois, and knew what to expect: rolling grass, plenty of trees, places where you could start a fire for a cookout, probably a place to rent a fishing boat, too, since the park was on a river. The grass would be hay length now, most likely; he didn't figure anybody would have mowed it since the Lizards came.

Lucille Potter found Riverview Park without any trouble. Whether it was worth finding was another question. Once, in one of those crazy magazines Sam Yeager used to read, Mutt had seen a picture of the craters of the moon. Add in mud and the occasional tree that hadn't been blown to pieces and you'd have a pretty good idea of what the park was like.

Daniels wondered if enough trees still stood to offer his squad decent cover from Lizard air attack. The rain wouldn't stop the scaly sons of bitches; he'd already seen that. They weren't a whole lot less accurate in bad weather than in good, either. He didn't know how they managed that. He just wished to the dripping heavens that they weren't able to do it.

From up ahead Freddie Laplace called, "There's bones stickin' up outta. the ground."

"Yeah? So what?" Mutt answered. 'This here place been fought over two-three times, in case you didn't notice."

"I know that, Sarge," Laplace answered in an injured voice. 'Thing of it is, some of 'ern look like they're Lizard bones." He sounded half intrigued, half sick.

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"What's that?" Lucille Potter said sharply. "Let me se those, Frederick.

Mutt went over to have a look at what Freddie had foun too. Lizard bones were the most interesting thing Rivervi Park had to offer, as far as he was concerned. If he didn't a gander at them, he'd have to get out his entrenching tool an start digging himself a hole in the tom-up mud. Squelch, squelch, squelch. His boots threatened to come at every step. The rain kept pattering down. Mutt sighed. danin bad you couldn't call a war on account of rain. Or o second thought, maybe not. On the ground if not in the air, th storm probably slowed down the Lizards worse than it did Americans. "'Course, we were slower to start with," he tered under his breath.

Freddie Laplace, a skinny little guy with a highly deve sense of self-preservation, pointed down into a shell hole th was rapidly turning into a pond. Sure enough, white bon stuck out of the dirt. "Those never came from no human bein Sarge," Freddie said.

"You're right," Lucille Potter answered. "Those never c from any creature on Earth."

"Just look like arm bones to me," Mutt said. "Yeah, they g claws 'stead of fingers, but so whatT' He wrinkled his nos "Still got some old meat on 'em, too." The rain banished th worst of the after-the-battle stench, but not all of it.

Lucille let out an impatient sniff. "Use your eyes, Mutt. must know that people have two long bones in their forearn and one in their upper arms. See for yourself-with the Li ards it's just the opposite."

"Well, I'll be a--2' The memory of his father's callus hand kept Mutt from saying what he'd be. Now that Lucil pointed it out, though, he saw she was right. His knowledge anatomy came from no formal study, but from farming an from dealing with players who hurt themselves on the fi and with his own injuries, back when he was playing himsel Now that his attention was focused, he added, "I never se any wrist bones like those, neither."

"They have to be different from ours," Lucille said. "A In man wrist pivots the hand off two bones, these off only on The muscle attachments would be very different, too, but v can't see much of them any more."

Freddie Laplace worked at the mud with his entrenching tool, not to dig in but to expose more of the dead Lizard's skeleton. In spite of the rain, the dead-meat stink grew bad enough to make Mutt cough. He'd already seen that Lizards bled red. Now he learned they had no more dignity in death than men slain the same way.

"Lord, I wonder what happens to 'ern come Judgment DayT' he said, very much as if he were asking the Deity. He'd been raised a hardshell Baptist, and never bothered to question his childhood faith after he grew to manhood. But if God had made the Lizards at some.time or other during Creation (and on which day would that have been?), would He resurrect them in the body come the Last Day? Mutt figured preachers somewhere were getting hot and bothered about that.

Freddie exposed some of the alien corpse's ribcage. "Ain't that peculiarT' he said. "More like latticework than a proper cage.

"How come you know so much about itT' Mutt asked him. "My old man, he runs a butcher shop up in Bangor, Maine:' Laplace answere(L "There's one thing I seen a lot of, Sarge, it's bones."

Mutt nodded, conceding the point. Lucille Potter said, "That latticework arrangement is very strong-the English used it for the skeletons of their Blenheim and Wellington bombers."

"Is that a factT' Daniels said. He was just making talk though; if Miss Lucille said something was so, you could take it to the bank.

She asked Freddie, "Do you think you can dig out his skull for me?"

"I'll give it a try, ma'am," Laplace said, as if she'd asked him up to the blackboard for a tough multiplication problem he thought he could do. He started scraping away more mud with the folding shovel. Lucille Potter made little eager noises, as if he were digging up a brand-new Chevy (not that there were any brand-new Chevies) and enough gas to run it for a year.

Try andfigure womet4 Mutt thought as he watched Lucille take a scalpel from her little case of instruments. A dead Lizard interested her ... but a live sergeant didn't.

Mutt sighed. He thought Lucille liked him well enouglL He knew he liked her well enough, and then some. He knew she knew that, too; she could hardly have doubted it after the kiss he'd given her when he used her bottle of ether to take out the

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Lizard tank. But the spark that jumped one way didn't come back the other.

He wondered if she'd left a sweetheart behind when she signed up as an Army nurse. He had his doubts about that; she had maiden lady written all over her. Just my luck, he thought He was not a man to spend a lot of time brooding over wh

he couldn't help. If he had been that sort of man, years o

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catching and then of managing would have changed him in a different sort: too many decisions to let any one reach earth shaking proportions, even if it didn't work. If you couldn't un derstand that down in your guts, you were liable to end up lik Willard Hershberger, the Reds' catcher who'd cut his throat i a New York hotel room after he called the pitch Mel Ott hi into the Polo Grounds stands for a ninth-inning game-winnin homer.

And so Mutt went around to see that the rest of his squ was well dug in and that Dracula Szabo had picked a spot w a good field of fire for his BAR. Daniels didn't expect to attacked here, but you never could tell.

"We got anything decent for chow tonight, Sarge?" Szab asked.

"C-rations, I expect, and damn lucky to have those," Mu answered. "Better'n what we ever saw in France; you can be lieve that." The only real thing Daniels had against the cann rations was that the supply boys had trouble getting enough them into the field to keep him from being hungry more th he liked. With the Lizards controlling the air, logistics got re sticky.

Szabo had what Mutt thought of as a city slicker's face controlled, knowing, often with an expression that seemed say he'd be laughing at you if only you were worth laughin at. It was a face that ached for a slap. Whether it did o whether it didn't, though, Dracula had his uses. Now h reached under his poncho and showed Mutt three dead chick ens. "Reckon we can do some better than C-rats," he sai sniugly, grinning like a fox who'd just raided the hen coop.

That was probably just what he was, too, Mutt thought. H said, "We ain't supposed to forage on our own people," but hi heart wasn't in it. Roast chicken did go down better tha canned stew.

"Aw, Sarge, they were just struttin' around, no people any

hers, Mutt asked jokingly, "You wash your hands before supper?"

"You'd best believe I did-and with soap, too." Being a nurse, Lucille was in dead earnest about cleanliness. "Did you wash yours before you cleaned these birds and cut them up?"

"Well, you might say so," Mutt answered; his hands had certainly been wet, anyhow. "Didn't use soap, though." Had Lucille Potter's stare been any fishier, she'd have

grown fins. Before she could say anything, Szabo strolled into the auditorium. "You save me a drumstick, Sarge?"

"Here's a whole leg, kid," Mutt said. The BAR man blissfully started gnawing away. Daniels took half a breast off the fire, waved it in the air to cool it down, and also began to eat. He had to pause a couple of times to spit out burnt bits of feather; he'd done a lousy job of plucking the chickens.

Then he paused again, this time with the hunk of white meat nowhere near his mouth. Through the splashing rain came deepthroated engine run. blings and the mucky grinding noise of caterpillar tracks working hard to propel their burden over bad ground. The chicken Mutt had already swallowed turned to a small lump of lead in his stomach.

"Tanks." The word came out as hardly more than a whisper, as if he didn't want to believe it himself. Then he bellowed it with all the fear and force he had in him: "Tanks!"

Dracula Szabo dropped the mostly bare drumstick and thigh and sprinted back toward his BAR- What good it would do against Lizard armor, Mutt couldn't imagine. He also didn't think the rain would give him another chance to take out a Lizard tank with a bottle of ether---even assuming Lucille had any more, which wasn't obvious.

He threw down his own piece of meat, grabbed his submachine gun, and peered out ever so cautiously through the gaping hole in the auditorium wall. The tanks were out there somewhere not far away, but he couldn't see them. They weren't firing; maybe they didn't know his squad was in the park.

"'Mat's great," he muttered. "Gettin' trapped behind enemy lines is just what I had in mind."

"Enemy lines?" All his attention on the noises coming from the dripping gloom outside, Mutt hadn't noticed Lucille Potter coming up behind him. She went on, "Those are our tanks, Mutt. They're coming down from the north---either the Lizards

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haven't taken out the bridges over the Vermilion or else we've repaired dieni--and they make a lot more racket than the machines the Lizards use."

Mutt listened again, this time without panic blinding his ears. After a two-beat pause he used around Lucille to replace a useful seven-letter word, he said, "You're right. Lord, I was ready to start shooting at my own side." "Some of the men are still liable to do that," Lucille said. "Yeah." Mutt stepped outside, shouted into the rain: "Hold your fire! American tanks comin' south. Hold fire!" One of the grunting, snorting machines rumbled by close enough for the commander to hear that cry To Mutt, he was just a vague shape sticking up from the top of the turret. He called back in unmistakable New England accents, "We're friendly all right, buddy. We're usin' the rain to move up without the Lizards spotting us-4ve the little scaly sons of bitches a surprise if they come after you guys."

"Sounds right good, pal," Daniels answered, waving. The tank-he could tell it was a Sherman; the turret was too big for a Lee---rattled on toward the south edge of Riverview Park. In a way, Mutt envied the crew for having inches of hardened steel between them and the foe. In another way, he was happy enough to be just an infantryman. The Lizards didn't particularly notice him. Tanks, though, drew their special fire. They had some fancy can openers, too.

The tank commander had to know that better than Mutt did. He kept heading south anyhow. Mutt wondered how many times he'd been in action, and if this one would be the last. With a wave to the departing tank that was half salute, he went back into the ruined auditorium to finish his chicken. Harry Turtledove

* X111 *

Vyacheslav Molotov jounced along toward the farm outside Moscow in a panje wagon, as if he were a peasant with a couple of sacks of radishes he hadn't been able to sell. From the way the NKVD man driving the wagon behaved, Molotov nught have been a sack of radishes himself. The Soviet foreign commissar didn't mind. He was rarely in the mood for idle chitchat, with today no exception to the rule.

All around him, the land burgeoned with Russian spring. The sun rose early now, and set late, and everything that had lain dormant through winter flourished in the long hours of daylight. Fresh green grass pushed up through and hid last year's growth, now gray-brown and dead. The willows and birches by the Moscow River wore new bright leafy coats. Concealed by those new leaves, birds chirped and warbled. Molotov did not know which bird went with which song. He could barely tell a titmouse from a toucan, not that you were likely to find a toucan in a Russian treetop even in springtime.

Ducks stuck their behinds in the air as they tipped up for food in the river. The driver looked at them and murmured, "I wish I had a shotgun." Molotov saw reply as unnecessary; the driver would likely have said the same thing had he been alone in the wagon.

Molotov wished not for a shotgun but a car. Yes, gasoline was in short supply, with almost all of it earmarked for the front. But as the number two man in the Soviet Union behind Stalin, he could have arranged for a limousine had he wanted one. rlbe Lizards, however, were more likely to shoot up motor vehicles than horse-drawn wagons. Molotov played it safe. When the driver pulled off the road and onto a meanderi

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path, Molotov thought the fellow had lost his way. The farm ahead looked like an archetypical kolkhoz, maybe a little smaller than most of its ilk. Chickens ran around clucking and pecking, fat pigs wallowed in mud. In the fields, men walked behind mules. The only buildings were row houses for the kolkhozniks and barns for the animals.

Then one of the men, dressed like any farmer in boots, baggy trousers, collarless tunic, and cloth cap, opened the door to a barn and went inside. Before he closed it after himself, the foreign commissar saw that the inside was brightly lit by electric light. Even before the Germans and the Lizards came, that would have been unusual for a kolkhoz, Now it was inconceivable.

His smile came broader and more fulsome than most who knew him would have imagined his face could form. "A splendid job of maskirovka," he said enthusiastically. "Whoever designed and implemented the deception plan, he deserves to be promoted."

"Comrade Foreign Commissar, I am given to understand the responsible parties have been recognized," the driver said. He

looked like a peasant--he looked like a drunk-but he talked like an educated man. Maskirovka again, Molotov thought. He knew intellectually he would not have a drunken peasant taking him to arguably the most important place in the Soviet Union, but the man played his role well. Molotov pointed to the barn. -Fhat is where they do their

research?"

"Comrade, all I know is that that is where I was told to deliver you," the driver answered. "What they do in there I could not tell you, and I do not want to know."

He pulled back on the reins. The horse drawing the highwheeled panje wagon obediently stopped. Molotov, who was not a large man (even if he was taller than Stalin), scrambled down without grace but also without falling. As he headed for the barn door, the driver took a flask from his hip pocket and swigged from it. Maybe he was an educated drunk. The bam door looked like a barn door. After that, though, the maskirovka failed: the air that came out of the barn did not smell as it should. Molotov supposed that didn't matter; if the Lizards got close enough to go sniffing around, the Soviet Union was likely to be finished, anyhow. He opened the door, closed it behind him as quickly as the

a peasant, he looked like a scholar. He also looked nervous. Because he was in charge, he was responsible for what his team did-and for what it didn't do.

"Comrade Foreign Commissar, the answer to your first question, or to the first part of it, is simple," he said, trying to hold his rather light voice steady. "The chief difficulty in production is that we do not yet know how to produce. Our techniques in nuclear research are several years behind those of the capitalists and fascists, and we are having to learn what they already know."

Molotov gave him a baleful stare. "Comrade Stalin will not be pleased to hear this."

Kurchatov blanched. So did Flerov, but he said, "If Comrade Stalin chooses to liquidate this team, no one in the Soviet Union will be able to produce these explosives for him. Everyone with that expertise who is still"alive is here. We are what the rodina has, for better or worse."

Molotov was not used to defiance, even frightened, deferential defiance. He harshened his voice as he replied, "We were promised full-scale production of explosive metal within eighteen months. If the team assembled here cannot accomplish this --- 2'

"The Germans are not likely to have that within eighteen months, Comrade Foreign Commissar," Flerov said. "Neither are the Americans, though the breakdown in travel has left us less well-informed about their doings."

Has played hob with espionage, you mean, Molotov thought: Flerov had a little diplomat in him after all. That, however, was a side issue. Molotov said, "If you cannot produce as promised, we will remove you and bring in those who can.,,

"Good luck to you and good-bye to the rodina," Flerov said. "You may find charlatans who tell you worse fies than we could ever imagine. You will not find capable physicists-and if you dispose of us, you may never see uranium or plutonium produced in the Soviet Union."

He was not bluffing. Molotov had watched too many men trying to lie for their lives; he knew nonsense and bluff when he heard them. He didn't hear them from Flerov. Rounding on Kurchatov, he said, "You direct this project. Why have you not kept us informed about your trouble in holding to the schedule?"

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"Comrade Foreign Commissar, we are ahead of schedule in preparing the first bomb," Kurchatov said. "That ought to count in our favor, even if the other half of the project is going more slowly than we thought it would. We can rock the Lizards back on their heels with one explosion." "Igor Ivanovich--2' Flerov began urgently. Molotov raised a hand to cut him off. He glared at Kurchatov. "You may be an excellent physicist, Comrade, but you are politically naive. If we rock the Lizards with one explosion, with how many will they rock us?"

Under the harsh electric lights, Kurchatov's face went an ugly yellowish-gray. Flerov said, "Comrade Foreign Commissar, this has been a matter of only theoretical discussion."

"You need to make it one of the theses of your dialectic," Molotov said. He was convinced Stalin had the right of that: the Lizards would hit back hard at any nation that used the explosive metal against them.

"We shall do as you say," Kurchatov said.

"See that you do," Molotov answered. "Meanwhile, the Soviet Union-4o say nothing of all mankind-requires a supply of explosive metal. You cannot make it within eighteen months, you say. How long, thenT' Molotov was not large, nor physically imposing. But when he spoke with the authority of the Soviet Union in his voice, he might have been a giant. Kurchatov and Flerov looked at each other. "If things go well, four years," Flerov said.

"If things go very well, three and a half," Kurchatov said. The younger man gave him a dubious look, but finally spread his hands, conceding the point.

Three and a half years? More likely four? Molotov felt as if he'd been kicked in the belly. The Soviet Union would have its one weapon, which it could hardly use for fear of bringing hideous retaliation down on its head? And the Germans and the Americans-and, for all he knew, maybe the English and the Japanese, too-ahead in the race to make bombs of their own?

"How am I to tell this to Comrade Stalin?" he asked. The question hung in the air. Not only would the scientists inc Stalin's wrath for being too optimistic, but it might fall on Molotov as well, as the bearer of bad news.

If the academicians were as irreplaceable as they thought, the odds were good that Stalin wouldn't do anything to them.

Over the years, Molotov had done his best to make himself in dispensable to Stalin, but indispensable wasn't the same as irreplaceable, and he knew it.

He asked, "Can I tell the General Secretary you will succee(within two and a half to three years?" If he could arrange t(present a small disappointment rather than a big one, he migh yet deflect Stalin's anger.

"Comrade Foreign Commissar, you can of course tell th(Great Stalin whatever you please, but that will not be th(truth," Kurchatov said. "When the time passes and we do no succeed, you will have to explain why."

"If the Lizards give us so much time for research and engineering," Flerov added; he looked to be enjoying Molotov' discomfiture.

"If the Lizards overrun this place, Comrades, I assure you that you will have no more joy from it than I," Molotov sai(stonily. Had the Germans defeated the Soviet Union, Molotov would have gone up against a wall (with a blindfold if he wa lucky), but nuclear physicists might have been useful enough to save their skins by turning their coats. The Lizards, how ever, would not want human beings to know atoms existed, le alone that they could be split. Driving that home, Molotov added, "And if the Lizards overrun this place, it will be in large measure because you and your team have failed to give the workers and people of the Soviet Union the weapons they need to carry on the fight."

"We are doing everything men can do," Flerov protested "There are too many things we simply do not know."

Now he was the one who sounded uncertain, querulous That was how Molotov wanted it. He snapped, "You had bettei learn, then."

Softly, Igor Kurchatov said, "It is easier to give orders to generals, Comrade Foreign Commissar, than to nature. S reveals her secrets at a pace she chooses."

"She has revealed altogether too many of them to the Lizards," Molotov said. "If they can find them, so can you." He turned his back to show the interview was over. He thought he'd recovered well from the shocking news the academician had given him. How well he would recover after he gave Stalin that news was, unfortunately, another question.

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The peddler smiled in appreciation as David Goldf handed him a silver one-mark piece with Kaiser Withel mustachioed image stamped on it. "That's good mon friend," he said. Along with the baked apple on a stick Goldfarb had bought, he gave back a fistful of copper and p metal coins by way of change. His expression turned sly. " have money that good, it doesn't matter how funny your 'I dish sounds."

"Geh kak afen yam, " Goldfarb said genially, doing his to hide the sudden pounding of his heart. "Where I come fr(everybody talks like me." "What a miserable, ignorant place that must be," the retorted. "At first, I thought you had a nice Warsaw acc The more I listen to you, though, the more I figure you're Chelm."

Goldfarb snorted. The legendary town was full of shlemi What he really spoke, of course, was Yiddish with a Wars accent corrupted by living his whole life in England. He thought it was corrupted till the British sub dropped him on flat, muddy coast of Poland. Now, comparing the way spoke to the Yiddish of people who used it every day of t lives, he counted himself lucky that they understood him at As an excuse not to say where he really did come from, bit into the apple. Hot, sweet juice flooded into his moi "Mmm," he said, a wordless, happy sound. "It would be really good if I could get some cinnamon," peddler said. "But there's none to be had, not for love money."

"Good anyhow," Goldfarb mumbled, his full mouth fling whatever odd accent the King's English gave him. a nod to the peddler, he walked south down the dirt track ward Lodz. He was, he thought, just a couple of hours aw He hoped that wouldn't be too late. From what he'd heard j before he sailed from England, his cousin Moishe was in somewhere in Lodz. He wondered how he was supposed to Moishe out.

With a noncom's fatalism, he put that out of his mind. worry about it when the time came. First he had to get Lodz. He'd already discovered that a couple of years of fi ing the war electronically had left his wind a shadow of w it was supposed to be. His physical-training sergeant would have approved.

"Something to be said for not laying about puffing on fags all day long-it'd be even shorter if I'd had more to smoke," he said in low-voiced English. "All the same, I miss 'em." He looked around. Just a glimpse of the endless flat farmland of the Polish plain had been plenty to tell him all he needed to know about that country's unhappy history. Besides the shelter of the English Channel, the United Kingdom had mountains in the west and north in which to take refuge: wit-

ness the survival of Welsh and Scots Gaelic over the centuries. Poland, now-all the Poles had was the Germans on one side and the Russians on the. other, and nothing whatever to keep either one of them out except their own courage. And when the Germans outweighed them three to one and the Russians two or three times as badly as that, even suicidal courage too often wasn't enough.

No wonder they give their Jews a hard time, he thought with a sudden burst of insight: they're sure they can beat the Jews. After losing so many wars to their neighbors, having in their midst people they could trounce had to feel sweet. That didn't make him love the people who had driven his parents from Poland, but it did help him understand them.

Goldfarb looked around again. Almost everywhere in England, he'd been able to see hills on the horizon. Here, it went on forever. The endless flat terrain made him, feel insignificant and at the same time conspicuous, as if he were a fly crawling across a big china platter.

The green of Polish fields was different from what he'd known in England, too: duller somehow. Maybe it was the light, maybe the soil; whatever it was, he'd noticed it almost at once.

He'd noticed the workers in those fields, too. Englishmen who labored on the land were farmers. The Poles were inarguably peasants. He had trouble defining the difference but, as with the colors of the fields, it was unmistakable. Maybe part of it lay in the way the Polish farmers went about their work. By the standards Goldfarb was used to, they might as well have been moving in slow motion. Their attitude seemed to say that how hard they worked didn't matter-they weren't going to realize much from their labors, anyway.

A nois~ ir the sky, like an angry cockchafer Goldfarb tiad heard that noise more times than he cared to remember. and his reaction to it was instinctive: he threw himself

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flat. Hugging the ground, a flight of German bombers ro by, heading east.

Ju-88s, Goldfarb thought, identifying them by sound shape as automatically as he would have told his father fro an uncle. He was used to praying for fighters and antiairc guns to blow German bombers out of the sky. Now he fou himself wishing them luck. That felt strange, wrong; the wo had taken a lot of strange turns since the Lizards came. He got to his feet and peered south. Smoke smudged the rizon there, the first mark he'd seen. That ought to be Lodz, thought. A little farther and he could start doing the job British high command had, in their wisdom, decided he w right for.

Cloth cap, black jacket and wool trousers-they all shou I am a Jew! He wondered why Hitler had bothered adding y low stars to the getup; they struck him as hardly necess Even his underwear was different from what he'd wom in E gland, and chafed him in strange places.

He had to look like a Jew. He spoke Yiddish, but his Poli was fragmentary and mostly foul. In England, even before went into uniform, he'd dressed and sounded like everyo else. Here in Poland, he felt isolated from a large majority the people around him. "Get used to it," he muttered. "M places, Jews don't fit in."

An ornate brass signpost said, LODZ, 5Km. Fastened above was an angular wooden sign with angular black letters on white background: LITZMANNSTADT, 5Km. Just seeing that si pointing like an arrow at the heart of Lodz set Goldfarb's tee on edge. Typical German arrogance, to slap a new name on town once they'd conquered it.

He wondered if the Lizards called it something altoge different.

A little more than an hour brought him into the outskirts Lodz. He'd been told the town had fallen to the Nazis alm undamaged. It wasn't undamaged now. The briefings he'd re on the submarine said the Germans had put up a hell of a sc before the Lizards drove them out of town, and that they lobbed occasional rockets or flying bombs (the briefin weren't very clear about which) at it ever since.

Most of the people in the outer part of the city were Pol If any German settlers remained from Lodz's brief spell Litzmannstadt, they were lying low. Sneers from the Po

were bad enough. He didn't know what he would have done with Germans gaping at him. All at once, he regretted hoping the German bombers bad a good mission. Then he got angry at himself for that regret. The Germans might not be much in the way of human beings, but against the Lizards they and England were on the same side.

He walked on down Lagiewnicka Street toward the ghetto. The wall the Nazis had built was still partly intact, although in the street itself it had been knocked down to allow traffic once more. As soon as he set foot on the Jewish side, he decided that while the Germans and England nidght be on the same side, the Germans and he would never be.

The smell and the crowding hit him twin sledgehammer blows. He'd lived his whole life with plumbing that worked. He'd never reckoned that a mitzvah, a blessing, but it was. The brown reek of sewage (or rather, slops), garbage, and unwashed humanity made him wish he could turn off his nose.

And the crowd! He'd heard men who'd been in India and China talk of ant heaps of people, but he hadn't understood what that meant. The streets were jammed with men, women, children, carts, wagons-a good-sized city was boiled down into a few square blocks, like bouillon made into a cube. People bought, sold, argued, pushed past one another, got in each other's way, so that block after block of ghetto street felt like the most crowded pub where Goldfarb had ever had a pint.

The people-the Jews-were dirty, skinny, many of them sickly-looking. After tramping down from the Polish coast, Goldfarb was none too clean himself, but whenever he saw someone eyeing him, he feared the flesh on his bones made him conspicuous.

And this misery, he realized, remained after the Nazis were the better part of a year out of Lodz. The Jews now were fed better and treated like human beings. What the ghetto had been like under German rule was-not unimaginable, for he imagined it all too vividly, but horrifying in a way he'd never imagined till now.

"Tbank you, Father, for getting out when you did," he said. For a couple of blocks he simply let himself be washed along like a fish in a swift-flowing stream. 'Men he began moving against the current in a direction of his own choosing. Posters of Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski seemed to follow

him wherever he went. Some were tattered and faded, some as

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new and bright as if they'd been put up yesterday, which th probably had. Rumkowski stared down at Goldfarb from a v riety of poses, but always looked stem and commanding.

Goldfarb shook his head; the briefing papers had had co siderable to say about Rumkowski and his regime in Lodz, b not much of that was good. In sum, he amounted to a pock Jewish Hitler. Just what we need, Goldfarb thought. A couple of times, he passed Order Service men with th armbands and truncheons. He noticed them not only for tho but also because they looked uncommonly well-fed. A po Jewish SS, too. WonderfuL Goldfarb kept his head down did his best to pretend he was invisible.

But he had to look up from time to time to tell where was going; studying a street map of Lodz didn't do enough let him make his way through the town itself. Luckily, be one mote in a swirling crowd kept him from drawing spec notice. After three wrong turns-about half as many as he expected-he walked into a block of flats on Mostowski Str(and started climbing stairs.

He knocked on what he hoped was the right door. A wom a couple of years older than he was-she would have be pretty if she hadn't been so thin--opened it and stared at unfamiliar face with fear-widened eyes. "Who are you?" s demanded.

Goldfarb got the idea something unpleasant would happen him if he gave the wrong answer. He said, "I'm supposed tell you even Job didn't suffer forever."

"And I'm supposed to tell you it must have seemed tl way to him." The woman's whole body relaxed. "Come You must be Moishe's cousin from England."

"Mat's right," he said. She closed the door behind him. went on, "And you're Rivka? Where's your son?"

"He's out playing. In the crowds on the street, the risk small, and besides, someone has an eye on him."

"Good * " Goldfarb looked around. The flat was tiny, but bare that it seemed larger. He shook his head in symp "You must be sick to death of moving."

Rivka Russie smiled for the first time, tiredly. "You have idea. Reuven and I have moved three times since Mois didn't come back to the flat we'd just taken." She shook head. "He thought someone had known who he was. We mi have been just too late getting out of the other place. If

nished brass 24 on it. KnocA; knock ... knock. He waited. The door opened. The big man standing in it said, "Nu?"

"Nu, the lady across the way sent me here," Goldfarb replied. With his shaggy beard and soldier's cap over civilian clothes, the big man looked like a bandit chief. He also looked like someone it would be wiser not to annoy. Goldfarb was glad he'd had the right code to introduce himself to Rivka Russie; without it, this fellow likely would have descended on him like a falling building. He'd been right to have his wind up.

But now the man grinned (showing bad teeth) and stuck out his hand. "So you're Russie's English cousin, are you? You can call me Leon."

"Right." The fellow had a blacksmith's grip, Goldfarb discovered. He also noted that while the local Jew had said he could call him Leon, that didn't mean it was his name: another precaution out of the books, and probably as necessary as the rest.

"Don't stand there-come in," Leon said. "Never can tell who's liable to be looking down the hall." He closed the door behind Goldfarb. "Take your pack off if you like-it looks heavy."

"Thanks." Goldfarb did. The apartment was, if anything, barer than Rivka's. Only mattresses on the floor said people lived, or at least slept, here. He said, "Moishe's still in Lodz?" Leon, he figured, would know more surely than Rivka had.

The big man nodded. "He's in Prison One on Franciszkanska Street-the Nazis called it Franzstrasse, just like they called Lodz Litzmannstadt. We call it Franzstrasse ourselves, sometimes, because there's a big sign with that name right across from the prison that nobody's ever bothered taking down."

"Prison One, eh?" Goldfarb said. "How many are there?" "Plenty," Leon answered. "Along with being good at killing people, the Nazis were good at putting them away, too."

"Do you know where in the prison he's locked up?" Goldfarb asked. "For that matter, do you have plans for the building?"

"Who do you think turned it into a prison? The Germans should have dirtied their hands doing the work themselves?" Leon said. "Oh yes, we have the plans. And we know where your cousin is, too. The Lizards don't let Jews anywhere near

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him-they're learning-but they haven't learned yet that s Poles are on our side, too."

"This whole business must make you meshuggeh so times," Goldfarb said. "The Lizards are better to Jews than the Nazis ever were, but they're bad for everybody el so sometimes you find yourself working with the Germ And the Poles don't like Jews, either, but I guess they like the Lizards any better." "It's a mess, all right," Leon agreed. "I'm just glad I have to do much in the way of figuring out. You wanted pl I'll show you plans." He went over to a cabinet, yanked ou roll of paper, and brought it over to Goldfarb. When Gol opened it, he saw they weren't just plans but Germanically ticulous engineering drawings. Leon pointed. "They have chine guns on the roof, here and here. We'll have to something about those."

"Yes," Goldfarb said in a small voice. "A machine gun don't do something about would put rather a hole in scheme, wouldn't it?"

That might have been Leon's first taste of British underst ment; he grunted laughter. "Put a hole in us, you me probably lots of holes. But let's say we can take out machine guns-" "Because if we don't, we can't go on anyhow," Go broke in. "Exactly," Leon said. "So let's say we do. You're suppo to be bringing some presents with you. Have you got then By way of answer, Goldfarb opened the battered Pol Army pack that had come from an exile in England. No had paid any attention to it since he'd landed here. Close half the people on the road wore one like it, and a lot of th who didn't had corresponding German or Russian gear inste Leon looked inside. His long exhalation puffed out his tache. They don't look like much," he said dubiously. "They're bloody hell to load, but they'll do the job if I c get close enough to use them. I've practiced with them. lieve me, they will," Goldfarb said.

"And what's all this messT' Leon pointed into the p which held, along with the bombs he'd already disparaged motley assortment of metal tubes, levers, and a spring might have come from the suspension of a lorry. "The mechanism for shooting them," Goldfarb answ

"They built one in sections especially for me, lucky chap that I am, so the business end wouldn't keep sticking out the top of my pack. The whole bloody thing together is called a PIAT-Projector, Infantry, Antitank." The last four words were necessarily in English. Leon, luckily, understood "tank." He shook his head anyhow. "No tanks' !--- he said panzers-"at the jail." "There'd better not be," Goldfarb said. "But a bomb that will make a hole in the side of a tank will make a big hole in the side of a building." He got the impression that that was the first thing he'd said which impressed Leon, even a little. The man from the underground (Goldfarb suppressed a picture of Leon coming up from a London tube station) plucked at his beard. "Maybe you have something there. How far will it shoot?" "A couple of hundred yards-uh, meters." Watch that, Goldfarb told himself. You can give yourself away if you don't think metric. "Should be far enough." Leon's sardonic smile said he'd caught the slip, too. "Do you want to look over the prison before you try cracking it?" "I'd better. I'm supposed to know what I'm doing before I do it, right?" "it helps, yes." Leon studied him. "You've seen some action, I think." "In the air, yes. Not on the ground, not like you mean. On the ground, I've just been strafed like everybody else." "Yes, I know about that, too," Leon said. "But even in the air--that'll do. You won't panic when things start going crazy. Why don't you leave your hardware here? We don't want to bring it around to the prison till it's time to use it." "Makes sense to me, as long as you're sure nobody's going to steal it while we're gone." Leon showed teeth in something that was not a smile. "Anyone who steals from us ... he's very sorry and he never, ever does it again. This happens once or twice and people start to get the idea." That probably meant just what Goldfarb thought it did. He didn't want to know for sure. Goldfarb left the pack on the floor and walked out of the flat after Leon. Franciszkanska Street was about ten minutes away. Again crowds and sights and smells buffeted Goldfarb. Again he re-Harry Turtledove

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minded himself that this was how things were long after Nazis had been driven away.

He stuck to Leon like a pair of socks; even though he memorized the local map, he didn't want to do much navig ing on his own. Leon presently remarked, "We'll just walk casual as you please. Nobody will think anything about looking as long as we don't stop and stare. The first rule is file:///C//2590%20Sci-Fi%20and%20Fantasy%20E-books/Harry%20Turtledove%20-%20Worldwar%2002%20-%20Tilting%20the%20Balance.txt

to make yourself conspicuous." Goldfarb looked, turning his head as if to carry on a conv sation with Leon. At first glance, the prison was a tough nut crack: two machine guns on the roof, barred windows, r wire around the perimeter. At second glance, he said quiel "It's too close to everything else and it doesn't have e guards." -Fhey didn't send a blind man over," Leon said, beami

"Right both times. That gives us our chance." "And what do we do to take itT' Goldfarb asked as they

Prison One behind.

"For now, you don't do anything," Leon said. "You sit and wait for the right time. Me, I have to go see some peol and find out what I need to do to incite myself a riot." Bobby Fiore paced along a dirt track somewhere in Chi His comrades said they weren't far from Shanghai. That me little to him, because he couldn't have put Shanghai on map to keep himself out of the electric chair. His guess v that it wasn't too far from the ocean: the air had the vagu salty tang he'd known when he played in places like Washi ton State and Louisiana, anyhow.

The weight of the pistol on his hip was comforting, like old friend. His baggy tunic hid the little gun. He'd acquire(new straw hat. If you ignored his nose and the five o'cl shadow on his cheeks, he made a pretty fair imitation peas He still didri't know what to make of the rest of the bai Some of the men who trudged along in the loose column w Chinese Reds like Lo and the rest of the gang who had g him into this mess in the first place. They too looked like pe ants, which was fair enough, because he gathered most of thi were.

But the othersHe glanced over at the fellow ne him, who carried a rifle and wore a ragged khaki u

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"Hey, Yosh!" he called, and mimed pivoting at second base to tam a double play.

Yoshi Fukuoka grinned, exposing a couple of gold teeth. He dropped the rifle and went into a first baseman's stretch, scissoring himself into a split and reaching out with an imaginary mitt to snag the equally imaginary ball. "Out!" he yelled ' the word perfectly comprehensible to Fiore, who lifted a clenched fist in the air, thumb pointing up.

The Reds looked from one of them to the other. They didn't get it. To diem, Fukuoka was an eastern devil and Fiore a foreign devil, and the only reason they were tagging along with the Japs was that they all hated the Lizards worse than they hated each other.

Fiore hadn't even counted on that much. When he stumbled into the Japanese camp--and when he figured out the soldiers there were Japs and not Chinamen, which took him a while-he wished he could find himself a priest for last rites, because roasting over a slow fire was the best he'd expected from them. They'd bombed Pearl Harbor, they'd butchered Liu Han's husband-what was he supposed to expect?

The Japs had taken a little while to figure out he was an Amencan, too. Their Chinese-the only language they had in common with him-was almost as bad as his, and a goodsized honker and round eyes had counted for less at first than his outfit. When they did realize what he was, they'd seemed more alarmed than hostile.

"Doolittle?" Fukuoka had asked, flying bombers over the ground with his hand.

Even though he thought he'd get killed in the next couple Of minutes, that had sent Bobby into laughter which, looking back on it, was probably close to hysterical. He knew a lot of the men- from Jimmy Doolittle's raid on Tokyo had landed in China, but getting mistaken for one by a jittery Jap was too much.

"I ain't no bomber pilot," he'd said in English. "I'm just a second baseman, and a lousy one, to boot."

He hadn't expected that to mean a thing to his interrogator, but the Jap's eyes had widened as much as they could. "Second base?" he'd echoed, pointing at Fiore. "Beisoboru?"

When Fiore still didn't get it, Fukuoka had gone into an unmistakable hitting stance. The light went on in Fiore's head.

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"Baseball!" he yelled. "Son of a bitch, I don't believe it. play ball, tooT'

It hadn't been enough for him to win friends and influenc people right off, but it had kept him from getting shot or bai oneted or suffering any of the other interesting things could have happened to him. His questioning stayed question not torture. When, haltingly, he explained how he'd been of the attack on the prison camp guard station, that got file:///C//2590%20Sci-Fi%20and%20Fantasy%20E-books/Harry%20Turtledove%20-%20Worldwar%2002%20-%20Tilting%20the%20Balance.txt

promoted from prisoner to fellow fighter.
 "You want kill ... T' One of the Japs had said a word in h
own language. When he saw Fiore didn't get it, he'd amen
it to, "Little scaly devils?"
 "Yeah!" Bobby had said savagely. The Japanese might
have known English, but they understood that just fine.
Arid so he'd started marching with them. That still
him crazy. They were the enemy, they'd kicked the U.S.A.
the balls at Pearl Harbor, jumped on the Philippines and Sing
pore and Burma and eight zillion little islands God knom
where in the Pacific, and here he was eating rice out of
same bowl with them. It felt like treason. He had uneasy
sions of standing trial for treason if he ever got back to
States. But the Japs hated Lizards more than they hated

icans, and, he'd discovered, he hated Lizards worse than hated Japs. He'd stayed.

The Reds had joined the band a couple of days after he They and the Japs hadn't seemed to have any trouble along. That puzzled Bobby--4hey'd been shooting at eac other right up to the day the Lizards came, and probably for while afterwards, too.

The leader of the Red detachment was a man of about lu own age named Nieh Ho-T'ing. Fiore spent more time with the Chinese than he did with any of the Japs except kuoka the ballplayer, he had more words in common ~hem. When he . asked why they didn't have any trouble mg common cause with their recent foes, Nieh had looked him as if he were a moron and replied, "Me enemy of my emy is a friend."

It seemed as simple as that to the Japs, too. They were ing for fighters, they knew the Reds could fight, and that all she wrote. If they thought about anything else, they didn't show it

Shanghai was in Lizard hands. The closer the band got to

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the more Bobby began to jitter. "What do we do if we see a Lizard tank?" he demanded of Nieh.

The Chinese officer shrugged, which infuriated Fiore. "Run," he answered placidly. "If we cannot run, we fight. If we must, we die. We hope to hurt the enemy as they kill us."

"Thanks a hell of a lot," Fiore muttered in English. He had no doubt Nieh Ho-T'ing meant just what he said, too. He had that do-or-die look Fiore had sometimes seen in the eyes of starting pitchers before a big game. It hadn't always meant victory, but it generally did mean a hell of an effort.

The Japs had that look,.too. In his dreadful Chinese, Fukuoka told stories about pilots who'd flown their bombers right at landed Lizard spaceships, accepting the loss of their own lives as long as they could hurt the foe, too. Fiore shivered. Martyrs were 0 very well in church, but disconcerting when encountered in real life. He couldn't decide whether they were insanely brave or just plain insane.

They came to a road sign that said SHANGHAi 50 Km along with its incomprehensible Chinese chicken scratches. At last the band split into little groups of men to make their advance less obvious.

Bobby Fiore didn't know much about Shanghai, or care. He felt like a man who'd just got out of jail. In essence, he was a man who'd just got out of jail. After a year or so trapped first in Cairo, Illinois, then on the Lizard spaceship, and then in the Chinese prison camp, just being on his own and moving from place to place again felt wonderful.

He'd been a nomad for fifteen years, riding trains and buses across the United States from one rickety minor-league park, one middle-sized town, to the next, every April to September. He'd done his share of winter barnstorming, too. He wasn't used to being cooped up in one place for weeks and months at a time.

He wondered how Liu Han was doing, and hoped the Lizards weren't giving her too hard a time because he'd gone grenade-chucking with Lo the Red. He shook his head. She was a sweet gal, no doubt about that-and he wondered what a kid who was half dago, half chink would look like. He rubbed his nose, laughing a little. He would have bet money the schnoz got passed on.

But no going back, not unless he wanted to stick his head in the noose. He wasn't a man to go back, anyhow. He looked

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ahead, toward whatever came next: the next series, the nex train ride, the next broad. Liu Han had been fun-she'd been more than fun; that much he admitted to himself-but she was history. And history, somebody said, was bunk.

Peasants in their garden plots and rice paddies looked up when the armed band passed, then went back to work. They'd seen armed bands before: Chinese, Japanese, Lizards. As long as nobody shot at them, they worked. In the end, the bands couldn't do without them, not unless the pe Lizards-wanted to quit eating.

Up ahead on the road, something stirred. Its approach was rapid, purposeful, mechanical-winch meant it belonged to Lizards. Bobby Fiore gulped. Seeing Lizards coming remi him he wasn't marching along from place to place here. He' signed up to fight, and the bill was about to come due. The Japs ahead started jumping off the road, looking

cover. That suddenly struck Bobby as a real good idea. He membered the little streambed that had cut across the field side the prison camp. Better an idea should strike him whatever the Lizards fired his way. He got behind a big bu by the side of the road. A moment later he wished he'd into a ditch instead, but by then it was too late to move. He willed a thought at the Japs: don't start shooting. Attac right now would be suicidal---tifies against armor just didn' work. Through the thick, leafy branches of the bush, couldn't see just what kind of armor it was, but the little of fighters didn't have the tools to take on any kind.

Closer and closer the Lizard vehicles came, moving with near silence that characterized the breed. Bobby pulled out hi pistol, which all at once seemed a miserable little weapon in deed. Instead of squeezing the trigger, he squeezed off a coup of Hail Marys.

Somebody fired. '~Oh, shit," Bobby said, in the same ent tone he'd used a moment before to address the Mother God. Now he could tell what the fighters were up against: tanks, but what he thought the U.S. Army called halfsoldier-haulers with machine guns of their own. Maybe a ard had been dumb enough to ride with his head sticking so a Jap could try to blow it off.

Fiore didn't think that showed the kind of brains w would have taken the Jap very far on "The \$64,000 Question! Take a potshot at armor and the armor would chew you

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which it proceeded to do. The half-tracks stopped and began hosing down the area with their automatic weapons. The bush behind which Bobby was hiding suffered herbicide as bullets amputated the top two-thirds. Flat on his belly behind it, Fiore didn't get hit.

He had his pistol out and his surviving grenade alongside him, but he couldn't make himself use the weapons. That would only have brought more fire down on him-and he wanted to live. He had trouble understanding how anybody in combat ever fired at anybody else. You could get killed like that.

The Japanese soldiers didn't seem to worry about it. They kept on blazing away at the Lizards' vehicles-those of them who hadn't got killed in the curtain of lead the half-tracks laid down, anyway. Bobby had no idea how much damage the Japs were -doing, but he was pretty damn sure it wouldn't be enough.

It wasn't. Along with keeping up the machine-gun fire, the half-tracks lowered their rear doors. A couple of squads of Lizards skittered out, their personal automatic weapons blazing. They weren't just going to hurt the people who'd shot at them, they were going to wipe 'em off the face of the earth.

"Oh, shit," Fiore said again, even more sincerely than he had before. If the Lizards caught him here with a pistol and a grenade, he was dead, no two ways about it. He didn't want to be dead, not even a little bit. He shoved the evidence under the chopped-off part of the bush and rolled backwards till he fell with a splash into a rice paddy.

He crouched down there as low as he could, huddling in the mud and doing his best to make like a farmer. Some of the real farmers were still in the knee-deep water. One or two weren't going to get out again; red stains spread around their bodies. Others, sensible chaps, ran for their lives.

The Japs didn't run, or Fiore didn't see any who did. They held their ground and fought till they were 0 dead. The Lizards' superior firepower smashed them like a shoe corming down on a cockroach.

Then the shooting tapered off. Fiore fervently hoped that meant the Lizards would get back into their half-tracks and go away. Instead, some of them came prowling his way, making sure they hadn't missed anybody.

One of them pointed his rifle right at Bobby Fiore. "Who

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you?" he demanded in lousy Chinese. He was standing no more than a foot and a half from the weapons Bobby had stashed. Bobby was dreadfully aware he hadn't stashed them all that well, either. The Lizard repeated. "Who you?"

"Name is, uh, Nieh Ho-Ving," Fiore said, stealing a handle from the Red officer. "Just farmer. Like rice?" He pointed to the plants peeping out of the water all around him, hoping the file:///C//2590%20Sci-Fi%20and%20Fantasy%20E-books/Harry%20Turtledove%20-%20Worldwar%2002%20-%20Tilting%20the%20Balance.txt

Lizard wouldn't notice how bad his own Chinese was. He might not have fooled another human being, with his accent, his nose, his eyes, and the stubble on his cheeks, but the Lizard wasn't trained to pick up the differences between one flavor of Big Uglies and the next. He just hissed something in his own language, then switched back to Chinese: "You know these bad shooters?"

"No," Fiore said, half bowed so he looked down into the murky water and didn't show much of his face. "They eastern devils, I think. Me good Chinese man."

The Lizard hissed again, then went off to ask questions o somebody else. Bobby Fiore didn't move until all the males got back into the half-tracks and rolled away.

"Jesus," he said when they were gone. "I lived through it.'

He scrambled up out of the rice paddy and reclaimed the weapons he'd stashed. He'd started to feel naked without a pistol, even if it wasn't any good against armor-and having a grenade around made you warrn and comfortable, too.

He wasn't the only one scuttling for guns, either. The Japs were all communing with their ancestors, but most of the Chinese Reds had played possum the same way he had. Now they came splashing from the paddies and grabbed their rifles and pistols and submachine guns.

They searched the corpses of the Japanese, too, but added little to what they already had. Nieh Ho-T'ing made a sou face as he walked over to Fiore. "Scaly devils are good soldiers," he said disappointedly. "They don't leave guns around for just anybody to pick up. Too bad."

"Yeah, too bad," Fiore echoed. Water dripped from his pants and formed little puddles and streams by his feet. Whenever he moved, the wet cotton made shlup-shlup noises right out of an animated cartoon.

Nieh nodded to him. "You did well. Unlike these imperial ists"--he pointed to a couple of dead Japs not far away-"you understand that in guerrilla war the fighter is but one fish in a

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vast school of peasants. When danger too great to oppose confronts him, he disappears into the school. He does not call attention to himself."

Fiore didn't understand all of that, but he got the gist. "Look like farnier, they not shoot me," he said.

"That's what I was talking about," Nieh answered impatiently. Bobby Fiore gave an absentminded emphatic cough to show he understood. Nieh had started to go off-, his soaked pants went shlup-shlup, too. He spun back around, spraying small drops of water as he did so. "You speak the language of the little scaly devils?" he -demanded.

"A bit." Bobby held his hands close together to show how small a bit it was. "Speak more Chinese." And if that wouldn't make my mama fall over in a faint, what would? he thought, and then, She's gonna have a hatf-Chinese grandkid, even if she doesn't know it. That oughta do the job.

Nieh Ho-T'ing didn't care about grandkids. "You speak some, though?" he persisted. "And you understand more than you speak?"

"Yeah, I guess so," Fiore said in English. Feeling himself flush, he did his best to turn it into Chinese.

Nieh nodded-he got the idea. He patted Bobby on the back. "Oh, yes, we will gladly take you to Shanghai. You will be very useful there. We do not have many who can follow what the little devils say."

"Good," Bobby answered, smiling to show how happy he was. And he was happy, too--the Reds could just as easily have shot him and left him here by the side of the road to make sure he didn't make a nuisance of himself later on. But since he made a good tool, they'd keep him around and use him. Just like Lo, Nieh Ho-T'ing hadn't asked how he felt about any of that. He had the feeling the Reds weren't good at asking-they just took.

He started to laugh. Nieh gave him a curious look. He waved the Red away: it wasn't a joke he knew how to translate into Chinese. But of all the things he'd never expected, getting shanghaied to Shanghai was right up at the top of the Est.

"Exalted Fleetlord, here is a report that will please you," the shiplord Kirel said as he summoned a new document onto the screen.

Atvar read intently for a little while, then stopped and stared

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at Kirel. "Major release of radioactivity in Deutschland?" he said. "This is supposed to please me? It means the Big Uglies there are a short step away from a nuclear bomb." "But they do not know how to take that next step," Kirel replied. "If you please, Exalted Fleetlord, examine the analysis." Atvar did as his subordinate asked. As he read, his mouth fell open in a great chortle of glee. "Idiots, fools, maniacs! They achieved a self-sustaining pile without proper damping?" "From the radiation that has been-is being-released, they seem to have done just that," Kirel answered, also gleefully. "And it's melted down on them, and contaminated the whole area, and, with any luck at all, killed off a whole great slew of their best scientists."

"If these are their best--2' Atvar's hiss was full of amazement. "They've done almost as much damage to themselves as we did to them when we dropped the nuclear bomb on Berlin."

"No doubt you are right, Exalted Fleetlord," Kirel said "One of the main characteristics of the Tosevites is their tendency to leap headlong into any new technology which comes within their capabilities. Where we would study consequences first, they simply charge ahead. Because of that, no doubt, they went in the flick of an eye turret from spear-flinging savages to.~,

"Industrialized savages," Atvar put in.

"Exactly so," Kirel agreed. "This time, though, in leaping they fell and smashed their snouts. Not all ventures into new technology come without risks."

"Something went right," Atvar said happily. "Ever since we came to Tosev 3, we've been nibbled to pieces here: tw killercraft lost in one place, five landcruisers; in another, deceit ful diplomacy from the Big Uglies, the allies we've mad among them who betrayed us--2'

"That male in Poland who embarrassed us by recanting hi friendship is back in our claws," Kirel said.

"So he is. I'd forgotten that," Atvar said. "We'll have to de termine the most expedient means of punishing him, too: fi some way to remind the Tosevites. who have joined us th they would do well to remember who gives them their meat No hurry there. He is not going anyplace save by our leave.'

"No indeed, Exalted Fleetlord," Kirel said. "We also need consider the effect of stepping up our pressure on Deutschl

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in light of their failure with the atomic pile. We may find them discouraged and demoralized. Computer models suggest as much, at any rate."

"Let me see." Atvar punched up detail maps of the northwestern section of Tosev 3's main continental mass. He hissed as he checked them. "The guerrillas in Italia give us as much trouble as armies elsewhere ... and though the local king and his males loudly swear they are loyal to us, they do cooperate with the rebels. Our drives in eastern France have bogged down again-not surprising, when half the local landcruiser crews cared more about tasting ginger than fighting. We're still reorganizing there. But from the east-something might be done."

"I have taken the liberty of analyzing the forces we have available as well as those with which the Deutsche could oppose -us," Kirel said. "I believe we are in a position to make significant gains there, and perhaps, if all goes well, to come close to knocking the Deutsche out of the fight against us."

"That would be excellent," Atvar said. "Forcing them into submission would improve our logistics against both Britain and the SSSR--and they are dangerous in their own right. Their missiles, their jet planes, their new landcruisers are all variables I would like to see removed from the equation."

"They are dangerous in more ways than that, Exalted Fleetlord," Kirel said quietly. "More even than the emperorslayers in the SSSR, they have industrialized murder. Eliminating them might also eliminate that idea from the planet."

Atvar remembered the images and reports from the camp called Treblinka, and from the bigger one, just going into operation when the Race overran it, called Auschwitz. The Race had never invented any places like those. Neither had the Hallessi or the Rabotevs. So many things about Tosev 3 were unique; that was one piece of uniqueness he wished to the tip of his tailstump that the Big Uglies had not come up with.

He said, "When we are through here, the Tosevites will not be able to do that to one another. And we will have no need to do it to them, for they will be our subjects. In obedience to the will of the Emperor, this shall be done."

Along with Atvar, Kirel cast down his eyes. "So it shall. I hope two things, Exalted Fleetlord: that the other Big Uglies working toward nuclear weapons make the same error as the

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Deutsche, and that the disaster permanently ended the Deutsch nuclear program. Given their viciousness, I would not want to see them of all Tosevites armed with aton-tic bombs." "Nor I," Atvar said. wj,~ V

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Heinrich Jager gave his interrogator a dirty look. "I have told you over and over, Major, I don't know one damned thing about nuclear physics and I wasn't within a good many kilometers of Haigerloch when whatever happened there happened. How you expect to get any information out of me under those circumstances is a mystery."

The Gestapo man said, "What happened at Haigerloch is a mystery, Colonel Jager. We are interviewing everyone at all involved with that project in an effort to learn what went wrong. And you win not deny that you were involved." He pointed to the German Cross in gold that Jager wore.

Jager had dormed the garishly ugly medal when he was summoned to Berchtesgaden, to remind people like this needle-nosed snoop that the Flihrer had given it to him with his own hands: anyone who dared think him a traitor had better diink again. Now he wished he'd left the miserable thing m its case.

He said, "I could better serve the Reich if I were returned to my combat unit. Professor Heisenberg was of the same opinion, and endorsed my application for transfer from Haigerloch months before this incident."

"Professor Heisenberg is dead," the Gestapo man said in a flat voice. Jager winced, nobody had told him that before. Seeing the wince, the man on the safe side of the desk nodded. "You begin to understand the magnitude of the-problem now, perhaps?'

"Perhaps I do," Jager answered; unless he missed his guess, the interrogator had been on the point of saying something like "disaster," but choked it back just in time. The fellow had a 386

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point. If Heisenberg was dead, the bomb program was a disaster.

,'If you do understand, why are you not cooperating with us?" the Gestapo man demanded.

The brief sympathy Jager had felt for him melted away like a panzer battalion under heavy Russian attack in the middle of winter. "Do you speak German?" he demanded. "I don't know anything. How am I supposed to tell you something I don't know?"

The secret policeman took that in stride. Jager wondered what sort of interrogations he'd carried out, how many desperate denials, true and untrue, he'd heard. In a way, innocence might have been worse than guilt. If you were guilty, at leas you had something to reveal at last, to make things stop. If you were innocent, they'd just keep coming after you. Because he was a Wehnnacht colonel with his share and

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more of tin plate on his chest, Jager didn't face the full battery of techniques the Gestapo might have lavished on a Soviet officer, say, or a Jew. He had some notion of what those tech niques were, and counted himself lucky not to make thei intimate acquaintance.

"Very well, Colonel Jager," the Gestapo major said with sigh; maybe he regretted not being able to use such forcefu persuasion on someone from his own side, or maybe he jus didn't think he was as good an interrogator without it. "You may go, although you are not yet dismissed back to your unit We may have more questions for you as we make progress o other related investigations."

"Thank you so much." Jager rose from his chair. He feare irony was lost on the Gestapo man, who looked to prefer th bludgeon to the rapier, but made the effort nonetheless. Th bludgeon is for Russians, he thought.

Waiting in the antechamber to the interrogation room---as the Gestapo man inside were a dentist rather than a thug-s Professor Kurt Diebner, leafing through a Signals old enoug to show only Germany's human foes. He nodded to Jager. "So they have vacuumed you up, too, Colonel?"

"So they have." He looked curiously at Diebner. "I wou not have expected you--2' He paused, unable to think of a tac ful way to go on.

The physicist didn't bother with tact. "To be among the hv Ing? Only the luck of the draw, which does make a in

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thoughtful. Heisenberg chose to take the pile over critical when I was away visiting my sister. Maybe not all luck, after 0--4le might not have wanted me around to share in his moment of fame."

Jager suspected Diebrier was right. Heisenberg had shown nothing but scorn for him at Haigerloch, though to the panzer colonel's admittedly limited perspective, Diebner was accornplishing as much as anyone else and more than most people. Jager said, "Me Lizards must have ways to keep things from going wrong when they make explosive metal."

Diebner ran a hand through his tliinning, slicked-back hair. "They have also been doing it rather longer than we have, Colonel. Haste was our undoing. You know the phrase festina lente?"

"Make haste slowly." In his Gymnasium days, Jager had done - his share of Latin.

"Just so. It's generally good advice, but not advice we can afford at this stage of the war. We must have those bombs to fight the Lizards. The hope was that, if the reaction got out of hand, ffirowmg a lump of cadymurn metal into the heavy water of the pile would bring it back under control. This evidently proved too optimistic. And also, if I remember the engineering drawings correctly, there was no plug to drain the heavy water out of the pile and so shut down the reaction that way. Most unfortunate."

"Especially to everyone who was working on the pile at the time," Jager said. "If you know all this, Dr. Diebner, and you've told it to the authorities, why are they still questioning everyone else, too?"

"Fust, I suppose, to confirm what I say-and I do not know everything that led up to the disaster, because I was out of town. And also, more likely than not, to find someone on whom to lay the blame."

That made sense to Jager; after all, he'd been trying to escape being that someone. The Wehrmacht played games with assigning responsibility for maneuvers that didn't work, too. Another old saying crossed his mind: "Victory has a hundred fathers, but defeat is an orphan." That wasn't true any more; these days, the powers that be launched a paternity suit to pin a failure on somebody. The results weren't always just, but he suspected they weren't supposed to be.

The Gestapo major came out, probably to find out why

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Diebner hadn't gone in. He scowled to discover two of his subjects talking with each other. Jager felt guilty, then angry at the secret policeman for intimidating him. He stomped out of the waiting room-and almost bumped into a big man who was just coming in. "Skorzeny!" he exclaimed. "So they dragged you into the net, too, did they?" the scar-

faced SS colonel said. "They're going to rake me over the

coals even though, as far as I know, I've never been within a hundred kilometers of the little pissant town where the screwup happened. Some major's supposed to grill me in five minutes."

"He's running late," Jager said. "He just got done with me and started in on one of the physicists. Want to go someplace and drink some schnapps? Nothing much else to do around here."

Skorzeny slapped him on the back. "First good idea I've heard since they hauled me back here, by God! Let's go-even if the schnapps they're making these days tastes like it's cooked from potato peelings, it'll put fire in your belly. And I was hoping I'd run into you, as a matter of fact. I'm working on a scheme where you just might fit in very nicely." "Really?" Jager raised an eyebrow. "How generous of the SS to look kindly on a poor but honest Wehrmacht man-_2' "Oh, can the shit," Skorzeny said. "You happen to know things that would be useful to me. Now let's go get those drinks you were talking about. After I ply you with liquor, I'll try seducing you." He leered at Jager.

"Ahh, you only want me for my body," the panzer man said. "No, it's your niind I crave," Skorzeny insisted. Laughing, the two men found a tavern down the street from

Gestapo headquarters. The fellow behind the bar wore uniform, as did just about everyone in Berchtesgaden these days. 'Sven the whores here are all kitted out with field-gray panties," Skorzeny grumbled as he and Jager took a table in the dimly lit cave. He raised his snifter in salute, knocked back his schnapps, and made a horrible face. "God, that's vile."

Jager also took a healthy nip. "It is, isn't it?" But warmth did spread out from his belly. "It's got the old antifreeze in it, though, no doubt about that." He leaned forward. "Before you jump on me, I'm going to pick your brain: what sort of goodies are they fishing out of that tank you stole? I want to pre-

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tend I'm still a panzer man, you see, not a physicist or a bandit like you."

Skorzeny chuckled. "Flattery gets you nowhere. But I'll talk-why the hell not? Half of it I don't understand. Half of it nobody understands, which is part of the problem: the Lizards build machines that are smarter than the people we have trying to figure out what they do. But there'll be new ammunition coming down the line by and by, and new armor, toolayers of steel and ceramic bonded together the devil's uncle only knows how."

"You served on the Russian front, all right," Jager said. "New ammunition, new armor-that's not bad. One day I may even get to use them. Probably not one day soon, though, eh?" Skorzeny did not deny it. Jager sighed, finished his shot, went back to the bar for another round, and returned to the table. Skorieny pounced on the fresh drink like a tiger. Jager sat down, then asked, "So what is this scheme you have that involves me?"

"Ali, that. You were going to be an archaeologist before the first war sucked you into the Army, right?"

"You've been poking through my records," Jager said without much malice. He drank more schnapps. It didn't seem so bad now-maybe the first shot had stunned his taste buds. "What the devil does archaeology have to do with the price of potatoes?"

"You know the Lizards have Italy," Skorzeny said. "They're not as happy there as they used to be, and the Italians aren't so happy with them, either. I had a little something to do with that, getting Mussolini out of the old castle where they'd tucked him away for safekeeping." He looked smug. He'd earned the right, too.

"You're planning to go down there again, and you want me along?" the panzer colonel asked- "I'd stick out like a sore thumb-not just my looks, mind you, but I don't speak much Italian.

But Skorzeny shook his massive head. "Not Italy, The Lizards are messing about on the eastern shore of the Adriatic, over in Croatia. I have trouble stomaching Ante Pavelic, but he's an ally, and we don't want the Lizards getting a toehold over there. You follow so far?"

"The strategy, yes." Jager didn't say that he marveled at an SS man's having trouble stomaching anything. Word had trick-

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led through the Wehrmacht that the Croat allies, puppets, whatever you wanted to call them, took their fascism-to say nothing of their blood feuds-very seriously indeed. Maybe Skorzeny's admission was proof of that. Jager went on, "I still don't see what it has to do with me, though." Skorzeny looked like a fisherman trying out a new lure.

"Suppose I were to tell you-and I can, because it's true-the

main Lizard base in Croatia is just outside Split. What would that mean to you?"

"Diocletian's palace," Jager answered without a moment's hesitation. "I even visited there once, on holiday eight or ten years ago. Hell of an impressive building, even after better than sixteen hundred years."

"I know you visited; the report you wrote probably went into the operational planning for Operation Strafgerichl. Strafgencht indeed; we punished the Yugoslavs properly for ducking out of their alliance with us. But that's by the way. What counts is that you know the area, and not just from that visit but from study as well. That's why I say you could be very useful to me.,,

"You're not planning on blowing up the palace, are you?"

Jager asked with sudden anxiety. Monuments suffered in wartime; that couldn't be helped. He'd seen enough Russian churches in flames during Barbarossa, but a Russian church didn't carry the same weight for him as a Roman Emperor's palace.

"I will if I have to," Skorzeny said. "I understand what you're saying, Jager, but if you're going to let that kind of attitude hold you back, then I've made a mistake and you're the wrong fellow for the Job."

"I may be anyhow. I've got a regiment waiting for me south of Belfort, remember."

"You're a good panzer man, Jager, but you're not a genius panzer man," Skorzeny said. "The regiment will do well enough under someone else. For me, though, your special knowledge would truly come in handy. Do I tempt you, or not?"

Jager rubbed his chin. He had no doubt Skorzeny could cut through the chain of command and get him reassigned: he'd pulled off enough coups for the brass to listen to him. The question was, did he want to go on fighting the same old war himself or try something new? IT

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"Buy me another schnapps," he said to Skorzeny. The SS colonel grinned. "You want me to get you drunk first, so you can say you didn't know what I was doing when I had my way with you? All right, higer, I'll play." He strode to the bar.

Lieutenant General Kurt Chill turned a sardonic eye on his Soviet opposite numbers-or maybe, George Bagriall thought, it was just the effect the torches that blazed in the Pskov Krom created. But no, the general's German was sardonic, too: "I trust, gentlemen, we can create a united front for the defense of Pleskau? This would have been desirable before, but cooperation has unfortunately proved limited."

The two Russian partisan leaders, Nikolai Vasiliev and Aleksandr German, stirTed in their seats. Aleksandr German spoke, Yiddish as well as Russian, and so followed Chill's words well enough. He said, "Call our city by its proper name, not the one you Nazis hung on it. Cooperation? Ha! You at least had that much courtesy before."

Bagnall, whose German was imperfect, frowned as he tried to keep track of the Jewish partisan leader's Yiddish. Vasiliev had no Yiddish or German; he had to wait until an interpreter finished murmuring in his ear. Then he boomed "Da! " and followed it up with a spate of incomprehensible Russian.

The interpreter performed his office: "Brigadier Vasiliev also rejects the use of the term 'united front.' It is properly applied to unions of progressive organizations, not associations with reactionary causes."

Beside Bagnall, Jerome Jones whistled under his breath. "He shaded that translation. 'Fascist jackals' is really what Vasiliev called the Nazis."

"Why does this not surprise me?" Bagnall whispered back. "If you want to know what I think, that they've come back to calling each other names instead of trying to kill each other is progress.,,

"Something to that," Jones said.

He started to add more, but Chill was speaking again: "If we do not join together now, whatever the name of that union may be, what we call this city will matter no more. The Lizards will give it their own name."

"And how do we stop thatT'As usual, German got his comment in a beat ahead of Vasiliev.

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The Russian partisan leader amplified what his comrade ha(said: "Yes, how do we dare put our men on the same firinj line as yours without fearing they'll be shot in the backT' "The same way I dare put Wehrmacht men into line along side yours," Chill said. "by remembering the enemy is worse As for being shot in the back, how many Red Army units wen into action with NKVD men behind them to make sure the were properly heroicT'

"Not our partisans," German said. Then he fell silent, an(Vasiliev had nothing to add, from which Bagnall inferred Gen eral Chill had scored a point.

Chill folded his arms across his chest. "Does either of yoi gentlemen propose to take overall command of the defenses Pleskau---excuse me, PskovT'

Aleksandr German and Vasiliev looked at each other. Nei ther seemed overjoyed at the prospect of doing as Chill ha(suggested. In their valenki, Bagnall wouldn't have been over joyed, either. Conducting hit-and-run raids from the fores wasn't the same as fighting a stand-up campaign. The partisan knew well how to make nuisances of themselves. They als had to be uneasily aware that partisan warfare hadn't kept th, Germans from Pskov or driven them out of it.

Finally, Vasihev said, "Nyet. " He went on through his inter preter. "You are best suited to lead the defense, provided yoi do it so that you are defending the town and the people and th Soviet fighters in the area as well as your own Nazis."

"If I defend the area, I defend all of it, or as much as I caj with the men and resources I have available," Chill answer& "This also means that if I give an order to one of your units .1 expect it to be obeyed."

"Certainly," Vasiliev answered, "so long as the unit's corn mander and political commissar judge the order to be in th best interest of the cause as a whole, not just to the advantag Of you Gerinaris."

, That is not good enough," Chill replied coldly. "They mu take the overall well-being as their governing assumption, an obey whether they see the need or not One of the reasons having an overall commander is to have a man in a positio where he can see things his subordinates do not."

"Nyet, " Vasiliev said again. Aleksandr German echoed him "Oh, bugger, here we go again," Bagnall whispered Jerome Jones. The radarman nodded. Bagnall went on, "We'vi

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got to do something, before we go through another round of the idiocy that had the Bolshies and Nazis blazing away at each other a few weeks ago. I don't know about you, but I don't fancy getting stuck between them again."

"Nor I," Jones whispered back. "If that's what the groundpounders call war, thank God for the RAF, is all I have to say."

"You get no arguments from me," Bagnall said. "Remember, I'd already found that out. You weren't along for the raid on the Lizard base south of here." They thought you were too valuable to risk, he thought without much rancor. Ken and poor dead A~f and I, we were expendable, but not you-you know your radars too well.

As if thinking along similar lines, Jones answered, "I tried to come along. The bloody Russians wouldn't let me."

,"Did you? I didn't know that." Bagnall's opinion of Jones went'up a peg. To volunteer to get shot at when you didn't have to took something special.

As most Englishmen would, Jones brushed that aside. "It doesn't matter, anyway. We have to worry about now, as you said." He got up and said loudly, "Tovarishchi!" Even Bagnall knew that one-it meant Comrades! Jones went on, in Russian and then in German, "If we want to hand Pskov to the Lizards on a silver platter, we can go on just as we are now."

"Yes? And so?" Kurt Chill asked. "What is your solution? Shall we all place ourselves under your command?" His smile was hard and bright and sharp, like a shark's.

Jones turned pale and sat down in a hurry. "I've got a picture of that, I do, bloody generals kowtowing to a radarman. Not flipping likely."

"Why not?" Bagnall got to his feet. He had only German, and not all he wanted of that, but he gave it his best shot: "The Red Army doesn't trust the Wehrmacht, and the Wehrmacht doesn't trust the Red Army. But have we English done anything to make either side distrust us? Let General Chill command. If Russian units don't like what he proposes, let them complain to us. If we think the orders are fair, let them obey as if the commands came from Stalin. Is that a fair arrangement?"

Silence followed, save for the murmur of Vasiliev's interpreter as he translated Bagnall's words. After a few seconds, Chill said, "In general, weakening command is a bad idea. A

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commander needs all the authority over his troops he can get. But in these special circumstances--2'

"Me Englishmen would have to decide quickly," Aleksandr German said. "If they cannot make up their minds, orders may become irrelevant before they give their answer."

"That would be part of the packet," Bagnall agreed.

"Me Englishmen would also have to remember that we are all allies together here against the Lizards, and that England is

not specially aligned with the Russians against the Reich," Lieutenant General Chill said. "Decisions which fail to show this evenhandedness would make the arrangement unworkable in short order-and we would start shooting at each other again."

"Yes, yes," Bagnall said impatiently. "If I didn't think we could do that, I wouldn't have advanced the idea. I might also say I'm not the only one in this room who has had trouble remembering we are all allies together and that plans should show us much."

Chill glared at him, but so did German and Vasiliev. Jerome Jones whispered, "You did well there, not to single out either side. This way each of them can pretend to be sure you're talk-Mg about the other chap. Downright byzantme of you, in fact." "Is that a compliment?" Bagnall asked.

"I meant it for one," the radarman answered.

Chill spoke to the Russian partisan leaders. "Is this agreeable to you, gentlemen? Shall we let the Englishmen arbitrate between us?"

"He rides that 'gentlemen' hard," Jones murmured. "Throws it right in the face of the comrades-just to irk 'em, unless I miss my guess. Gentlemen don't fit into the dictatorship of the proletariaL"

Bagnall listened with but half an ear. He was watching the two men who'd headed the "forest republic" before the Lizards arrived. They didn't look happy as they muttered back and forth. Bagnall didn't care whether they were happy. He just hoped they could live with the arrangement.

Finally, grudgingly, Nikolai Vasiliev turned to General Chill and spoke a single sentence of Russian. The translator turned it into German: "Better the English than you."

"On that, if you reverse roles, we agree completely," Chill said. He turned to Bagnall, gave him an ironic bow. '~Congratulations. You and your British colleagues have just become a file:///C//2590%20Sci-Fi%20and%20Fantasy%20E-books/Harry%20Turtledove%20-%20Worldwar%2002%20-%20Tilting%20the%20Balance.txt

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three-man board of field marshals. Shall I order your batons and have a tailor sew red stripes to your-trouser seams?"

"T'hat won't be necessary," Bagnall said. "What I need is assurance from you and from your Soviet counterparts that you'll abide by whatever decisions we end up making. Without that, we might as well not start down this road."

The German general gave him a long look, then slowly nodded. "You do have some understanding of the difficulties with which you are involving yourself. I wondered if this was so. Very well, let it be as you say. By my oath as a soldier and officer of the Wehrmacht and the German Reich, I swear that I shall accept without question your decision on cases brought before you for arbitration."

"What about you?" Bagnall asked the two Soviet brigadiers. Aleksandr German and Vasiliev seemed imperfectly delighted once more, but German said, "If in a dispute you rule against us, we shall accept your decision as if it came from the Great Stalin himself. This I swear."

"Da, " Vasiliev added after the interpreter had translated for him. "Stalin." He spoke the Soviet leader's name like a religious man invoking the Deity---or perhaps a powerful demon.

Kurt Chill said, "Enjoy the responsibility, my English friends." He sent Bagnall and Jones a stiff-armed salute, then strode out of the meeting chamber in the Krom.

Bagnall felt the responsibility, too, as if the air had suddenly turned hard and heavy above his shoulders. He said, "Ken won't be pleased with us for getting him into this when he wasn't even at the meeting."

"That's what he gets for not coming," Jones replied. "Mm-maybe so." Bagnall looked sidelong at the radarman. "Do you suppose the Germans will want you to give up the fair Tatiana, so as to have no reason to be biased toward the Soviet side?"

"They'd better not," Jones said, "or I'll bloody well have reason to be biased against them. The one good thing in this whole pestilential town-if anyone tries separating me from her, he'll have a row on his hands, that I tell you."

"What?" Bagnall raised an eyebrow. "You're not enamored of spring in Pskov? You spoke so glowingly of it, I recall, when we were flying here in the Lanc."

"Bugger spring in Pskov, too," Jones retorted, and stomped off.

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In fact, spring in Pskov was pretty enough. The Velik River, ice-free at last, boomed over the rapids as it neared L Pskov. Gray boulders, tinted with pink, stood out on steep hi sides against the dark green of the all-surrounding woo Grass grew tall on the streets of deserted villages around t file:///C//2590%20Sci-Fi%20and%20Fantasy%20E-books/Harry%20Turtledove%20-%20Worldwar%2002%20-%20Tilting%20the%20Balance.txt

city.

The sky was a deep, luminous blue, with only a few pu little white clouds slowly drifting across it from west to ea Along with those clouds, Bagnall saw three parallel lines white, as straight as if drawn with a ruler. Condensation tra from Lizard jets, he thought, and his delight in the beauty the day vanished. The Lizards might not he moving yet, b they were watching.

Mordechai Anielewicz looked up from the beet field at sound of jet engines. Off to the north he saw three small si very darts heading west. They'll be landing at Warsaw, thought with the automatic accuracy of one who'd been sp ting Lizard planes for as long as there had been Lizard plan to spot-and German planes before that. Wonder what they' been up to.

Whoever headed the Jewish fighters these days would h someone at the airport fluent enough at the Lizards' speech answer that for him. So would General Bor-Komorowski the Polish Home Army. Anielewicz missed getting informatio like that, being connected to a wider world. He hadn't reali his horizons would contract so dramatically when he left saw for Leczna.

Contract they had. The town had had several radios, b without electricity, what good were they? Poland's big citi had electricity, but nobody'd bothered repairing the lines out all the country towns. Leczna probably hadn't had electricity all until after the First World War. Now that it was gone agai people just did. without.

Anielewicz went back to work. He pulled out a weed, in sure he had the whole root, then moved ahead about half a ter and did it again. An odd task, he thought: mindless and acting at the same time. You wondered where the hours h gone when you knocked off at the end of the day.

A couple of rows over, a Pole looked up from his weedin and said, "Hey you, Jew! What does the creature that says he governor of Warsaw call himself again?"

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The fellow spoke quite without malice, using Anielewicz's religion to identify him, not particularly to scorn him. That he might feel scorned anyhow never entered the Pole's mind. Because he knew that, Anielewicz didn't feel scorned, or at least not badly. "Zolraag," he answered, carefully pronouncing the two distinct a sounds.

"Zolraag," the Pole echoed, less clearly. He took off his cap, scratched his head. "Is he as little as all the others like him? It hardly seems natural."

"All the males I've ever seen are about the same size Mordechai answered. The.Pole scratched his head again. Anielewicz had worked with the Lizards almost every day; he knew them as well as any man could. Here in Leczna, Lizards were hardly more than a rumor. The locals might have seen them when they ran the Nazis out of town, or when they went to Lublin to buy and sell. Other than that, the aliens were a mystery here.

"They are as nasty as people sayT' the Pole asked.

How was he supposed to answer that? Slowly, he said, "They aren't as vicious as the Germans, and they aren't as smart, either-or maybe it's just that they don't understand people any better than we understand them, and that makes them seem dumber than they are. But they can do more with machines than the Germans ever dreamed of, and that makes them dangerous."

"You reason like a priest," the farmworker said. It wasn't quite a compliment, for he went on, "Ask a simple question and you get back, 'Well, sort of this but sort of that, too, because of these things. And on the other hand-' " He snorted. "I just wanted a yes or a no."

"But some questions don't have simple yes-or-no answers," Anielewicz said. Though he'd been a secular man, his ancestry had generations of Talmudic scholars in it-and just being a Jew was plenty to teach you things were rarely as simple as they looked at first glance.

The Pole didn't believe that; Anielewicz could see as much. The fellow took a flask of vodka off his hip, swigged, and offered it to Anielewicz. Mordechai took a nip. Vodka helped you get through the day.

After a while, the Pole said, "So what did you do to get yourself run out of Warsaw and show up in a little town like this?"

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"I shot the last man who asked me a question like tha Anielewicz replied, deadpan.

The farmworker stared at him, then let out a hoarse gu "Oh, you're a funny one, you are. We got to watch you ev minute, hey?" He leered at Mordechai. "Some of the girls watching you already, you know that?"

Anielewicz grunted. He did know that. He didn't quite kn

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what to do about it. As leader of the Jewish fighters, he had had time for women, and they might have endangered securi Now he was just an exile. His training in underground w insisted he still ought to hold himself aloof. But he was a in in his mid-twenties, and emphatically not a monk. Grinning, the Pole said, "You go out to the backhouses night, you have to be careful not to look toward the haystac or under the wagons. Never can tell when you're liable to s something you're not supposed to."

"Is that a fact?" Mordechai said, though he knew it w The Poles were not only less straitlaced than the Jews w lived among them, they also used vodka or brandy to gi themselves an excuse for acting that way. Anielewicz added, don't see how anyone is up to doing anything except sleep

ter a day in the fields."

"You think this is work, wait till harvest comes," the P said, which made Anielewicz groan. The local laughed, th went on more soberly: "All the old-timers, the ones left ali they're sneering at us, on account of we're having to make without tractors and such, so I shouldn't give you a hard ti friend. You pull your weight, and every pair of hands we c find is welcome. We want to keep ourselves fed through w ter, we better work now." He stooped, tore out a weed, mov ahead.

He probably didn't care what happened two kilometers o side Leczna, but he'd put his finger on a worldwide truth the With so much, farm machinery out of commission or out fuel, people everywhere were having to do all they could j to stay alive. That meant they were able to do less to fight Lizards, too.

Anielewicz wondered if the aliens had planned it that w Maybe not; some of the things Zolraag had said suggested th hadn't expected people to have machines, let alone readapt doing without them. But if the Lizards reduced all of manki to nothing more than peasants grubbing a bare living from

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soil, would people ever be able to get free of them? He shook his head like a horse bedeviled by gnats. He couldn't see it Then mtional thought went away for a while as the ancient rhythm of the fields took over. The next time he looked up from the furrows, the sun hung low in the west, sinking into the mist that rose from the flat, moist land as it cooled with approaching evening.

"Where does the time go?" he said, startled.

He'd spoken more to himself than to anyone else, but the Polish farmworker was still close enough to hear him. The Pole laughed, loud and long..'~Got away from you, did it? That happens sometimes. You wonder what the devil you've been doing all day, till. you look back and see what you've done."

Mordechai looked back. Sure enough, he'd done a lot. He was an educated man, a city man. No matter how necessary farmwork was, he'd been sure it would drive him mad with boredom. He didn't know whether to be relieved or alarmed that that hadn't happened. Relief seemed natural, but if someone like him could sink down to the level of a farmer with no thought past his fields, what did that say about the rest of humanity?'If the Lizards pressed the yoke of serfdom down on their necks, would they wear it?

He shook his head again. If he was going to start thinking, he would have preferred to start with something more cheerful. The mist rose; the sun sank until he could stare straight at its blood-red disk without hurting his eyes. The Pole said, "Hell with it. We're not going to get any more done today. Let's go back to town."

"All right by me." Anielewicz's back protested when he stood up straight. If aches bothered the Pole, he didn't show it. He'd worked on a farm 0 his life, not just for a couple of weeks.

Leczna was an ordinary Polish town, bigger than a village, not nearly big enough to be called a city. It was small enough for people to know one another, and for Mordechai to stand out as a stranger. People still greeted him in a friendly enough way, Jews and Poles allke. The two groups seemed to get on pretty well-better than in most places in Poland, anyhow.

Maybe the friendly greetings came because he was staying with the Ussishkins. Judah Ussishkin had been doctoring Jews and gentiles alike for more than thirty years; his wife Sarah, a midwife herself, must have delivered half the population of the

V, il-

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Most of the Jews lived in the southeastern part of town. A was fitting for one who worked with both halves of the popu lace, Dr. Ussishkin had his house at the edge of the Jewish dis trict. His next-door neighbors on one side, in fact, were Poles Roman lUopotowski waved to Anielewicz as he came dowi the street toward the doctor's house. So did Klopotowski' file:///C//2590%20Sci-Fi%20and%20Fantasy%20E-books/Harry%20Turtledove%20-%20Worldwar%2002%20-%20Tilting%20the%20Balance.txt

daughter Zofia.

Mordechai waved back, which made Zofia's face light up She was a pretty blond girl-no, woman; she had to be pas twenty. Anielewicz wondered why she hadn't married. What ever the reason, she'd plainly set her sights on him. He didn't know what to do about that (he knew what ho wanted to do, but wasn't nearly so sure it was a good idea) For the moment, he did nothing but walk up the steps onto thi front porch of Dr. Ussishkin's house and, after wiping his feet on into the parlor.

"Good evening, my guest," Judah Ussishkin said with a dil of his head that was almost a bow. He was a broad-shouldere(man of about sixty, with a curly gray beard, sharp dark eye! behind steel-rimmed spectacles, and an old-fashioned courtli ness that brought with it a whiff of the vanished days of th(Russian Empire.

"Good evening," Mordechai answered, nodding in return He'd grown up in a more hurried age, and could not match tht doctor's manners. He might even have resented them had tbe3 not been so obviously genuine rather than affectation. "Hm& was your day?"

"Well enough, thank you for asking, although it would have been better still had I had more medicines with which t(work. 11

"We would all be better off if we had more of everything,' Mordechai said.,

The doctor raised a forefinger. "There I must disagree wid $y \sim u$, my young friend: of troubles we have more than a suffi-

ciency." Anielewicz; laughed ruefully and nodded, yielding the point.

Sarah Ussishkin came out of the kitchen and interrupted: "Of potatoes we also have a sufficiency, at least for now. Potato soup is waiting, whenever you tzaddiks decide you'd rather eat than philosophize." Her smile belied the scolding

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tone in her voice. She'd probably been a beauty when she was young; she remained a handsome woman despite gray hair, the beginning of a stoop, and a face that had seen too many sorrows and not enough joys. She moved with a dancer's grace, making her long black skirt swirl about her at every step.

The potato soup steamed in its pot and in three bowls on the table by the stove. Judah Ussishkin murmured a blessing before he picked up his spoon. Out of politeness to him, Anielewicz waited till he was done, though he'd lost that habit and his stomach was growling like an angry wolf.

The soup was thick not only with grated potatoes but also with chopped onion. Chicken fat added rich flavor and sat in little golden globules on the surface of the soup. Mordechai pointed to them. "I always used to call those 'eyes' when I was a little boy."

"Did you?" Sarah laughed. "How funny. Our Aaron and Benjamin said just the same thing." The laughter did not last long. One of the Ussishkins' sons had been a young rabbi in Warsaw, the other a student there. No word had come from them since the Lizards drove out the Nazis and the closed ghetto ended. The odds were mournfully good that meant they were both dead.

Mordechai's soup bowl emptied with amazing speed. Sarah Ussishkin filled it again, and he emptied it the second time almost as fast as the first. "You have a healthy appetite," Judah said approvingly.

"If a man works like a horse, he needs to eat like a horse, too," Anielewicz replied. The Germans hadn't cared about that; they'd worked the Jews like elephants and fed them like ants. But the work they'd got out of the Jews was just a sidelight; they'd been more interested in getting rid of them.

Supper was just ending when someone pounded on the front door. "Sarah, come quick!" a frightened male voice bawled in Yiddish. "Hannah's pains are close together."

Sarah Ussishkin made a wry face as she got up from her chair. "It could be worse, I suppose," she said. "That usually happens in the middle of a meal." The pounding and shouting went on. She raised her voice: "Leave us our door in one piece, Isaac. I'm coming." The racket stopped. Sarah turned to her husband for a moment. "I'll probably see you tomorrow sometime."

"Very likely," he agreed. "God forbid you should have to

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call me sooner, for that could only mean something bai wrong. I have chloroform, a little, but whenit is gone, it gone forever."

'This is Hannah's third," Sarah said reassuringly. "Me two were so simple I could have stayed here for them." Is started banging on the door again. "I'm coming," she told I again, this time following words with action.

"She's right about that," Judah told Anielewicz after wife had gone. "Hannah has hips like--2' Having caught hi self about to be ungallant, he shook his head in self-reproa As if to make amends, he changed the subject. "Would y care for a game of chess?"

"Why not? You'll teach me something." Before the w Anielewicz had fancied himself as a chess player. But ei his game had gone to pot after close to four years of negl or Judah Ussishkin could have played in tournaments, becai he'd managed only one draw and no wins in half a dozen so games against the doctor.

Tonight proved no exception. Down a knight, his cast king's position not well enough protected to withstand attack he saw coming, Mordechai tipped the king over, sig fying surrender. "You might have gotten out of that," Ussi kin said. "Not against you," Mordechai answered. "I know better. you want to try another game? I can do better than that." "Your turn for white," Judah said. As they rearranged pieces on the board, he added, "Not everyone would coming back after a string of losses."

"I'm learning from you," Anielewicz said. "And maybe game is coming back a little. When I'm playing as well a can, I might be able to put you to some trouble, anyhow." pushed his queen's pawn to open.

They were in the middle of a hard-fought game with great advantage for either side-Mordechai was proud avoiding a trap a few moves before-when more pounding the door made them both jump. Isaac shouted, "Doctor, S wants you to come. Right away, she says."

"Oy, " Judah said, cultivated manner for once forgotten. pushed back his chair and stood up. "Ibe game will have keep, I'm afraid." He moved a pawn. "Think about that wh I'm gone." He snatched up his bag and hurried out to the ar ious Isaac. file:///C//2590%20Sci-Fi%20and%20Fantasy%20E-books/Harry%20Turtledove%20-%20Worldwar%2002%20-%20Tilting%20the%20Balance.txt

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for Zofia to notice the lull in the ir talk, say good night, and go back to her father's house. When she didn't, but kept standing quietly by him, he reached out and, quite in the spirit of experiment, let his hand rest on her shoulder.

She didn't shrug him off. She stepped closer, so that his arm went around her. "I wondered how long that would take you , she said with a small laugh.

Miffed, he almost said something sharp, but luckily had a better idea: he bent his face down to hers. Her lips were upturned and waiting. For some time, neither of them said anything. Then he whispered, "Where can we goT,

"The doctor didn't take his car, did he?" she whispered back. Ussishkin owned an ancient Fiat, one of the handful of automobiles in town. She answered her own question: "No, of course he didn't. No one has any petrol these days. So it's right in back of his house. If we're quiet."

The Fiat's back door squeaked alariningly when Anielewicz opened it for Zofia, who let out an almost soundless giggle. He slid in beside her. They were cramped, but managed to loosen and eventually pull off each other's clothes all the same. His hand strayed down from her breasts to her thighs and the warm, moist softness between them.

She gripped him, too. When she did, she paused a moment in surprise, then giggled again, deep down in her throat. "Mat's right," she said, as if reminding herself. "You're a Jew. It's different."

He hadn't really thought he was her first, but the remark jolted him a little just the same. He made a wordless questioning noise.

"My fianc6-his name was Czeslaw-went to fight the Germans," she said. "He never came back."

"Oh. I'm sorry." He wished he'd ignored her. Hoping he hadn't ruined the mood, he kissed her again. Evidently he hadn't; she sighed and lay back as well as she could on the narrow seat of the car. He poised himself above her. "Zofia," he said as they joined. She wrapped her arnis around his back.

When he paid attention to anything but her again, he saw the old Fiat's windows, which Ussishkin kept closed against pests, had steamed up. That made him laugh. "What is itT' Zofia asked. Her voice came slightly muffled; she was pulling her blouse back on over her head. He explained. She said, "Well, what would you expectT'

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He dressed, too, as fast as he could. Getting back i clothes in the backseat was even more awkward than esc from them had been, but he managed. He opened the car and slid out, Zofia right behind him. They stood for a of seconds, looking at each other. As people do in such cumstances, Mordechai wondered where that first coup would end up taking them. He said, "You'd better get back your house. Your father will wonder where you've been." tually, he was aft-aid Roman Klopotowski might know w she'd been, but he didn't want to say that. She stood on tiptoe so she could kiss him on the che "That's for caring enough about me to worry what my will think," she said. Then she kissed him again, op mouthed. "And that's for the rest." He squeezed her. "If I weren't so tired from working in fields-2' She burst out laughing, so loud he twitched in alarm. "M are such braggarts. It's all right. We'll find other times." That meant he'd pleased her. He felt several centi taller. "I hope we do." "Of course you hope we do. Men always hope that~" said without much anger. She laughed again. "I don't kn
why you Jews go to so much trouble and hurt to make
selves different. Once it's in there, it's the same either
"Is it? Well, I can't help that," Anielewicz said. "I am s
about your Czeslaw. Too many people, Poles and Jews,
come back from the war."

"I know." She shook her head. "Mat's God's truth, it c tainly is. It's been a long time-three and a half years, I'm entitled to live my own life." She spoke defiantly, as Mordechai were going to disagree with her

But he said, "Of course you are. And now you had better home."

"All right. I'll see you soon." She hurried away. Anielewicz; went back into the Ussishkins' house. Th came in a few minutes later, tired but smiling. Judah said, got a good baby, a boy, and Hannah I think will be 0 too. I didn't have to do a cesarean, for which I thank real chance for asepsis here, try as I will." "That's all good news," Anielewicz said.

"It is indeed." The doctor looked at him. "But what are

doing still awake? You've been studying the chessboard, uni

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I miss my guess. I have noticed you don't like to lose, however polite you may be. So what are you going to do?"

The chess game hadn't crossed Mordechai's mind once since the sound of airplane engines made him go outside. Now he walked back over to the board. Thanks to the pawn move Ussishkin had crowed about, he couldn't attack with his queen as he'd planned. He shifted the piece to a square farther back along the diagonal than he'd intended.

Fast as a striking snake, Judah Ussishkin moved a knight. It neatly forked the queen and one of Mordechai's rooks. He stared in dismay. Here was another game he wasn't going to win-and Ussishkin was right, he hated to lose.

All at once, though, it didn't seem to matter so much. All right, so he'd lose at chess one more time. He'd played a different game tonight, and won it.

Leslie Groves looked down the table at the scientists from the Metallurgical Laboratory. "The fate of the United Statesand probably the world--depends on your answer to this question: how do we turn the theoretical physics of a working atomic pile into practical engineering? We have to industrialize the process as fast as we can."

"A certain amount of caution is indicated," Arthur Compton said. "By what we've been told, they're paying in Germany for rushing ahead with no thought for consequences." "Mat was an engineering flaw we've already uncovered, wasn't it?" Groves said.

"A flaw? You might say so." Enrico Fermi made a fine Latin gesture of contempt. "When their pile went critical, they had no way to shut it down again-and so the reaction continued, out of control. For all I know, it continues still; no one can get close enough to find out for certain. It cost the Germans many able men, whatever we may think of them politically."

"Heisenberg," someone said softly. An almost invisible pall of gloom seemed to descend on the table. Many of the assembled physicists had known the dead German; you couldn't be a nuclear physicist without knowing his work.

"I am not about to let a foreign accident slow down our own program," Groves said, "especially when it's an accident we won't have. What were they doing, throwing pieces of cad-

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mium metal into the heavy water of their pile to try to slow down? We've designed better than that."

"In this particular regard, yes," Leo Szilard said. "But w can say what other problems may be lurking in the metaphy ical undergrowth?"

Groves gave the Hungarian scientist an unfriendly loo However brilliant he was, he was always finding ways could go wrong. Maybe he was so imaginative, he saw file:///C//2590%20Sci-Fi%20and%20Fantasy%20E-books/Harry%20Turtledove%20-%20Worldwar%2002%20-%20Tilting%20the%20Balance.txt

no one else would. Or maybe he just liked to borrow troub Whichever it was, Groves didn't intend to put up with it. growled, "If we never tried anything new, we wouldn't have worry about anything going wrong. Of course, if we'd had th attitude all along, the Lizards would have conquered us abo twenty minutes after they landed here, because we'd all been living in villages and sacrificing goats whenever we h a thunderstorm. So we will go ahead and see what the lems are. ObjectionsT'

No one had any. Groves nodded, satisfied. The physicis were a bunch of prima donnas such as he'd never had to de with in the Army, but no matter how high in the clouds th heads were, they had their hearts in the right place. He said, "Okay, back to square one. What do we have to to turn our experimental pile here into a bomb factory?" "Get out of Denver," Jens Larssen muttered. Groves gl ered at him; he'd had enough of Larssen's surly attitude. Then, to his surprise, he noticed several other physici were nodding. Groves did his best to smooth out his feature "Why?" he asked, as mildly as he could.

Larssen looked around; maybe he didn't want the floor. B he'd opened his mouth, and so he had it. He reached into shirt pocket, as if digging for a pack of cigarettes. Not comin up with one, he said, "Why? The most important reason is, don't have the water we'll need."

"Like any other energy source, a nuclear pile also gen heat," Fermi amplified. "Running water makes an effecti coolant. Whether we can divert enough water here from uses is an open question."

Groves said, "How much are we going to need? The Missi sippi? The Lizards are holding most of it these days, P afraid."

He'd intended that for sarcasm. Fermi didn't take it as suc He said, "That being so, the Columbia is probably best for

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purposes. It is swift-flowing, with a large volume of water, and the Lizards are not strong in the Northwest."

"You want this operation to move again, after we've just gotten set up here?" Groves demanded. "You want to pack everything up into wagons and haul it over the Rockies?" What he wanted to do was start heaving nuclear physicists out the window, Nobel laureates first.

"A move like the move we made from Chicago, no, that would not be necessary," Fermi said. "We can keep this facility intact, continue to use it for research. But production, as you call it, would be better placed elsewhere."

Heads bobbed up and down, all along the table. Groves sighed. He'd been given the power to bind and loose on this project, but he'd expected to wield it against bureaucrats and soldiers; he hadn't imagined the scientists he was supposed to ride herd on would complicate his life so. He said, "If you're springing this on me now, you probably have a site all picked out."

That's what he would have done, anyhow. But then, he was a hardheaded engineer. The ivory-tower boys didn't always think the way he did. This time, though, Ferini nodded. "From what we can tell by long-distance research, the town of Hanford, Washington, seems quite suitable, but we shall have to send someone to take a look at this place to make certain it meets our needs."

Larssen stuck his hand in the air. "I'll go." A cotiple of other men also volunteered.

Groves pretended not to see them. "Dr. Larssen, I think I may take you up on that. You have experience traveling through a war zone by yourself, and-" He let the rest hang.

Larssen didn't. "-and it'd be best for everybody if I got out of here for a while, you were going to say. Now tell me one I hadn't heard." He ran a hand through his shock of thick blond hair. "I've got a question for you. Will the Lizard POWs stay with the research end or go to the production site?" :'Not my call." Groves turned to Fermi. "Professor?"

'I think perhaps they may be more useful to us here," Fermi said slowly.

"That's kind of what I thought, too," Larssen said. "Okay, now I know." He didn't need to draw anybody a picture. If the Lizards-and Sam Yeager, and Barbara Larssen-turned-

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Yeager-stayed here, Jens would likely end up at Hanford fo good, assuming the place panned out.

That set off an alarm bell in Groves' mind. "We will a scrupulously accurate report on Hanford's suitability, Larssen."

"You'll get one," Jens proniised. "I won't talk it up just I can move there, if that's what you're worried about." "Okay." Groves thought for a minute, then said, "We ough to send a GI with you, too. That would help make sure you g back here in one piece." file:///C//2590%20Sci-Fi%20and%20Fantasy%20E-books/Harry%20Turtledove%20-%20Worldwar%2002%20-%20Tilting%20the%20Balance.txt

Larssen's eyes grew hard and cold. "You try sending any body from the Army with me, General, and I won't go. Army's already done me enough bad tums-I don't need an more. I'll be there all by my lonesome, and I'll get back, too You don't like that, put somebody else on the road." Groves glared. Larssen glared right back. Groves ran int the limits of his power to command. If he told Larssen to s up and do as he was told, the physicist was liable to go o strike again and end up in the brig instead of Hanford. even if he did leave Denver with a soldier tagging along, wh would his report be worth when he got back? He'd proved he could survive on his own. Groves muttered u his breath. Sometimes you had to throw in your hand; no he for it. "Have it your way, then," he growled. Larssen I disgustingly smug.

Leo Szilard stuck a forefinger in the air. Groves nodded hi way, glad of the chance to forget Larssen for a moment Szilard said, "Building a pile is a large work of engineering How do we keep the Lizards from spotting it and knocking i to pieces? Hanford now, I would say as a statement of hi probability, has no such large works."

"We have to make it look as if we're building somethin else, something innocuous," Groves said after a little thought "Just what, I don't know. We can work on that while Dr. Larssen is traveling. We'll involve the Army Corps of Engi neers, too; we won't need to depend on our own ingenuity." "If I were a Lizard," Szilard said, "I would knock down any

large building humans began, on general principles. The aliens must know we are trying to devise nuclear weapons." Groves shook his head again, not in contradiction but in an-

Groves shook his head again, not in contradiction but in annoyance. He had no doubt Szilard was right; if he'd been a Lizard himself, he'd have done the same thing. "Hiding an

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atomic pile in the middle of a city isn't the world's grea idea, either," he said. "We've done it here because we had choice, and also because this was an experiment. If someth goes wrong with a big pile, we'll have ourselves a mess j like the one the Germans got. How many people woul kill?"

"A good many-you are right about that," Szilard s "That is why we settled on the Hanford site. But we also have to consider whether working out in the open would co to the enemy's attention. Winning the war must come first. fore we go to work, we must weigh the risks to city against ose to t e project as a w o e om st ng up a out in the open, so to speak."

Enrico Fermi sighed. "Leo, you presented this view at meeting where we decided what we would advise Gen(Groves. The vote went against you, nor was it close. Why you bring up the matter now?"

"Because, whether in the end he accepts it or not, he ne to be aware of it," Szilard answered. Behind glasses, his e twinkled. And to raise a little hell, Groves guessed. He said, "We'll need Dr. Larssen's report on the area. I s

pect we'll also need to do some serious thinking about we'll camouflage the pile if we do build there." His smile c lenged the eggheads. "Since we have so many brilliant mi here, I'm sure that will be no trouble at all."

A couple of innocents beamed; perhaps their sarcasm de tors were out of commission for the duration. A couple of p ple with short fuses-Jens Larssen was one-glared at h Several people looked thoughtful: if he set them a probl they'd start working on it. He approved of that attitude; it what he would have done himself.

"Gentlemen, I think that's enough for today," he said.

Major Okamoto seemed out of place in a laboratory, Teerts thought. What the Big Uglies called a lab wasn't impressive to a male of the Race: the equipment was primitive and chaotically arranged, and there wasn't a computer anywhere. One of the Nipponese who wore a white coat manipulated a curious device whose middle moved in and out as if it were a musical instrument.

"Superior sir, what is that thing?" Teerts asked Okamoto, pointing.

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"What thing?" Okamoto looked as if he wanted to be interrogating, not interpreting and answering questions. "Oh, that. That's a slide rule. It's faster than calculating by hand." "Slide rule," Teerts repeated, to fix the term in his memory. "How does it work?" Okamoto started to answer, then turned and spoke in rapidfire Nipponese to the Big Ugly who was wielding the curious artifact. The scientist spoke directly to Teerts: "It adds and subtracts logarithms-you understand this word?"

"No, superior sir," Teerts admitted. Explanations followed, with considerable backing and filling. Eventually Teerts got the idea. It was, he supposed, clever in an archaic way. "How accurate is this slide rule?" he asked.

"Fhree significant figures," the Nipponese answered. Teerts was appalled. The Big Uglies hoped to do serious scientific research and engineering with accuracy to only one part in a thousand? That gave him a whole new reason to hope their effort to harness nuclear energy failed. He didn't want to be anywhere close if it succeeded: it was liable to succeed altogether too well, and blow a big piece of Tokyo into radioactive slag. The Nipponese added, "For finer calculations, we go back to pen and paper, but pen and paper are slow. Do you understand?"

"Yes, superior sir." Teerts revised his opinion of the Big Ugfies' abilities-slightly. Because they had no electronic aids, they did what they could to calculate more quickly. If that meant they lost some accuracy, they were willing to make the trade.

The Race didn't work that way. If they came to a place where they needed two different qualities and had to lose some of one to get some of the other, they generally waited instead until in the slow passage of time their arts improved to the point where the trade was no longer necessary. Because of that slow, careful evolution, the Race's technology was extremely reliable.

What the Big Uglies called technology was anything but Not only didn't they seem to believe in fail-safes, he some times wondered if they believed in safety at all. Much o Tokyo, which was not a small city even by the standards of the Race, looked to be built from wood and paper. He marveled that it hadn't burnt down a hundred times. Traffic was even

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more horrifying than it had been in Harbin, and if a vehicle ran into another one, or over a male who was also using the street, too bad. Along with inaccuracy, the Big Uglies accepted a lot of carnage as the price they had to pay for getting things done.

That thought put Teerts in mind of something he thought he'd heard a couple of the Nipponese scientists discussing. He turned to Major Okamoto. "Excuse me, superior sir, may I ask another questionT'

"Ask," Okamoto said with the air of an important male granting a most unimportant underling a boon beyond his station. Despite so many differences between them in some ways the Race and Big Uglies weren't that far apart.

"Ibank you for your generosity, superior sir." Teerts played the inferior role to the hilt, as if he were addressing the fleetlord rather than a rather tubby Tosevite whom he devoutly wished dead. "Did this humble one correctly hear that some other Tosevites also experimenting with explosive metal suffered a mishapT'

Again Okamoto and the scientist held a quick colloquy. The latter said, "Why not tell him? If he is ever in a position to escape, the war will be so badly lost that that will be the least of our worries."

"Very well." Okamoto gave his attention back to Teerts. "Yes, this did happen. The Germans had an atomic pile-what is the phrase?-reach critical mass and get out of control." Teerts let out a horrified hiss. The Big Uglies didn't just accept risk, they pursued it with insane zeal. "How did this happenT' he asked.

"I am not certain the details are known, especially since the accident killed some of their scientists," Okamoto said. "But those who still live are pressing ahead. We shall not make the mistakes they did. The Americans have succeeded in running a pile without immediately joining their ancestors, and they are sharing some of their methods with us."

'%." Teerts wished he had some ginger to chase away the lump of ice that formed in his belly. When the Race came to Tosev 3, the patchwork of tiny empires that dotted the planet's surface had been a matter for jokes. It wasn't funny any more. Back on Home, only one line of experiment at a time would have been pursued. Here, all the competing little empires worked separately. Disunion usually was weakness, but could also prove strength, as now.

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Yoshio Nishina came into the room. His alarmingly mobil lips-or so they seemed to Teerts--pulled back so that h showed what was for a Big Ugly a lot of teeth. Teerts h learned that meant he was happy. He spoke with the other sc entist and with Major Okamoto. Teerts did his best to follo but found himself left behind.

Okamoto eventually noticed he'd got lost. "We have had

new success," the interpreter said. "We have bombarded un nium with neutrons and produced the element plutonium. Pro duction is still very slow, but plutonium will be easier separate from uranium-238 than uranium-235 is."

"Hai, " Nishina echoed emphatically. "We prepared uraniu hexafluoride gas to use to separate the two isotopes of uraniu from each other, but it is so corrosive that we are having impossible time working with it. But separating plutoniu from uranium is a straightforward chemical process."

Major Okamoto had to translate some of that, too. He an Teerts used a mixture of terms from Nipponese and the lat guage of the Race to talk about matters nuclear. Teerts took granted a whole range of facts the Big Uglies were just uncoi ering, but though he knew that things could be done, he ofte had no idea as to how. There they were ahead of him. Nishina added, "Once we accumulate enough plutonium, shall surely be able to assemble a bomb in short order. The we will meet your people on even terms."

Teerts bowed, which he found a useful way of respondi without saying anything. The Nipponese didn't seem to hav any idea how destructive nuclear weapons really were. M it was because they'd never had any dropped on them. As had a dozen times before, Teerts tried to get across to the that nuclear combat wasn't anything to anticipate with relis

They wouldn't listen, any more than they had those dozen times. They thought he was just trying to slow dow their research (which he was, and which, he knew, compr(rnised his position). Okamoto said, "My country was backw until less than a hundred years ago. We saw then that we h to learn the ways of the Tosevite empires that knew more th we did, or else become their slaves."

Less than two hundred of our years, Teerts thought. Tlw hundred of his years before, the Race had been just abol where it was now, leisurely contemplating the conquest

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Tbsev 3. Best wait till all was perfectly ready. What difference could a few years make, one way or the other? They'd found out.

Okamoto went on, "Less than fifty years ago, our soldiers and sailors beat the Russians, one of the empires that had been far ahead of us. Less than two years ago, our airplanes and ships smashed those of the United States, which had been probably the strongest empire on Tosev 3. By then we were better than they. Do you see where I am leading with this?"

"No, superior sir," Teerts said, though he feared he did. Major Okamoto drove the point home with what Teerts had come to think of as customary Tosevite brutality: "We do not let anyone keep a lead on us in technology. We will catch up with you, too, and teach you to learn better than to attack us without warning."

Nfshina and the other scientist nodded emphatically at tha In the abstract, Teerts didn't suppose he could blame them. Had other starfarers attacked Home, he would have done everything he could to defend it. But war with nuclear weapons was anything but abstract-and if the Nipponese did build and use one, the Race would surely respond in kind, most likely on the biggest city Nippon had. Right on top of my head, in other words.

"Ms is not your concern," Okamoto said when he worried about it out loud. "We will punish them for the wounds they have inflicted on us. Past that, all I need say is that dying for the Emperor is an honor."

He meant the Nipponese emperor, whose line was said to run back more than two thousand years and to be astonishingly ancient on account of that. Teerts was tempted to bitter laughter. Dying for the Emperor was an honor, too, but he didn't want to do it any time soon, especially not at the hands of the Race.

Nishina turned toward him. "Let's go back to what we were discussing last week: the best arrangement for the uranium in a pile. I have the Americans' report. I want to know how the Race does the same thing. You are likely to have more efficient procedures."

I should hope so, Teerts thought. "How do the Americans do it, superior sir?" he asked as innocently as he could, hoping to get some idea of the Big Uglies' technical prowess. But the Nipponese, though technically backward, were old

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in games of deceit. "You tell us how you do it," Okamoto said "We do the comparing. The rest is none of your business, an you would be sorry if you made it so."

Teerts bowed once more. That was how the Nipponese apol ogized. "Yes, superior sir," he said, and told what he kne Anything was prefer-able to giving Okamoto the excuse to st acting like an interrogator again. file:///C//2590%20Sci-Fi%20and%20Fantasy%20E-books/Harry%20Turtledove%20-%20Worldwar%2002%20-%20Tilting%20the%20Balance.txt

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* XV *

Ristin let his mouth hang open, showing off his pointy little teeth and Lizardy tongue: he was laughing at Sam Yeager. "'You have what?" he said in pretty fluent if accented English. "Seven days in a week? Twelve inches in a foot? Three feet in a mile?"

"A yard," Sam corrected.

"I thought something with grass growing in it was a yard," Ristin said. "But never mind. How do you remember all these things? How do you keep from going mad trying to remember?"

"All what you're used to," Yeager said, a little uncomfortably: he remembered trying to turn pecks into bushels into tons in school. That was one of the reasons he'd signed a minorleague contract first chance he got-except for banking. and his batting average, he'd never worried about math since. He went on, "Most places except the United States use the metric system, where everything is ten of this and ten of that" If he hadn't read science fiction, he wouldn't have known about the metric system, either.

"Even time?" Ristin asked. "No sixty seconds make a Im-inute or an hour or whatever it is, and twenty-four minutes or hours make a day?" He sputtered like a derisive steam engine, then tacked on an emphatic cough to show he really meant it

"Well, no," Sam admitted. "All that stuff stays the same all over the world. It's-tradition, that's what it is." He smiled happily-the Lizards lived and died by tradition.

But Ristin wasn't buying it, not this time. He said, "In our ancient days, before we were-what is the word? civilized?yes, civilized, we had traditions like that, traditions that

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hami, not good. We made them work for us or we got rid them. This was a hundred thousand years ago. We do not these bad traditions."

"A hundred thousand years ago," Yeager echoed. He'd go ten the idea that Lizard years weren't as long as the on people used, but even so . . . "A hundred thousand years ag fifty thousand years ago, too, come to that- people were ju cavemen. Savages, I mean. Nobody knew how to read write, nobody knew how to grow their own food. Hell, nobod knew anything to speak of."

Ristin's eye turrets moved just a little. Most people wouldn even have noticed, but Sam had spent more time around Li ards than just about anybody. He knew the alien was thinki something he didn't want to say. He could even make a pret fair guess about what it was: "As far as you're concerned, w still don't know anything to speak of."

Ristin jerked as if Sam had stuck him with a pin. "How di

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you know that?"
,'A little bird told me," Yeager said, grinning.
 "Tell it to the Marines," Ristin retorted. He didn't quite u
derstand what a Marine was, but he had the phrase down p
and used it at the right times. Sam wanted to bust out laughi
every time he heard it.
 "Shall we go outside?" he asked. "It's a nice day."
 "No, it's not. It's cold. It's always cold on this rniserab
iceball of a world." Ristin relented. "It's not as cold as it wa
though. You are right about that." He gave an exaggerat
shiver to show how cold it had been. "If you say we must g
out, it shall be done."
 "I didn't say we had to," Yeager answered. "I just asked

you wanted to."

"Not very much," Ristin said. "Before I was a soldier, I w a male of the city. The-what do you call them?-wide ope spaces are not for me. I saw enough of them on the long, Ion way from Chicago to this place to last me forever." Sam was amused to hear his own turns of phrase comin out of the mouth of a creature bom under the light of anoth star. It made him feel as if, in some small way, he'd affecte the course of history. He said, "Have it your own way, the even though I don't call some grass on the University of De ver the wide open spaces. Maybe it's just as well; Ullha., 420 WORLDWAR: TILTING THE BALANCE

t,

ought to be back in a few minutes, and then I can take both you guys back to your rooms." "They do not need you to be there any more to translate?" Ristin asked. "That's what they say." Yeager shrugged. "Professor Fernii hasn't called me this session, so I guess maybe he doesn't. Both of you speak English pretty well now." "If you are not needed for this, will they take you away from us?" Ristin showed his teeth. "You want me and Ullhass to forget how we speak English? Then they still need you. We do not want you to go. You have been good to us since you catch us all this time ago. We think then that you people hurt us, kill us. You showed us different. We want you to stay." "Don't worry about me. I'll be okay," Yeager said. A year befoFe, he'd have found absurd the notion that anything a turret-eyed creature with a hissing accent said could touch him. Touched he was, though, and sometimes he had to rerriind himself how alien Ristin really was. He went on, "I've been a bench warmer before. It's not the end of the world," "It may be." From sympathetic, Ristin turned serious. "If you humans do build an atomic bomb, it may be. You win use it, and we will use it, and little will be left when all is done." "We weren't the first ones to use them," Yeager said. "What about Washington and Berlin?" "Warning shots," Ristin said. "We could choose to use them in a way that did little harm`~-he ignored the choked noise that escaped from Sam's.throat----~'because we had them and you did not. If they turn into just another weapon of war, the planet will be badly hurt." "But if we don't use them, the Race is probably going to conquer us, " Yeager said. Now Ristin made a noise that reminded Sam of a water heater in desperate need of replacement. "This is-how do you say two things that cannot be true at the same time but are anyhow?" "A paradox?" Sam suggested after some thought; it wasn't a word he hauled out every day. If that is what you say. Paradox," Ristin repeated. "You may lose the war without these bombs, but you may lose it, too, because of them. Is this a paradox?" "I guess so." Yeager gave the Lizard a hard look. "But if Harry Turtledove 421

you drink things are like that, how come you and Ullhass hav(been so much help to the Met Lab?"

"At first, we did not think you Big Uglies could knov enough to make a bomb anyhow, so no harm done," Ristil said. Sam knew he was worried, because he didn't often slil and use the Lizard slang name for human beings. He went on "Soon we found how wrong we were. You know enough an(more, and were mostly using us to check the answers you ha(already. Again, because of this not much harm could come, s we went along." "Oh," Yeager said. "Nice to know we surprised you." Ristin's mouth opened and he wagged his head slightly: h, was laughing at himself. "This whole planet has been a sur prise, and not a good one. From the first time people starto shooting at us with rifles and cannon, we knew everything w had believed about Tosev 3 was wrong."

Somebody rapped on the door of the office where Ye and Ristin were talking. "That'll be Ullhass," Yeager said. But when the door opened, Barbara came through it. "Yoi are not Ullhass," Ristin said in accusing tones. He let hi mouth hang open again to show he'd made a joke.

"You know what?" Sam said. "I'm darn glad she isn't. H hon." He gave her a hug and a peck of a kiss. "I didn't they were going to let you off work till later." "One thing about English majors: we do learn how to type, Barbara said. "As long as we don't run out of ribbons, F have plenty to do. Or until the baby comes-whichever hal pens first. They ought to give me a couple of days off that."

"They'd better," Yeager said, and added the emphatic coug] He laughed at himself. To Ristin, he said, "Ibat's what I for hanging around with the likes of you."

"What, a civilized language?" Ristin said, laughing his of laugh once more' He turned civilized into a long hiss. Despite his accent, he gave as good as he got. Yeager didn fire back at him. Instead, he asked Barbara, "Why did they you go early?"

"I turned green, I guess," she answered. "I don't know w they call it morning sickness. It gets me any old time of it feels like."

"You look okay now," he said. "I got rid of what ailed me," Barbara said bleakly. "I'm ju

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glad the plumbing works. If it didn't, somebody-probably me-would have a mess to clean up." "You're supposed to be eating for two, not throwing up what one has, " Sam said. "If you know a secret way to make lunch stay down, I wish you'd tell me what it is," Barbara answered, now with a snap in her voice. "Everybody says this is supposed to go away after I get further along. I hope to heaven that's true." Another knock, this one on the frame of the open door. "Here you go, Corporal," said a kid in dungarees with.a pistol bolster on his belt. "I've brought your pet Lizard back for you." Ullhass walked in and exchanged sibilant greetings with Ristin. The kid, who except for the pistol looked like a college freshman, nodded to Yeager, gave Barbara a quick once-over and obviously decided she was too old for him, nodded again, and trotted off down the hall. "I am not a pet. I am a male of the Race," Ullhass said with considerable dignity. Yeager soothed him: "I know, pal. But haven't you noticed that people don't always say exactly what they mean?" "Yes, I have seen this," Ullhass said. "Because I am a prisoner, I will not tell you what I think of it." "If you ask me, you just did," Yeager answered. "You were very polite about it, though. Now come on, boys; I'll take you home." Home for the Lizards was an office converted into an apartment. Maybe cell block was a better word for it, Yeager thought: at least, he'd never seen any apartments with stout iron bars across the windows and an armed guard waiting outside the door. But Ristin and Ullhass liked it. Nobody bothered them in there, and the steam radiator let them heat the room to the bake-oven level they enjoyed. Once they were safely ensconced, Yeager walked Barbara out onto the lawn. Unlike Ristin, she didn't complain it was too cold. All she said was, "I wish I had some cigarettes. Maybe they'd keep me from wanting to toss my cookies." "Now that you haven't smoked in a while, they'd probably just make you sicker." Sam slipped an arm around Barbara's waist, which was still deliciously slim. "As long as you are off early, you want to go back to the place and ... T' He let his voice trail away, but squeezed her a little. Her answering smile was wan. "I'd love to go back to the Harry Turtledove 42 place, but if you don't mind, all I want to do is lie dowt

maybe take a nap. I'm tired all the time, and my stomach isn
what you call happy right now, either. Is it okay?" Sh
sounded anxious.
 "Yeah, it's okay," Yeager answered. "Fifteen years ago,

probably would have fussed and sulked, but I'm a grownnow. I can wait till tomorrow." My dick doesn't think for the way it used to, he thought, but that wasn't something could say to a new-wed wife. Barbara let her hand rest on his. "Thanks, hon." "First time I ever got thanked for getting old," he said. She made a face at him. "You can't have it both ways. you a grown-up and saying it's okay because it really is, or you just getting old and saying it's okay because you're all ble~ and tired?" "Ooh." He mimed a wound. When she wanted to, she coul

get him chasing his tail like nobody's business. He didn't thi of himself as dumb (but then, who does?), but he hadn't formal training in logic and in fencing with words. Tradi barbs with ballplayers in his dugout and the ones on the side of the field wasn't the same thing. Barbara let out a loud, theatrical groan as she got to the of the stairs. "That's going to be even less fun when I'm ther along," she said. "Maybe we should have looked for place on the ground floor. Too late to worry about it now, suppose.,,

She groaned again, this time with pleasure, when sh flopped onto the sofa in the front room. "Wouldn't you more comfortable on the bed?" Yeager asked.

"Actually, no. I can put my feet up this way." The stuffed sofa had equally overstuffed arms, so maybe that reall was comfortable. Sam shrugged. If Barbara was happy, he w happy, too.

Somebody knocked on the door. "Who's that?" Sam Barbara said in the same breath. Why doesn't he go away? I beneath the words.

Whoever it was didn't go away, but kept on knockin Yeager strode over and threw open the door, intending to gi a pushy Fuller Brush man a piece of his mind. But it wasn a Fuller Brush man, it was Jens Larssen. He looked at S Eke a man finding a cockroach in his salad. "I want to talk MY wife," he said.

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"She's not your wife any more. We've been through this," Yeager said tiredly, but his hands bunched into fists at his sides. "What do you want to say to her?"

"It's none of your damn business," Jens said, which almost started the fight then and there. But before Yeager quite decided to knock his block off, he added, "But I came to tell her good-bye."

"Where are you going, Jens?" In her stocking feet, Barbara came up behind Sam so quietly that he hadn't heard her.

"Washington State," Larssen answered. "I shouldn't even tell you that much, but I figured you ought to know, in case I don't come back."

"That sounds as if I shouldn't ask when you're going," Barbara said, and Larssen nodded to show she was right. Coolly, she told him, "Good luck, Jens."

He turned red. Because he was so fair, the process was easy to watch. He said, "For all you care, I could be going off to desert to the Lizards."

"I don't think you'd do that," she said, but Larssen was right: she didn't sound as if she much cared. Yeager had all he could do to keep from breaking into a happy grin. Barbara went on, "I told you good luck and I meant it. I don't know what more you want that I can give you."

"You know good and well what I want," Jens said, and Yeager gathered himself again. If Larssen wanted that fight bad enough, he'd get it.

'qbat I can't give you, I said," Barbara answered. Jens Larssen glared at her, at Sam, at her again, as if he couldn't decide which of them he wanted to belt more. With a snarl of curses, some in English, others in throaty Norwegian, he stomped off. His furious footfalls thundered on the stairs. He slammed the front door of the apartment building hard enough to rattle windows.

"I wish that hadn't happened," Barbara said. "I wish--oh, what difference does it make what I wish now? If he's going away for a while, that may be the best thing that could happen. We'll get some peace and quiet, and maybe by the time he gets back he'll have figured out he can't do anything about this." '~God, I hope so," Yeager said. "What he's put you through ever since we got here isn't right." He'd been riding the roller coaster himself, but he kept quiet about that. Barbara was the one who'd had the tough time, because she'd been in love with

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Jens-right up to the minute she found out he was still aliw Sam thought. Since then, since she'd chosen to stay Barb Yeager instead of going back to being Barbara Larssen, had done his best to act about as unlovable as a human bei could.

Barbara's sigh showed a weariness that had nothing to with her being pregnant. "Very strange to think that a year ag he and I were happy together. I don't think he's the same son any more. He never used to be bitter-but then, he used to have much to be bitter about, either. I guess you can really tell about someone till you see him when the chips down."

"You're probably right." Sam had seen that playing bal some guys wanted to be out there with the game on the]in(while others hoped they wouldn't come up or be on the mou or have the ball hit to them in that kind of spot.

Musingly, Barbara went on, "I suppose that's one of the sons people write so much about love and war: they're the s uations that put the most strain on a person's character, so can see it at its best and at its worst."

"Makes sense." Yeager hadn't thought about it in tho

terms, but it did make sense to him. He'd seen enough w close up to know it was more terrifying than exciting, but it mained endlessly interesting to read about. He'd never th about why until now. "You put things in a whole new fight me," he said admiringly.

She looked at him, then reached out and took his hands hers. "You've put some things in a new light for me, to(Sam," she murmured.

He felt ten feet tall the rest of the day, and didn't give Jen Larssen another thought.

"Superior sir, I greet you and welcome you to our fine b here," Ussmak said to the new landcruiser commander. My la est, he thought, and wondered how many more he'd g through before Tosev 3 was conquered-if it ever was.

That gloomy reflection was a far cry from the spirit of with which he---and all landcruiser males-had gone into thi campaign. Then, they'd thought crews would stay to through the whole war. They'd trained on that assumption, that a male without his crew was an object of pity, both to hi comrades and to himself. 0

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Things hadn't quite worked that way. Ussmak had had tw commanders and a gunner killed on him, and another com mander and gunner swept away in the wild hunt for ginge lickers. He studied this new male and wondered how long he' last.

The fellow seemed promising enough. He was good-looking and alert, and his neatly applied body paint argued that h didn't have his tongue in a ginger jar (though you never could tell; Ussmak was fastidious about his own paint just to keep his superiors from getting-justifiably-suspicious).

"Landcruiser Driver Ussmak, I am Landcruiser Commander Nejas; you are assigned to my crew," the male said. "Skoob, our gunner, will be along shortly; he must be completing reporting formalities. Both of us will draw heavily on your knowledge, as you have more combat experience than we do."

"I shall help you in any way I can, superior sir," Ussmak said, as he had to. He did his best to sound fulsome, but was not rejoicing inside. He'd hoped he'd get crewed with veterans, but no such luck. As delicately as he could, he added, "The Deutsche are not opponents to take lightly."

"So I am given to understand," Nejas said. "I am also given to understand that this garrison has problems beyond the Deutsche, however. Is it true that the Big Ughes actually spirited a landcruiser out of the vehicle park hereT'

"I fear it is, superior sit." Ussmak was embarrassed about that himself, though he'd had nothing to do with it. It showed Drefsab hadn't managed to sweep out all the ginger tasters, and it showed some of them didn't care for anything on Tosev 3 past where their next taste was coming from.

"Disgraceful," Nejas said. "We must have order aboard our own ship before we can hope to put down the Tosevites."

Another male came into the barracks and swiveled his eye turrets every which way, taking the measure of the place. By the time he was through, he looked dismayed. Ussmak understood that; he'd felt the same way the first time he'd inspected his new housing. From everything he'd heard, even the Big Ughes lived better than this these days.

The newcomer might have been Nejas' broodbrother. They both had the same perfect body paint, the same alert stance, and, somehow, the same air of trusting innocence about them, as if they'd just come out of cold sleep and didn't know anything about the way the war against the Big Uglies was (or

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rather wasn't) going, about what ginger had done to the landcruiser crews at Besangon, or about any of the many other

unpleasant surprises Tosev 3 had given the Race. Ussmak didn't know whether to envy or pity them. Nejas said, "Driver Ussmak, here is Skoob, the gunner of our landcruiser crew." Ussmak closely studied Skoob's body paint. It said the other male's rank was about the same as his. Nejas' neutral introduction said the same thing. Ussmak had the feeling he was vastly superior in combat experience: what Nejas had said told him as much, at any rate. On the other hand, Skoob looked to have been together with Nejas for a long time. Ussmak said, "I greet you, superior sir."

Skoob took the deference as nothing less than his due, which irked Ussmak. "I greet you, driver," he said. "May we

brew up many Tosevite landcruisers together."

"May it be so." Ussmak wished he had a taste of ginger; better that than the taste of condescension he got from Skoob But, because his life would depend in no small measure on how well the gunner did his job, he went on politely, "The other half of the bargain involves keeping the Big Uglies from brewing us up."

"Shouldn't be that difficult," Nejas said. "I've studied the technical specifications for all the Tosevites' landcruisers, even the latest ones from the Deutsche. They've improved, yes, but we still handily outclass them."

"Superior sir, in theory there's no doubt you're right,' Ussmak said. "Me only trouble is-may I speak frankly?"

"Please do," Nejas said, Skoob echoing him a moment later. From that, they were an established crewpair. I was wise to defer to Skoob after all, even if he is arrogant, Ussmak thought

Still, he hoped their willingness to listen meant something "Me trouble with the Big Uglies is, they don't fight the way we'd expect, or the way our simulations prepared us to meet They're masters at setting ambushes, at using terrain to mask what they're up to, at using feints and minefields to channe our moves into the direction they want, and their intelligence is superb."

"Ours should be better," Skoob said. "We have reconnais sance satellites in place, after all, to see how they move." "How they move, yes, but not always what the moves mean," Ussmak said. "They're very good at concealing th

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until they hurt us. And we may have satellites, but they have every Big Ugly between here and their positions to let them know where we're going. This isn't like the SSSR, where a lot of the Tosevites preferred us to either the Deutsche or the Russkis. These Big Uglies don't want us, and they wish we'd all disappear."

Nejas' tongue flicked out and then in again, as if at a bad taste. "Helicopter gunships should take the edge off their tactics."

"Superior sir, they're of less use here than they were in the SSSR," Ussmak said. "For one thing, the countryside gives the Deutsche good cover-I said that before. And for another, they've learned to bring antiaircraft artillery well forward. They've hurt our gunships badly enough that the males in charge of them have grown reluctant to commit them to battle except in emergency, and sometimes then, too."

"What good are they to us if they cannot be used?" Skoob asked angrily.

"A good question," Ussmak admitted. "But what good are they to us if they get blown out of the air before they damage the Big Uglies' landcruisers?"

"You are saying we face defeat?" Nejas' voice was silky with danger. Ussmak guessed part of his mission was keeping an eye turret turned for defeatists as well as ginger tasters. "Superior sit, no, I am not saying that," the driver replied. "I am saying we need to be more wary than we thought we would against the Tosevites."

"More wary, possibly," Nejas said with the air of a male making a concession to another who was inferior mentally as well as in rank. "But, when faced in accord with sound tactical doctrine, I have no doubt the Big Uglies will fall."

Ussmak had had no doubts, either, not until he had a couple of landcruisers wrecked while he was in them. "Superior sir, I say only that the Tosevites are more devious than our tactical doctrine allows for." He held up a hand to keep Nejas from interrupting, then told the story of the mortar attack on the Race's local base and the land mine waiting for the armor as it hurried toward the bridge that would let it get at the raiders.

Nejas did break in: "I have heard of this incident. My impression is that males with their heads in the ginger via] were in large measure responsible for our losing an armored fighting

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vehicle. They charged straight ahead without considering p sible risks."

"Superior sir, that's true," Ussmak said, recalling just h true it was. "But it's not the point I was trying to make. H they gone more cautiously, they would have taken an altern route ... under which the Big Uglies also had a bomb waiti We are devious by doctrine and training; they seem to be vious straight from hatchlinghood. They play a deeper g than we do."

That got through, to Skoob if not to Nejas. The gunner s "How do we protect ourselves against this Tosevite devio ness, then?"

"If I had the whole answer to that, I'd be fleetlord, no landcruiser driver," Ussmak said, which made both his crewmales laugh. He went on, "The one thing I will say that, if a move against the Big Uglies looks easy and obvi you'll probably find it has claws attached. And the first th you think of after the obvious move may well be wrong, t And so may the second one."

"I have it," Skoob said. "The thing to do is post landcruisers in a circle in the middle of a large, open fiel and then make sure the Big Uglies aren't digging under the Ussmak let his mouth drop open at that: good to see one the new males could crack wise, anyhow. Nejas remained rious. Letting his eyes roam around the bar-racks once more, said, 'This is such a gloomy place, I'd hardly mind getting of it to fight in a landcruiser. I expect I'd be more comfo in one than I will here. Does it have anything in its favor

"The plumbing is excellent," Ussmak said. Through newcomers' hisses of surprise, he explained, "The Big Ug have messier body wastes than we do, so they need more the way of plumbing. And this whole planet is so wet, they water more for, washing and such than we would dare back Home. Standing under a decently warm spray is invigorati even if it does play hob with your body paint."

"Let me at it," Skoob said. "We were on duty down so of here, somewhere in the landmass unit the Tosevites call rica. It was warm enough there, but the water was in streams or falling from the sky in sheets; the local Big Ugl didn't know anything about putting it in pipes' " Nejas also made enthusiastic noises. Ussmak said,

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throw your gear on these beds"-they had been Hessef's and Tvenkel's-"and I'll show you what we have."

All three males were luxuriating in the showers when the unit commander, a male named Kassnass, stuck his head into the chamber and said, "All out. We have an operations meeting coming up."

Feeling unjustly deprived, to say nothing of damp, Ussmak and his crewmales listened to Kassnass set forth the newest plan for a push toward Belfort. To the driver, it seemed more of the same. Nejas and Skoob, however, listened as if entranced. From what Ussmak had heard, they wouldn't have faced serious opposition in this Africa place, which was almost as backward technologically as the Race had thought all of Tosev 3. to be. Things were different here.

The unit commander turned one eye turret from the holograms on which the positions of the Deutsche and the Race were marked to the males assembled before him. "A lot of you are new here," he said. "We've had troubles with this garrison, but, by the Emperor'~-he and the landcruiser crews cast down their eye turrets-~'we've cleaned up most of that now. Our veterans know how devious the Deutsche can'be. You newcomers, follow where they lead and stay cautious. If something looks too good to be true, it probably is."

"That's so," Ussmak whispered to Nejas and Skoob. Neither of them responded; he hoped they'd pay more attention to Kassnass than they did to him.

Kassnass went on, "Don't let them lure you into rugged country or the woods; you're vulnerable if you get separated from the other landcruisers in the unit, because then the Big Uglies will concentrate fire on you from several directions at once. Remember, they can afford to lose five or six or ten landcruisers for every one of ours they take out, and they know it, too. We have speed and firepower and armor on our side; they have numbers, trickery, and fanatical courage. We have to use our advantages and minimize theirs."

They're the enemy and they're only Big Uglies, so of course we call their courage fanatical, Ussmak thought. Saying they're just doing their best to stay alive like anybody else would give them too much creditfor sense.

The males trooped out to the revetments that protected the landcruisers, Ussmak guiding his new commander and gunner. The earth was scored with hits from Tosevite mortars; bomb

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fragment scars pocked the sides of buildings. Nejas and S rapidly swiveled their eye turrets. Ussmak guessed they h seen resistance like this from the Big Uglies.

Once in place in the driver's position, he stopped worryi about what they'd seen and what they hadn't. He had a vial ginger stashed in the landcruiser's fuse box, but he didn't op it up and taste, not now. He wanted to be clear and ration

not berserk, if he saw action unexpectedly soon. Helicopter gunships took off with whickering roars audib even through the landcruiser's thick armor. They'd reach target area well before the ground vehicles did. With luc they'd soften up the Deutsche and not take too much dama themselves. Ussmak knew somebody reckoned the mission i portant; as he'd told his crewmales, helicopters had grown t scarce and precious to hazard lightly.

Through the streets of Besanqon, past the busy-looki buildings with their filigrees of iron railings and balconies. E gineers preceded the landcruisers, to make sure no more expl sive surprises awaited. All the same, Ussmak drove butto up and regarded every Big Ugly he saw through his vision s as a potential-no, even a likely-spy. The Deutsche wou know they were coming even before the helicopters arrived Ussmak breathed easier when his landcruiser rumbled ov the bridge across the Doubs and headed for open country. was also taking the measure of Nejas as a landcruiser co mander The new male might not have seen much action, b he seemed crisp and decisive. Ussmak approved. He hadn't part of a proper landcruiser crew since a sniper killed Votal, first commander. He hadn't realized how much he missed feeling till he saw some chance of getting it back.

Somewhere off in the trees, a machine gun opened up wi harassing fire. A couple of bullets pinged off the landcrui Nejas said, "Fake no notice of him. He can't hurt us, anyw Ussmak hissed, in delight. He'd seen males with heads abu with ginger badly delay a mission by trying to hunt o Tosevite nuisances.

The column rolled north and east. Reports came back th the helicopters had struck hard at the Tosevite landcruis Ussmak hoped the reports were right. Knowing the Big Ugli could hurt him put combat in a new light.

A flash, a streak of fire barely seen, a crash that made landcruiser ring like a bell. "Furret rotate from zero to twen

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five," Nejas called-urgently, but without the panic or rage or excessive excitement a ginger taster would have used. "Machine-gun fire into those bushes."

"It shall be done, superior sir," Skoob replied. The turret swung through a quarter of a circle, from northeast to northwest. 71be machine gun yammered. "No way to tell whether I got him, superior sir, but he won't shoot another rocket at one of our landcruisers for a while, I hope."

"Let us hope not," Nejas said. "We're lucky that one hit us on the turret and not in the side of the hull, where the armor is thinner. Briefings say the results can be most unpleasant."

"Briefings don't know the half of it, superior sir," Ussmak said. Vivid inside his head were flames and explosions and unremitting fear, fear that had come flooding back at that impact against the turret and now receded only slowly.

The~ landcruiser column rolled on. Every now and again, bullets from the bushes struck sparks off armor plate, but the column did not slow. Ussmak kept driving buttoned up. He felt half blind, but didn't care to have one of those rounds clip off the top of his head.

"Why don't they keep those pests from harassing usT' Nejas asked after yet another band of Tosevites sprayed the column with gunfire. 'This is our territory; if we can't keep raiders from slipping in, we might as well not have conquered it."

"Superior sir, the trouble is that almost all the Tosevites hereabouts favor the raiders and shelter them, and we have an impossible time trying to figure out who really lives in the farms and villages and who doesn't. Identity cards help, but they aren't enough. This is their planet, after all; they know it better than we can hope to."

"It was simpler down in Africa," the landcruiser commander said mournfully. "The Big Uglies there had no weapons that could hurt a landcruiser, and did what they were told once we made a few examples of those who disobeyed."

"We tried that here, too, I've heard," Ussmak said. "This was before I arrived. The trouble was, the Big Uglies had been making examples of one another yet fighting just the same. They ignored the examples we made, the same way they'd ignored their own."

"Mad," Skoob said. Ussmak didn't contradict him. The landcruisers began passing old battlefields, some still showing the scars of fires set by shot-up landcruisers. The

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hulks of destroyed Deutsch armored fighting vehicles s sprawled in death. Some of them were the angular little n chines Ussmak had encountered on the plains of the SSSR, others were the big new ones that could endanger a landcrui of the Race if well-handled-and the Deutsche handled well.

Nejas said, "Those are impressive-looking hulks, are

they? Even holograms don't do them justice. When I first s one, I wondered why our males hadn't salvaged it; I neede moment to realize the Big Uglies had made it. I apologize wondering about some of the things you said, Ussmak. No believe you."

Ussmak didn't answer, but felt a burst of pleasure m4 subtle than the jolt lie got from ginger, and perhaps more s isfying as well. It had been too long since a superior ackno edged that the Race's obligations ran down as well as up. last pair of landcruiser commanders had taken him for as if he were just a component of the machine he drove. even being a ginger buddy with Hessef had changed that. wonder he'd felt isolated, alone, hardly part of the Race at Now ... it was almost as if he'd come out of the eggs anew.

Smoke rose from the woods up ahead. An artillery sh burst off to one side of the road: the helicopters hadn't ro the Deutsche, then. Ussmak had hoped he'd be going in mop up. He hadn't really believed it, but he'd hoped.

A cannon belched fire and smoke from behind some bush Wham! Ussmak felt as if he'd been kicked in the muzzle. I the landcruiser's heavy glacis plate kept the Tosevite sh from penetrating. Without being ordered, Ussmak swung vehicle in the direction from which the round had come. "I most fouled my seat," he said. "If the Big Uglies had wai till we passed and shot at the side of our hull-_2'

Nejas took the time to give him one word: "Yes." Then landeruiser commander snapped an order to Skoob: "Gunne A moment later another single-word command followed: bod"

Skoob put the automatic loader through its paces. A rou of armor-piercing discarding sabot ammunition clattered i the breech of the gun, which closed with a solid thunk. "UI the gunner reported.

"Landcruiser, front!" Nejas said, noting the target for Sko

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"Identified," Skoob answered: he had it in his thermal sight. "Fire!"

"On the way," Skoob said. The report of the landcruiser cannon was less than thunderous inside the hull, but the massive vehicle rocked back from the recoil and a sheet of flame billowed across Ussmak's vision slits. Again the dfiver knew pleasure almost as intense as ginger gave: this was how a crew was supposed to work together. He hadn't known anything like it since Votal got killed. He'd forgotten how satisfying it could be.

And, just as ginger brought a burst of ecstasy as it shot from the tongue to the brain, so teamwork also had its reward: fire and black smoke boiled up behind the bushes as the Deutsch landcruiser that had tried to impede the progress of the Race paid the price for its temerity. The turret machine gun chattered, mowing down the Big Uglies who'd bailed out of their wrecked vehicle.

"Ahead, driver," Nejas said.

"It shall be done, superior sir," Ussmak said. Along with part of the column of Iandcruisers, he pushed the machine forward down the road past the ambush the Big Uglies had hoped to set. The rest of the Race's armor went after the Deutsche who'd tried to waylay them. The fight was savage, but didn't last long. When they weren't caught by surprise in disadvantageous positions, the Race's landcruisers remained far superior to those of the foe. They methodically pounded the Deutsche till no more Deutsche were left to pound, then rejoined the rear of the advancing column.

"Mese Big Uglies are better than any Tosevites I've seen before," Nejas said, "but they don't seem to be anything we can't handle."

Ussmak wondered about that. Had his previous crew, their wits cooked on ginger and their tactics and even their commands full of drug-induced sloppiness, really been so inept? He had trouble believing it, but here was an ambush that would have thrown them into fits, brushed away like any minor annoyance.

On the highway, black smoke rose from burning trucks that formed a barricade across the paved surface. The landcruisers in front of Ussmak's peeled off to the grassy verge to the left to bypass the obstacle. Ussmak was about to swing his handle-

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bar controller to follow them when dirt fountained up und one and it slewed sideways to a stop.

He hit the brakes, hard. "Mines!" he shouted. Concealed Deutsch landcraisers and guns opened up on d crippled vehicle. No armor could take that pounding for Ion Blue flames spurted from the engine compartment as a hy file:///C|/2590% 20Sci-Fi% 20 and % 20 Fantasy% 20 E-books/Harry% 20 Turtled ove% 20-% 20 Worldwar% 2002% 20-% 20 Tilting% 20 the% 20 Balance.txt the state of the state of

gen fine began to bum. Then the landcruiser went up in a b of fire.

Big Ugly males with satchel charges burst from cover to tack the vehicles that had stopped. Machine guns cut dov most of them, but a couple managed to fling the explosives ther under the rear of a turret or through an open cupola The roars from those explosions shook Ussmak even inside h armored eggshell.

"Driver, I apologize," Nejas said. But then, a moment I he was all business again: "Gunner ... Sabot!" The c spoke, and killed a Big Ugly landcruiser. Nejas gave his atte tion back to Ussmak. "Driver, there's a narrow space ground on the right between the road and the trees. Take i we can get by, we'll put ourselves in the Tosevites' rear." "Superior sit, that space is probably iiiined, too," Ussm said.

"I know," Nejas answered cahrily. 'The gain we win passing is worth the risk. Steer as close to the burning vehic as you can without making our own paint catch fire."

"It shall be done." Ussmak tramped down hard on the ac erator. The sooner the passage was over, the sooner his scal would stop itching with anticipation of the blast that would his landcruiser out of commission. With a hiss of relief loud an air brake, he was through and back on the road again. B Uglies turned a machine gun on his landcruiser. He let mouth fall open in scornful laughter: that wouldn't do any good. Nor did it; from the turret, the coaxial machine g scythed down the Tosevites.

"Keep advancing," Nejas said urgently. "We have in landcruisers behind us, and mechanized infantry combat ve cles as well. If we can deploy in the Big Uglies' rear, we ru their whole position."

Ussmak stepped on it again. The landcruiser bounded ahe Speed, sometimes, was as important a weapon as a cannon. spied a Deutsch landcruiser barreling through the undergro

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trying to find a place from which to block the onslaught of the Race's arnior.

"Gunner! ... Sabot!" Nejas shouted-he'd seen it, too. But before Skoob could acknowledge the order and crank the round into the cannon, a streak of fire off to one side took the Big Ugly vehicle in the engine compartment. Red and yellow flames shot up from it, setting the bushes afire.

"Superior, sit, I think the infantry's dismounted from their carriers," Ussmak said. "That was an antilandcruiser rocket." "You're right," Nejas said, and then, "Steer right, away from the road." Ussmak obeyed, and caught sight of another Tosevite landcruiser. Nejas gave orders to Skoob, the cannon barked, the landcruiser jerked with the recoil ... and the Deutsch machine brewed up.

Before long, Ussmak saw something he hadn't seen much of since the early days on the endless plains of the SSSR: Big Ughes coming out of their overrun hiding places with arms raised in token of surrender. He hissed in wonder. Just for a moment, the sense of inevitable triumph he'd felt then-before the Race really understood how the Big Uglies could fightcame flooding back. He doubted anything was inevitable any more, but the way to Belfort and, with luck, beyond lay open. When the landcruiser finally stopped for the evening, he thought, he'd have a taste of ginger to celebrate. Just a small one, of course.

Mutt Daniels tasted the rich black earth just outside Danforth, Illinois. He knew soil; he'd grown up as a dirt farmer, after all. If he hadn't had a talent for baseball, he'd have spent his life eastbound behind the west end of a mule. This was soil as good as he'd ever come across; no wonder the corn grew here in great green waves.

All the same, he wished he weren't making its acquaintance under these circumstances. He tasted it because he lay flat on his belly between the rows, his face jammed into the dirt so he wouldn't get a shell splinter in the eye. With the coming of spring, the Lizards were driving hard. He didn't know how the Army would hold them out of Chicago this time. "Gotta try, though " he muttered, and tasted dirt again.

"; shells came in. They lifted Mutt up, slammed him iWor

back to the ground like a wrestler putting on a show in a tank

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town. Unlike a wrestler, they didn't pull any punches-he'd black and blue all over.

"Medic!" somebody shouted, not far away. The tone w anguish; surprise was more like it. That meant one of things: either the wound wasn't bad or the fellow who'd goi didn't realize how bad it was. Mutt had seen that before, perfectly calm and rational with their guts hanging out blood soaking into the dark dirt and making it blacker than already was.

"Medic!" The cry came again, rawer this time. Mutt craw toward it, tommy gun at the ready; no telling what the tall c might hide.

But only Lucille Potter crouched by Freddie Laplace w Daniels reached him. She was gently getting him to take bloodstained hands off his calf. "Oh ... goodness, Freddi Mutt said, inhibited in his choice of language by Lucille's ence. He hurt not only for Laplace but for the squad; the guy was-had been-far and away their best point man.

"Give me a hand, Mutt, if you please," Lucille Potter s The place where the shell fragment had gone in was a sm neat hole. The exit wound-Mutt gulped. He'd seen worse, this one wasn't pretty. It looked as if somebody had dug i the back of Laplace's leg with a sharp-edged serving spo and taken out enough meat to feed a man a pretty good dinn Lucille was already cutting away the trouser leg so she coi work on the wound.

"Careful with that scissors," Laplace said. "You don't to slice me any worse than I am already." Mutt nodded to hi self-, if that was what Freddie was worrying about, he did know how bad he'd been hit.

"I'll be careful," Lucille answered gently. "We're going have to get you back to an aid station after Mutt and I band you UP."

"Sorry, Sarge," Laplace said, still eerily composed. "I do think I can walk that far."

"Don't worry about it, kid." Mutt was wondering whet Laplace would keep that leg, not about his walking on "We'll get you there. You just want to hold still now - w Miss Lucille patches you up."

"I'll try, Sarge. It-hurts." Freddie was doing his best to a good Scout, but it didn't sound easy any more. After a whi the numbness that often came with a wound wore off, and

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you started to realize what had happened to you. That wasn't any fun at all.

Lucille dusted the wound with sulfa powder, then folded the skin over it as best she could. "Too big and ragged to sew up," she murmured to Mutt. "Just lucky it didn't smash the bones up, too. He may walk on it again one of these days." She packed gauze into the hole and put more gauze and tape over it. Then she pointed back toward one of the windmills outside of Danforth. It had a big new Red Cross banner hanging from it. "Let's get him over there."

"Right you are." Mutt stooped with Lucille Potter and got Laplace upright, with one of his arms draped over each of their shoulders. They hauled him along toward the windmill. "Musta been Dutch settled around these parts," Mutt mused. "Not many other -folks use those things."

"That's true, but I couldn't tell you for certain," Lucille said. "We're too far up3tate for me to know much about the people hereabouts."

"You know more'n I do," Daniels said. Freddie Laplace didn't stick his two cents' worth in. He hung limply in the grasp of the pair who carried him, his head down on his chest. If he was out, it probably counted as a mercy.

"Oh, God, another one," an unshaven medic with a grimy Red Cross armband said when they hauled Freddie into the makeshift aid station in the room at the bottom of the windmill. "We just got Captain Maczek in here-he took one in the chest."

"Shit," Lucille Potter said crisply, which was exactly what Mutt was thinking. The word made his jaw drop just the same.

The medic stared at her, too. She stared back until he lowered his eyes and took charge of Laplace, saying, "We'll patch him up the best way we know how. Looks like you did good emergency work on him." He knuckled his eyes, yawned enormously. "Jesus, I'm tired. Other thing we've got to worry about is getting out of here in case we're overrun. We've been falling back a lot lately."

Mutt almost gave him a hot answer-anybody who bitched about the job the Anny was doing could go to hell as far as he was concerned. But the medic had a real worry there, because they probably would have to retreat farther. And medic wasn't exactly a cushy job, either; the Lizards honored the Red

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Cross most of the time, but not always-and even if meant to honor it, their weapons weren't perfect, either. So, sighing, he tramped away from the windmill and b toward his squad. Lucille Potter followed him. She said, "Wi the captain down, Mutt, they're liable to give you a pl and turn you into a lieutenant."

"Yeah, maybe," he said. "If they don't reckon I'm too old He thought he could do the job; if he'd run a ballclub, could handle a platoon. But how many guys in their fifties denly sprouted bars on their shoulders? "If this were peacetime, you're right-they would," Lucil said. "But the way things are now, I don't think they'll w about it-they can't afford to."

"Maybe," Mutt said. "I'll believe it when I see it, thou And the way things are now, like you said, I ain't gonna w about it one way or the other. The Lizards can shoot me ju as well for bein' a lieutenant as for bein' a sergeant." "You have the proper attitude," Lucille said approvingly.

A compliment from her made Mutt scuff his worn-out boot over the ground like a damn schoolkid. "One thing bei a manager'll teach you, Miss Lucille," he said, "and that's th some things, you can't do nothin' about, if you know what mean. You don't learn that pretty dam quick, you go craz "Control what you can, know what you can't, and d worry about it." Lucille nodded. "It's a good way to live." Before Mutt could answer, a burst of firing came from front line. "That's Lizard small arms," he said, breaking into trot and then into a run. "I better get back there." He w afraid they'd need Lucille's talents, too, but he didn't say th any more than he would have told a pitcher he had a no-hi going. You didn't want to put the jinx on.

Running through the corn made his heart pound in h throat, partly from exertion and partly for fear he'd blunder among the Lizards and get himself shot before he even kne they were there. But the sound of the gunfire and a pretty go sense of direction brought him back to the right place. flopped down in the sweet-smelling dirt, scraped out a b minimum of a foxhole with his entrenching tool, and s firing short bursts from his tommy gun toward the racket the Lizards' automatics. Not for the first time, he wished had a weapon like theirs. As he'd said to Lucille Pott though, some things you couldn't do anything about.

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The Lizards were pushing hard; firing started to come from both flanks as well as straight ahead. "We gotta fall back," Mutt yelled, hating the words. "Dracula, you 'n' me'll stay here to cover the rest. When they're clear, we back up, too." "Right, Sarge." To show he had the idea, Dracula Szabo

squeezed off a burst from his BAR.

When you advanced, if you were smart, you split into groups, one group firing while the other one moved. You had to be even smarter to carry out that fire-and-move routine while you gave ground. What you wanted to do at a time like that was run like hell. It was the worst thing you could do, but you always had a devil of a time making your body believe it.

The guys in Daniels' squad were veterans; they knew what they had to do. As soon as they found decent positions, they hunkered down and started firing again. "Back!" Mutt shouted to Szabo. Shooting as they went, they retreated through the rest of the squad. The Lizards kept pressing. Another couple of rounds of fire-and-fall-back brought the Americans into the town of Danforth.

It had held three or four hundred people before the fighting started; if the locals had any brains, they'd abandoned their trim white and green houses a while ago. A lot of the houses weren't so trim any more, not after artillery and air strikes. The sour odor of old smoke hung in the air.

Mutt pounded on a front door. When nobody answered, he kicked it open and ran inside. One of the windows gave him a good field of fire to the south, the direction from which the Lizards were coming. He crouched down behind it and got ready to give them a warm welcome.

"Mind if I join. you?" Lucille Potter's question made him jump and start to point his gun toward the doorway, but he stopped in a hurry and waved her in.

Freight-train noises overhead and a series of loud bursts a few hundred yards south of town made Mutt whoop with delight. "About time our artillery got off the dime," he said. "Feed the Lizards a taste of what they give us."

Before long, northbound roars and whistles balanced those coming from out of the north. "They're awfully quick with counterbattery fire," Lucille said. "Awfully accurate, too."

"Yeah, I know," Daniels said. "But-heck, come to that, aH their equipment is better'n ours-artillery and planes and tanks and even the rifles their dogfaces carry. Whenever they want to

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bad enough, they can move us out of the way. But it's they don't want to all the time."

"Unless I miss my guess, they're stretched thin," Lucil Potter answered. "They aren't just fighting in Illinois or ing against the United States; they're trying to take over whole world. And the world is a big place. Trying to hold all down can't be easy for them."

"Lord, I hope it's not." Grateful for talk to help get through the lull without worrying about what would when it stopped, Mutt gave her an admiring glance. "Mi Lucille, you got a good way of lookin' at things." He hesi then added, "Matter of fact, you look right good yourself." "Mutt . . ." Lucille hesitated, too. Finally, with exasperatio in her voice, she said, "Is this really the right time or place be talking about things like that?" "Far as I can see, you don't think there's ever any right or place," Mutt said, also with some annoyance. "I ain't caveman, Miss Lucille, I just-2' The lull ended at that moment: some of the Lizard artil

instead of going after its American opposite number, coming in on Danforth. The rising whistle of shells w

Mutt they were going to hit just about on top of him. He dire himself flat even before Lucille yelled "Get down!" and al jammed her fare into the floorboards.

The barrage put Daniels in mind of France in 1918. windows of the house, those that weren't broken already, in, scattering broken glass all over the room. A glittering dug into the floor and stuck like a spear, maybe six inc from Mutt's nose. He stared at it, cross-eyed.

The shells kept falling, till the blast of each was lost in collective din. Bricks fell from the chimney and crashed on roof. Shell fragments punched through the walls of the hou as if they were made of cardboard. In spite of his helmet, felt naked. You could take only so many heavy shellings fore something in you started to crack. You didn't want it happen, but it did. Once you got your quota, you weren' worth a whole lot.

As the pounding went on, Mutt began to think he wasn't from his own limit. Trying not to go to pieces in front Lucille Potter helped him ride it out. He glanced away the broken chunk of glass toward her. She was flattened а

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tell me you're one o' them-what do they call 'em?-lizzies, is that right?"

"It's close enough, anyhow." Lucille's face shut up as tight as a poker player's--especially one who was raising on a busted flush. Poker-faced still, she said, "Okay, Mutt, what if I am?"

She hadn't said she was, not quite, but she didn't deny it, either, only waited to see what he'd say next. He didn't know what the hell to say. He'd run across a few queers in his time, but to find out somebody he liked not just because he wanted to lay her but on account of who she was-and he couldn't be fooled on something like that, not when they'd been living in each other's pockets through months of grinding combat-was one of these creatures almost as alien as a Lizard ... that was a jolt, no doubt about it.

"I dunno," he said at last. "Reckon I'll keep my mouth shut. Last thing I want to do is cost us a medic as good as you are." She startled him immensely by leaning forward and kissing him on the cheek. An instant later, she looked contrite. "I'm sorry, Mutt. I don't want to play games with you. But that's one of the kindest things anybody ever said about me. If I'm good at what I do, why should the rest matter?"

Words like unnatural and perverted flashed across his mind. But he'd had plenty of chances to see that Lucille was good people--somebody you could trust your life to, in the most literal sense of the words.

"I dunno," he repeated, "but it does, somehow." Just then, the Lizards started shelling the front part of Danforth again, probably sowing their little artillery-carried mines to keep the Shermans from pushing farther south anytime soon. Mutt had never imagined he could be relieved to take cover from a bombardment, but right at that moment he was.

Liu Han hated going out to the market. People looked hard at her and muttered behind her back. Nobody had ever done anything to her-the little scaly devils were powerful protec tors--but the fear was always there. -tplace,

Little devils paced through the prison camp marke too. They were smaller than people, but nobody got too close to them; wherever they went, they took open space with them. It was, more often than not, the only open space in the crowded market.

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The baby in her belly gave her a kick. Even the loose cotton tunic she wore couldn't disguise her pregnancy any longer. She didn't know what to feel about Bobby Fiore: sadness that he was gone and worry about whether he was all right n-tingled with shame over the way the scaly devils had forced them together and a different sort of shame at conceiving by a foreign file:///C|/2590% 20Sci-Fi% 20 and % 20 Fantasy% 20 E-books/Harry% 20 Turtled ove% 20-% 20 Worldwar% 2002% 20-% 20 Tilting% 20 the% 20 Balance.txt the state of the state of

devil.

She let the market din wash over her and take her away from herself. "Cucumbers!"-a fellow pulled a couple of them from a wicker basket tied round his middle. They were long and twisty like snakes. A few feet away another man cried the virtues of his snake meat. "Cabbages!" "Fine purple horseradish!"

"Pork!" The man selling disjointed pieces of pig carcass wore shorts and an open jacket. His shiny brown belly showed through, and looked remarkably like one of the bigger cuts of meat he had on display.

Liu Han hesitated between his stall and the one next to it, which displayed not only chickens but fans made from chicken

feathers glued to brightly painted horn frames. "Make up your mind, foolish woman!" somebody screeched at her. She hardly minded; that, at least, was an impersonal insult. She went up to the man who sold chickens. Before she

some went up to the man who sold chickens. Before she could say anything, he quietly told her, "Fake your business somewhere else. I don't want any money from the running dogs of the imperialist scaly devils."

A Communist, she thought dully. Then anger flared in her. "What if I tell the scaly devils who and what you are?" she snapped.

"You're not the dowager empress, to put me in fear with a word," he retorted. "If you do that, I will find out about it and disappear before they can take me--or if I don't, my family will be looked after. But you-you've been a quiet running dog so far. But if you begin to sing as if you were in the Peking opera, I promise you'll be sorry for it. Now go."

Liu Han went, a stone in her heart. Even buying pork at a good price from the fellow in the stupid jacket didn't ease her spirit. Nor did the cries of the merchants who hawked amber or slippers with upturned toes or tortoiseshell or lace or beaded embroidery or fancy shawls or any of a hundred other different things. The little scaly devils were generous to her: why not, when they wanted to learn from her how a healthy woman

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gave birth? For the first time in her life, she could have most of the things she wanted. Contrary to what she'd always believed, that didn't make her happy.

A little boy in rags flashed by. "Running dog!" he squealed at Liu Han, and vanished into the crowd before she got a good look at his face. His mocking laughter was all she could report to the scaly devils, assuming she was foolish enough to bother.

The baby kicked her again. How was he supposed to grow up when everyone down to street urchins scorned his mother so? The easy tears of pregnancy filled her eyes, spilled down her cheeks.

She started back toward the house she'd shared with Bobby Fiore. Though it was a house finer than the one she'd had back in her own village, it seemed as empty as the gleaming metal chamber in which the little scaly devils had imprisoned her on their plane that never came down. The resemblance didn't end there, either. Like that metal chamber, it wasn't a home in any proper sense of the word, but a cage where the little devils kept her while they studied her

Suddenly she had had all the study she could stand. Maybe no scaly devils waited back at the house right now to take photographs of her and touch her in intimate places and ask her questions that were none of their business and talk among themselves with their hisses and pops and squeaks as if she had no more mind of her own than the kang that kept her warm at night. But so what? If they weren't there now, they would be later today or tomorrow or the day after that.

Back in her village, the Kuomintang was strong; even thinking about being a Communist was dangerous, though Communist armies had done more than most in fighting the Japanese. Bobby Fiore hadn't had any use for the Reds, either, but he'd willingly gone with them to take a poke at the scaly devils. She hoped he still lived; even if he was a foreign devil, he was a good man-better to get along with than her Chinese husband had been.

If the Communists had fought the Japanese, if Bobby Fiore had gone with them to raid the little devils ... they were likely to be doing more against the devils than anyone else. "I owe them too much to let them do whatever they want with me forever," Liu Han muttered.

Instead of going on to her house, she turned around and went back to the stall of the fellow who sold chickens and

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chicken-feather fans. He was haggling with a skinny man ov the price of a couple of chicken feet. When the skinny in sullenly paid his price and went away, he gave Liu Han an urk. friendly look. "What are you doing here? I thought I told yo to go away." $file: ///C|/2590\% \ 20Sci-Fi\% \ 20 and \% \ 20 Fantasy\% \ 20 E-books/Harry\% \ 20 Turtled ove\% \ 20-\% \ 20 Worldwar\% \ 2002\% \ 20-\% \ 20 Tilting\% \ 20 He\% \ 20 Balance.txt$

"You did," she said, "and I will, if that's what you real] want. But if you and your friends"-she did not name the out loud-"are interested in knowing more about the littl scaly devils who come to my hut, you'll ask me to stay." The poultry seller's expression did not change. "You'll to earn our trust, show you're telling the truth," he said, hi voice still hostile. But he did not yell for Liu Han to leave. "I can do that," she said. "I will." "Maybe we'll talk, then," he said, and siniled for the firs time.

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Yiddish: "Stand back, cousin. I'm going to blow the lock off your door."

Spy stories came in handy after all. Russie pointed to the floor of the corridor. "No need. There's the key. This mamzei`-he pointed to the unconscious Pole----~"was about to take me away for more questions."

"Oy. Wouldn't that have been a balls-up?" The last wasn't in Yiddish; Moishe wasn't sure what language it was in. He had precious little time to wonder; the man grabbed the key, turned it in the lock. He yanked the door open. "Come on. Let's get out of here."

Moishe needed no further urging. Alarms were clanging somewhere, off in the distance; power here seemed to be out. As he ran toward the hole in the outer wall, he asked, "Who are you, anyway?"

"I'm a cousin of yours from England. David Goldfarb's my narne. Now cut the talk, will you?"

Moishe obediently cut the tak Bullets started flying agairr, he ran even harder than he had before. Behind him, somebody screamed. The medical student part of him wanted to go back and help. The rest made him keep running-out through the hole, out through the open space around the prison, out through a gap in the razor wire, out through the screaming, gapipg people in the street.

I.There are machine guns on the roof," he gasped. "Why aren , t they shooting at usT'

"Snipers," his cousin answered. "Good ones. Shut up. Keep running. We aren't out of this mess yet."

Russie kept running. Then, abruptly, his companions, those who survived, threw away their weapons as they rounded a comer. When they rounded another comer, they stopped running. David Goldfarb grinned. "Now we're just ordinary people-you see?"

"I see," Moishe answered-and, once it was pointed out to him, he did.

"It won't last," said one of the gunmen who'd been with Goldfarb. "They'll turn this town inside out looking for us. Somebody kills a Lizard, they get nasty about that." His teeth showed white through tangled brown beard.

"Which means it's a good idea to get away from the net before they go fishing," Goldfarb said. "Cousin Moishe, we're going to take you back to England."

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"Without Rivka and Reuven, I won't go." As soon as tb words were out of his mouth, Russie realized how selfish an boorish they sounded. These men had risked their lives to sav him; their comrades had died. Who was he to set conditions what they did? But he didn't apologize, because however sel ish what he'd said sounded, he also realized he'd meant it. He waited for Goldfarb to scream at turn, and for the oth file:///C|/2590% 20Sci-Fi% 20 and % 20 Fantasy% 20 E-books/Harry% 20 Turtled ove% 20-% 20 Worldwar% 2002% 20-% 20 Tilting% 20 the% 20 Balance.txt the state of the state of

man-who looked tough enough for anything, no matter how desperate-to pound him senseless and then do whatever he chose. Instead they just kept walking along, easygoing, as he'd made a remark about the weather. Goldfarb said, "That's taken care of They'll be waiting for us along the way."

"That's-wonderful," Moishe said dazedly. Too much was happening too fast for him to take it all in. He let his cousi and the other fighter lead him through the streets of Lo while he tried to adjust to the heady joys of freedom. It in him giddy, as if he'd gulped down a couple of shots of plu brandy on an empty stomach.

A tattered poster with his face on it peered down from wall. He rubbed his chin. The Lizards hadn't let him use a zor, so his beard was coming back. It wasn't as long as he'

wom it before, but pretty soon he'd look like his picture again. "Don't worry about it," Goldfarb said when he fretted ou loud. "Once we get you out of town, we'll take care of thing like that." "How will you get me out?" Moishe asked. "Don't worry about it," Goldfarb repeated. His nameless friend laughed and said, "Asking a Jew not worry is like asking the sun not to rise. You can ask all y like, but that doesn't mean you'll get what you ask for." Th was apt enough to make Moishe laugh, too. Before long, they walked into a block of flats. Lodz was al ready beginning to boil around them. The sound of explosi and gunfire carried a long way; rumor rippled out from the prison almost as fast as the racket. The two women wh went into the building just behind Moishe and his companion were already wondering who had escaped. If only they kne

They climbed stairs. The fellow without a name rapped a door--one, two, one again. "Spy stuff," David Goldfarb t

he thought dizzily.

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tered. The other fellow poked him in the ribs with an elbow, hard enough to make him give back a pace.

The door opened. "Come in, come in." The skinny little bald man who greeted them looked like a tailor, but tailors did not commonly carry submachine guns. He looked them over, lowered the weapon. "Just you three? Where are the rest?"

"Just us," Goldfarb answered. "A couple scattered off to the other hidey-holes, a couple others won't be going anywhere any more. About what we figured." The casual way he said that chilled Russie. His cousin went on, "We're not hanging around here, either, you know. You have what we need?"

"You need to ask?" With a scornful sniff the bald little man pointed to bundles on the couch. "There---change your clothes."

"Clothes are only part of it," Goldfarb's tough-looking friend said. "The rest is taken care of, too?"

"The rest is taken care of." The bald fellow sniffed again, this time angrily. "We wouldn't be good for much if it weren't, would we?"

"Who knows what we're good for?" the nameless fighter answered, but he shrugged off his shabby wool jacket and started unbuttoning his shim Moishe had no jacket to shrug off. He shed with a long sigh of relief the clothes he'd been wearing since he was captured. Their replacements didn't fit as well, but so what? They were clean.

"Good thing the Lizards haven't figured out prison uniforms; they'd have made it harder for us to do a vanishing act with you," Goldfarb said as he, too, changed. His Yiddish was plenty flue% but full of odd turns of phrase he didn't seem to notice, as if he was using it to express ideas that came first in English. He probably was.

"You're staying here, right, Shmuel?" asked the nondescript little Jew who kept the flat. The nameless fighter, now nameless no more, nodded. So did the little fellow, who turned to Moishe and Goldfarb. He handed each of them a thin rectangle of some shiny stuff, about the size of a playing card. Moishe looked at his. A picture that vaguely resembled him looked back from it. The card gave details of a life he'd never led. The bald little man said, "Don't pull these out unless you have to. With luck, you'll be away before they do a proper job of cordoning off the city."

"And without luck, we'll buy a plot," Goldfarb said, holding

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up his own card. 'This bloke looks more like Goebbels he does like me."

"Best we could do," the bald Jew said with a shnig. 'That why you don't want to wave it around unless somebody for it. But if somebody does, he probably won't look at it; he' feed it into a Lizard machine-and it shows you've been ai thorized for the past two weeks to leave Lodz on a buyi

trip." He clucked mournfully. "Cost us plenty to pay off a
who works for the Lizards to make these for us, and he'd on]
take the best."
 "Gold?" Russie asked.
 "Worse," the fellow answered. "Tobacco. Gold at least
in circulation. Tobacco, you smoke it and it's gone."
 "Tobacco." Goldfarb sounded even more mournful than
bald Jew had. "What I wouldn't give for a fag. It's been
bloody long time."
 Russie didn't care one way or the other about tobacco. He
 rever got the babit and big modical studies made him

never got the habit, and his medical studies made him sure it wasn't good for you. But it did show how far the derground had gone to rescue him. That warmed him, espec ally since some people thought him a traitor for broadcasti for the Lizards. He said, 'Thank you more than I know ho to tell you. 1-2' Shmuel cut him off. "Listen, you'd better get out of You want to thank us, broadcast from England." "He's right," David Goldfarb said. "Come on, cousi Standing around chattering doesn't up the chances of our livir to collect an old-age pension-not that we're in serious dang, of it at any rate, things being as they are." Out of the flat, out of the block of flats, they went. As th walked north, they listened to rumors swirl around diem: " the prisoners free-~' 'The Nazis did it. My aunt saw a man a German helmet----7' "Half the Lizards in Lodz killed, I My wife's brother says--2' "Bu temperage they lib of any the Ligarda drepped

"By tomorrow, they'll be saying the Lizards dropped atomic bomb on this place," Goldfarb remarked dryly.

"Did you hear what he said?" someone going the way exclaimed. 'They used an atomic bomb to blow up prison." Russie and Goldfarb looked at each other, shook the heads, and started to laugh.

Less than an hour had gone by since the first blast Goldfarb called it, which sounded more Polish than either

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dish or English) hit the prison, but the streets heading out the ghetto already had checkpoints on them; the Lizards an their human henchmen, Order Service thugs and Po6h bullies had wasted not a moment. Some people took one look and 6 cided they didn't need to leave after all; others queued up t show they had the right.

Moishe started to get into a line that led up to a couple Poles. Goldfarb pulled him out of it. "No, no," he said loudl "Come on over here. This line is much shorter."

Of course that line was much shorter: at its head stood Lizards. Nobody in his right mind wanted to trust his fate them when human beings were around. Humans raight b thugs, but at least they were your own kind of thugs. B Moishe couldn't drag Goldfarb back from the line he'd chosen without makinLy a scene, and he didn't dare do that. Coiivinc~ his cousin wa~ leading them to their doom, he took his plea in the queue that led up to the aliens.

Sure enough, the wait to get to them was short. A Li turned one eye turTet toward Russie, the other toward Goldfab "You is?" he asked in bad Yiddish. He repeated the question in worse Polish.

"Adam Zilverstajn," Goldfarb answered at once, using 4 name on his new, forged identity card.

"Felix Kirshbojm," Moishe said more hesitantly.

He waited for alarms to go off, for guns to be pointed and maybe fired. But the Lizard just stuck out his hand and sai~ "Card." Again, Goldfarb promptly surrendered his. Again, Moishe paused almost long enough to draw suspicion to hina.

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there. But evidently they didn't, for the Lizard waited till the card came out again, then said, "You go business seven days, too?"

,,Yes," Moishe said, remen-l'oering not to tack "superior sir onto the end.

,,you both go seven days," the Lizard said. "You go-how to say- together?"

-Yes,', Moishe repeated. He wondered if the Lizards were looking for people traveling in groups. But the guard just handed him his card and got ready to receive the next set of people passing through the checkpoint.

David Goldfarb indulged in the luxury of a long, heartfelt ,,I as soon as they'd walked a couple of hundred meters past the guard and out of the ghetto. Whew! did not seem enough to Moishe. "Gouenyu, " he sai(1, and then added, "I thought you'd killed us both when you pulled me into that line with the Lizards."

,%, that." Now Goldfarb looked jaunty. "No, I knew just what I was doing there."

, You could have fooled me!" "No, seriously-look at it. If we go through a line with poles or those Order Service would-be Nazi shmucks, they're liable to look at the pictures on the cards-and if they do that, we're dead. No matter what the machine tells them, they'll ve we don't really look like the pictures on the cards, or not anyhow. But the Lizards can't tell you from Hedy Lamarr without the machine to do it for them. That's why I wanted them to check us." himself nodding. '~Cousin~' wzpah.., irls if I didn't," Goldfarb ch I served with named pie, he did." e pushe in mind of alienness about him that ssions peppering his Yidthe way Polish Jews were. does for you, " Moishe

> k up Rivka and ReuvenT' ed to him about them just

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ever since the German and the security man met. She'd kept them from trying to kill each other on the tramp back to the Village where they'd shot it out with the anti-Tolokonnikovites (she still didn't know who Tolokonnikov was or what sort of faction he led), and sometimes kept them from sniping at each other with words for as long as half an hour.

"You be careful up there," Schultz told her, in the not-to-bedenied tones of a field marshal giving orders--or a man who wanted to go to bed with her. She knew which only too well. Wanting to go to bed with her was the only thing on which he and Sholudenko agreed. The air base had needed a political officer when Sholudenko got there, but that wasn't the only reason Sholudenko had arranged to stay on here, even if it was the official one.

In a way, climbing into the cockpit of her new U-2 was a relief. She didn't have to argue with the Lizards or cajole them along; all they wanted to do was kill her. Avoiding that was a lot simpler than the passes from Schultz and Sholudenko she kept ducking.

Schultz spun the prop. He'd been right about one thing-Colonel Karpov had been so glad to have his mechanical talents back that he'd overlooked the little matter of going off without bothering to get permission first. That Schultz had actually returned with Ludmila hadn't hurt there, either.

The Kukuruznik's little five-cylinder radial buzzed into life. It had a note slightly different from the one she'd grown used to, but Schultz insisted that was nothing to worry about. On engines, if not many other places, Ludmila trusted his word.

She released the brake, gave the biplane full throttle, and bounced across the still-muddy steppe till she was airborne. She stayed at treetop height as she flew south and west toward the front. One rule the Red Air Force had teamed: the higher

you flew against the Lizards, the less likely you were to come back.

The front south of Sukhinichi was not far away, and got closer all the time whether she was in the air or not. With the coming of good weather, the Lizards were on the move again, pushing through German remnants and Soviet troops alike as they advanced on Moscow. By crackling shortwave Stalin had ordered, "Ni shagu nazad!-Not one step back!" Giving the order and being strong enough to make sure it was obeyed were not the same thing, worse luck.

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The Red Army had brought up all the artillery it could to try to stem the Lizard tide. Ludmila flew past bare-chested young men in khaki trousers serving their guns for all they were worth. When a cannon, or sometimes a whole battery, discharged close by, the blast made the U-2 tremble in the air like a failing leaf caught by a gust of wind. The gun crews waved at her plane, not because they knew she was a woman, but for joy at seeing anything human-built in the aiL

Tanks rumbled along the dirt roads. Some of them spewed smoke to help mask their positions. Ludmila hoped that would do some good; going up against Lizard armor was worse thari facing the Germans. The Nazis had had better tactics but worse tanks. The Lizards' tanks were better than the T-34s and KV-ls that were the pride of Soviet armored forces, and their tactics weren't bad, either.

A curtain of dust thrown up from shell hits marked the front. Ludmila took a deep breath as she drew near; every second she spent in and around that curtain or on the other side was a second in which she was hideously more likely to die than at any other time. Her bowels clenched and loosened, her bladder felt very full though it wasn't. She noticed none of that, not consciously.

What she did notice was the Soviet line beginning to go to pieces. Along with the dust, smoke from burning tanks filled the air and made her cough and choke when she flew through plumes of it. She didn't we many tanks right at the front to try to halt the Lizards' advance. Most either hunkered down where they were or pulled back toward Sukhinichi.

Ludmila shook her head. That wasn't going to hold things together; it would probably end up costing the vital railway

center, too. The Germans had had surprisingly few tanks, but they'd massed them and used them aggressively against Soviet troops. She'd thought the Red Army had grasped the principle. It didn't seem that way, not from what she was seeing here.

Without armor to support them, the Russian infantryinen who huddled in their trenches had to take whatever the Lizards dished out without much hope of hitting back. She wondered how long they would stay and fight, even with NKVD men with submachine guns back of the fine to discourage them from doing anything else.

As the soldiers at the guns had, some of the infantry waved as she flew over them. She wondered if the young peasants

and workers down below appreciated the irony of her sallying forth against the Lizards in an aircraft that had seemed obsolete even against the Nazis. She doubted it. All they saw was a plane with red stars on the fuselage and wings. That was enough to give them hope.

Then she was on the other side of the line, the side the Lizards controlled. The ground below her resembled nothing so much as the craters of the moon she'd once examined in a science text: the aliens were advancing through territory that had already been fought over. If that bothered them, they didn't show it.

Pop, pop! A couple of bullets tore through the doped fabric that covered the U-2's wings. Ludmila grunted in dismay. The only thing that would protect her was the aircraft's speed, and the Kukuruznik wasn't very fast ...

Off to one side a couple of kilometers, she glimpsed the fierce tadpole shape of a Lizard helicopter gunship. She -heeled the U-2 away from it and dove even closer to the deck. The gunship could fly rings around her and blow her out of the sky, and painful experience had taught that the machine guns she carried wouldn't do anything more than scratch its paint.

Luck stayed with her: the helicopter continued on up toward the front without spying her. And her turn brought her straight toward a convoy of lorries-some Lizard-made, others captured from the Red Army or the Nazis-also moving up with troops and supplies. She never would have spotted them if she hadn't had to evade the gunship.

With a joyful whoop, she thumbed the firing button. The Kukuruznik jerked a little as its twin machine guns began to hammer away. Orange lines of tracers showed she was scoring hits. A German-made lorry suddenly became a ball of flame. Ludmila whooped louder.

Lizards bailed out of vehicles and started shooting at her. She got out of there as fast as she could.

After a good strafing run like that, she could have flown back to her base and truthfully reported success. But, like most good combat pilots, she lusted for more. She buzzed on, deeper into Lizard-held territory.

Back of the line, fire came her way less often. The Lizards seemed less alert, or maybe just hadn't counted on many human planes getting through. She wished she were flying a Pe-2 bomber with a couple of thousand kilos of high explosive

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rather than a wheezing trainer that had had a brace of machi guns strapped onto it. But then, the Lizards shot down Pewith effortless ease.

She spied more lorTies-human-made ones, stopped to fu up. She raked them with machine-gun fire, and felt a mix terror and crazy exhilaration when flames shot so high that s had to pull up sharply to keep from flying straight throug them.

The machine guns had performed without a jam. They us

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ally did, so she didn't know how much Georg Schultz's relen less perfectionism had to do with that, but it couldn't hav hurt. She swung the U-2 back toward the north; she was lo on fuel and she'd used a lot of ammunition. She was willin to bet Schultz had spent the time she was flying methodicall filling belts with bullets.

Coming back, she was fired on not only by the Lizards b also by jittery Soviet troops convinced anything in the air, e pecially if it flew over them from the other side of the line, h to be dangerous. But the Kukuruznik, not least because it w so simple, was a rugged machine: unless you hit the engine the pilot or were lucky enough to snap a control wire with bullet, you wouldn't hurt it much.

Ludmila flew over advancing Lizard tanks. They wer

across a small river whose line the Soviets had been holdin when she'd gone out on her attack run an hour or so b She bit her lip. It was as she'd feared: in spite of everythi the Red Army could do, in spite of her own pinprick successe inside Lizard-held territory, the local position was deteriorat ing. Sukhinichi would fall, and after that only Kaluga stood be tween the Lizards and Moscow.

The U-2 bounced to a stop. A couple of grounderew me lugged jerricans of petrol toward the airplane, squelchin through mud that was still pretty thick. Behind them c Georg Schultz, ammunition belts draped across his chest s that he resembled nothing so much as a Cossack bandit. H took a chunk of black bread from a pocket of the German in fantry blouse he still wore, held it out to Ludmila. "Khleb, said, one Russian word he'd mastered.

"Spasebo, " she answered, and took a bite. Right in back Schultz slogged Nikifor Sholudenko. Maybe he didn't want th German spending even a moment alone with her because the were rivals, or maybe just because he was NKVD. Either w

Ludmila was glad to see him: he was someone to whom she could report, which meant she wouldn't have to hunt up Colonel Karpov.

Or could she? The air base looked like an anthill somebody had kicked, with people running every which way to no apparent purpose. Before she could ask any questions, Schultz spread his arms wide and exclaimed, "Bolshoye drap-big skedaddle." That was, ironically, the same term the Russians had used to describe the flight of bureaucrats from Moscow when it looked as if the Germans would capture the capital in October 1941. Ludmila wondered if Schultz was using it with malice aforethought.

That, however, mattered relatively little. "Skedaddle?" Ludmila said in dismay. "We're pulling out of here?"

"We are indeed," Nikifor Sholudenko said. "Orders are to shorten, ~ consolidate, and strengthen the defensive front." He didn't bother to add that that was a euphemism for retreat, just as severe fighting meant a battle we're losing. Ludmila knew that as well as he did. So, very likely, did Georg Schultz.

Ludmila said, "May I fly another mission before we pun back? I stung them the last time; they hardly had any air defenses set up."

"Who can defend against one of these things?" Schultz said in German, setting an affectionate hand on the U-2's clothcovered fuselage. "They peep in through the keyhole when you're taking a leak."

Sholudenko snorted at that, but to Ludmila he shook Ins head. "Colonel Karpov's orders are that we leave now. They came in just after you took off, if you hadn't been airborne, we probably would have already cleared out."

"Where are we going?" Ludmila asked.

The NKVD man pulled out a scrap of paper, glanced down at it. "Mey're setting up a new base at Collective Farm 139, bearing 43, distance fifty-two kilometers."

Ludmila translated distance and bearing into a dot on the map. "rhat's right outside Kaluga," she said unhappily.

"Just west of it, as a matter of fact," Sholudenko agreed. "We're going to fight the Lizards house by house and street by street in Sukhinichi to delay them while we prepare new positions between Sukhinichi and Kaluga. Then, at need, we will fight house by house in Kaluga. I hope the need does not anse.

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He stopped there; not even an NKVD man, answerable no one at the air base but himself and perhaps, for somethi particularly heinous, Colonel Karpov, wanted to say too mu(But Ludrnila had no trouble reading between the lines. didn't expect whatever makeshift line the Red Army would up north of Sukhinichi to hold the Lizards. He didn't expect hold them at Kaluga, either, not by the sound of what he sa file:///C//2590%20Sci-Fi%20and%20Fantasy%20E-books/Harry%20Turtledove%20-%20Worldwar%2002%20-%20Tilting%20the%20Balance.txt

And between Kaluga and Moscow lay only plains a forest-no more cities in which to slow down and maul the vaders.

"We're in trouble," Georg Schultz said in German. Ludin wondered at his nafvet6 in speaking so freely: the Nazis mi not have the NKVD, but they certainly did have the Ges Didn't Schultz know you weren't supposed to open yo mouth where people you couldn't trust were listening?

Sholudenko gave him an odd look. "The Soviet Union is trouble," he conceded. "No more so than Germany, howe and no more so than any of the rest of.the world."

Before Schultz could answer, Colonel Karpov came runni up the airstrip, shouting, "Get out! Get out! Lizard armor h broken through west of Sukhinichi, and they're heading way. We have maybe an hour to get clear-maybe not, t Get out!"

Wearily, Ludmila climbed back into the little Kukuruzn Groundcrew men turned the plane into the wind; Geo Schultz spun the two-bladed wooden prop. The engine, reliab even if puny, caught at once. The biplane rattled down runway and hopped into the air. Ludmila swung it northea toward Collective Farm 139.

Schultz, Sholudenko, and Karpov stood on the ground w ing to her. She waved back, wondering if she would ever s them again. Suddenly, instead of being the one who flew gerous combat missions, she was the one who could escape t] oncoming Lizards. If they were only an hour away, they had good chance of overrunning the humans trying to escape fro the air base.

She checked her airspeed indicator and her watch. At t] U-2's piddling turn of speed, Collective Farm 139 was half an hour away. She hoped she'd be able to spot the ne base, and then hoped she wouldn't: if the maskirovka was ba the Lizards would notice it.

Of course, if the maskirovka was good, she'd fly around at

around and probably have to set down in the wrong place because she was running out of fuel. Airspeed indicator, watch, and compass were not the most sophisticated navigational instruments around, but they were what she had,

A Lizard warplane shot by, far overhead. The howl of its jet engines put her in mind of wolves deep in the forest baying at the moon. She patted the fabric sides of her U-2. It was also an effective combat aircraft, no matter how puny and absurd alongside the jet It had seemed puny and absurd alongside an Me-109, too.

She was still flying along when the Lizard plane came shrieking back on the reciprocal to its former course. She wasn't even done shifting bases, and it had already finished its mission of destruction.

Speed.The word tolled in Ludmila's mind, a mournful bell. The Lizards had more of it at their disposal than people did: their tanks rolled faster, their planes flew faster. Because of that, they held the initiative, at least while the weather was good. Fighting them was like fighting the Germans, only worse. Nobody ever won a war by reacting to what the other fellow did.

A bullet cracked past her head, rudely slaughtering that fine of thought. She shook her fist at the ground, not that it would do any good. The stupid muzhik down there was no doubt convinced that anything so clever as an airplane had to belong to the enemy. Had Stalin had the chance to continue peacefully building socialism in the Soviet Union, such ignorance might have become a thing of the past in a generation's time. As it was ...

A peasant working in a newly sown field of barley took off his jacket and waved it as she buzzed over him. The jacket had a red lining. Ludmila started to fly on by, then exclaimed, "Bozhemol, I'm an idiot!" The Red Air Force wouldn't send up a flare, literally or figuratively, to let her know exactly where the new base was. If they did, the Lizards would make sure said base didn't last long. She could credit good navigation-or more likely good luck-for finding her target at all.

She wheeled the Kukuruznik through the sky. As she bled off speed and what little altitude she had, she spotted marks that cut across plowed furrows. They told her where planes

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were landing and taking off. She brought the U-2 around on more time, landed it in more or less the same place. As if by magic, men appeared where she had been willin to swear only grain grew. They sprinted toward the bipl bawling, "Out! Out! Out!"

Ludmila scrambled out. As her booted feet dug into the still muddy ground, she began, "Senior Lieutenant Gorbunova re porting as-"

"Tell us all that shit later," said one of the fellows who wa. hauling the U-2 away toward concealment, though of what so Ludmila couldn't imagine. He turned to a comrade. "Tolya, ge file:///C//2590%20Sci-Fi%20and%20Fantasy%20E-books/Harry%20Turtledove%20-%20Worldwar%2002%20-%20Tilting%20the%20Balance.txt

her under cover, too."

Tolya needed a shave and smelled as if he hadn't seen so and water in a long time. Ludmila didn't hold it against him she was probably just as rank, but didn't notice it on hersel any longer. "Come on, Comrade Pilot," Tolya said. If he no ticed she was a woman, or cared, he didn't let on. Some of his friends unrolled a broad stretch of matting th 'so cunningly mimicked the surrounding ground, she hadn' even noticed it (she was glad she hadn't tried taxiing across it) It covered a trench wide and deep enough to swallow an plane. As soon as the Kukuruznik vanished into the trench, mats went back on.

Tolya led Ludmila toward some battered buildings half a kilometer away. "We don't have to do anything speci

for people," he explained, "not with the stuff for the kolkhoz niki still standing." "I've flown from bases where people lived underground too," Ludmila said. "We didn't have much digging time here," her guide said and machines come first." Somebody unrolled another strip of matting and ducked under it carrying a lighted torch. "Is he starting a fire down there?" Ludmila -asked. Tolya nodded. "Why?" she said. "More maskirovka," he answered. "We found out the Lizards like to paste things that are warm. We don't know how they spot them, but they do. If we give them some they can't really hurt---2' "Fhey waste munitions." Ludmila nodded. "Ochen khorosho-very good." Even though they were alone in the middle of a field, Tolya

Even though they were alone in the middle of a field, Tolya looked around and lowered his voice before he spoke again:

"Comrade Pilot, you've flown over Sukhinichi? How did it look to you?"

it was coming to pieces, Ludmila thought. But she didn't want to say that, not to someone she didn,t know or trust: who knew what he ruight be under his baggy, peasant-style tunic and trousers? Yet she didn't want to lie to him, either. Carefully, she replied, "Let me put it this way: I'm glad you don't have much in the way of heavy, permanent installations here." "Huh?" Tolya's brow furrowed. Then he grunted. "Oh. I see. We may have to move in a hurry, is that it?" Ludmila. didn't answer; she just kept walking toward what was left of the collective farm's buildings. Beside her, Tolya grunted again and asked no more questions; he'd understood her not-answer exactly as she meant it.

the front south of

Alone on a bicycle with a pack on his back and a rifle slung over his shoulder: Jens Larssen had spent a lot of time and covered a lot of miles that way. Ever since his Plymouth gave up the ghost back in Ohio, he'd gone to Chicago and then all around Denver on two wheels rather than four.

This, though, was different. For one thing, he'd been on flat ground in the Midwest, not slogging his way up through a gap in the Continental Divide. More important, back then he'd had a goal: he'd been riding toward the Met Lab and toward Barbara. Now he was running away, and he knew it.

"Hanford," he said under his breath. As far as he could tell, they all just wanted an excuse to get him out of their hair. "You'd think I was a goddamn albatross or something."

All right, so he'd made it real clear he wasn't happy about his wife shacking up with this Yeager bum. The way everybody acted, it was his fault, not hers. She'd run out on him, and she got the sympathy when he tried to put some sense into her thick hea&

"It just isn't right," he muttered. "She bailed out, and I'm the one who's stuck in the plane wreck." He knew his work had suffered since the Met Lab crew got to Denver. That was another reason everybody was glad to get him out of town, on a bike if not on a rail- But how was he supposed to keep his eyes on calculations or oscilloscope readings if they were really seeing Barbara naked and laughing, her legs wrapped around that stinking corporal as he bucked above her? He reached back over his right shoulder with his left hand

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to touch the hard, upthrust barrel of the Springfield. He'd thought about lying in wait for Yeager, ending those terrible visions for good. But he had enough sense left to realize he'd probably get caught and, even if he didn't, blowing Yeager's head off, however delightful that might be, wouldn't bring Barbara back to him. "It's a good thing I'm not stupid," he told the asphalt of US 40 under his wheels. "I'd be in a whole heap of trouble if I were.,,

He looked back over his shoulder. He was thirty miles out of Denver now, and had gained a couple of thousand feet; he could see not only the city, but the plain beyond it that sloped almost imperceptibly downward toward the Mississippi a long way away. Down in the flatlands, the Lizards held sway. If he hadn't gone away from the city heading west, he might have left heading cast.

Looked at rationally, that made as little sense as ambushing Sam Yeager, and Jens knew it. Knowing and caring were two different critters. Instead of just getting his own back from Yeager, selling out the Met Lab project gave him vengeance wholesale rather than retail, paying back all at once everybody who'd done him wrong. The idea had a horrid fascination to it, the way the sharp edge of a broken tooth irTesistibly lures the tongue. Feel, it seems to say. This isn't the way it should be, but feel it anyhow.

Pushing the bike along at 7,500 feet took more out of him than making it go through the flat farming country of Indiana. He stopped every so often for a blow, and just to admire the scenery ahead. Now the Rockies loomed in every direction except right behind him. In the clear, thin air, the snowcapped peaks and the deep green cloak of pine forest below them looked close enough to reach out and touch. The sky was a deep, deep blue, with a texture to it he'd never known before. But for the soundof his own slightly winded breathing and the rustle of bushes in the breeze, everything was quiet: no buzz and wheeze of cars, no growling rumble of trucks. Jens had passed a patient convoy of horse-drawn wagons four or five miles back, and another coming into Denver just as he was leaving, but that was about it. He knew the Lizard-induced dearth of traffic meant the war effort was going to hen, but it sure worked wonders for the tourist business. "Except there's no tourist business any more, either," he file:///C//2590%20Sci-Fi%20and%20Fantasy%20E-books/Harry%20Turtledove%20-%20Worldwar%2002%20-%20Tilting%20the%20Balance.txt

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said. The habit of talking to himself when he was alone on his bike had come back in a hurry.

He swung his feet back up onto the pedals, got rolling again. In a couple of minutes, he came up to a sign: IDAHO SPRINGS, 2 NULES. That made him lift one hand from the handlebars to scratch his head. "Idaho Springs?" he muttered. "This was still Colorado, last I looked."

A few hundred yards ahead another sign said, HOT SPRINGS BATHING, 500. VAPOR CAVES, ONLY \$1. That explained the springs, but left him still wondering how a chunk of Idaho had shifted south and east.

The town might have had a thousand people before the Lizards came. It straggled along a narrow canyon. A lot of the houses looked deserted, -,,,nd the doors to several shops hung open. Jens had seen a lot of towns like that. But if people had fled from everyplace, where had they all gone? His reluctant conclusion was that a lot of them were dead.

Not everybody was gone from Idaho Springs. A bald man in black overalls came out of a dry-goods store and waved to Larssen. He waved back, slowed to a stop. "Where you from, mister?" the local asked. "Where you goin'T'

Jens thought about replying that it was none of Nosy Parker's business, but his eye happened to catch a bit of motion in a second-story window that the breeze couldn't have caused: a curtain shifted slightly, perhaps from a rifle barrel stirring behind it. The folk of Idaho Springs were ready to take care of themselves.

And so, instead of getting smart, Jens said carefully, "I'm out of Denver, heading west on Army business. I can show you a letter of authorization, if you'd like." The letter wasn't signed by Groves; the detested Colonel Hexham's John Hancock was on it instead. Larssen had been tempted to wipe his backside with it; now he was glad he'd refrained.

Black Overalls shook his head. "Nah, you don't need to bother. If you was one of them bad guys, don't reckon you'd be so eager to show it off." The upstairs curtain twitched again as the not-quite-unseen watcher drew back. The bald guy went on, "Anything we can do for you here?"

Jens' stomach rumbled. He said, "I wouldn't turn down some food--or even a drink, if you folks have some hooch you can spare. If you don't, don't put yourselves out on ac-

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count of me," he added hastily; in these times of scarcity, ple got mighty touchy about sharing things like liquor. But the fellow in black overalls just grinned. "We can a bit, I expect. We'd always stock up for the folks who'd c to visit the springs, you know, and there ain't been them lately. You just want to ride on up ahead for another block to the First Street Cafe. Tell Mary there Harvey okay to get you fed."

'Thanks, uh, Harvey." Jens started the bicycle rolling

His back itched as he rode past the window where he'd the curtain move, but nothing at all stirred there now. If satisfied Harvey, he must have satisfied the local hired too.

The Idaho Springs city hall was an adobe building wi couple of big millstones in the yard in front of it. A sign i tified them as coming from an old Mexican arastra, a powered gadget that ground ore as an ordinary mill gro grain. Colorado had more history than Jens had thought

The First Street Cafe, by contrast, looked like a bank. It its name spelled out in gold Old English letters across a p glass window. Jens stopped in front of it, let down the stand on his bike. He didn't think bike rustlers would be as a worry here as they were in Denver. All the same, he reso not to eat with his back to the street. He opened the door to the caf6. A bell jingled above head. As his eyes adjusted to the gloom inside, he saw place was empty. That amazed him, because a wonderful s filled the aiL From the room in back, a woman's voice cal "Mat you, Jack?"

"Uh, no," Jens said. "I'm a stranger here. Harvey was enough to say I could beg a meal from you, if you're M Brief silence fell, then, "Yeah, I'm Mary. Just a second, I'll be right with you." He heard footsteps back there, then came out behind the counter and looked him over, hands hips. Voice slightly mocking, she went on, "So Harvey I'm supposed to feed you, huh? You're skinny enough could do with some feeding, that's for sure. Chicken stew you? It had better-it's what I've got."

"Chicken stew would be swell, thank you." That was w was making the wonderful smell, Jens realized. "Okay. Comin' right up. You can sit anywhere; we

what you'd call crowded." With a laugh, Mary turned and disappeared again.

Jens chose a table that let him keep an eye on his bicycle. Plates clattered and silverware jingled in the back room; Mary softly sang something to herself that, if he recognized the tune, was a scandalous ditty he'd last heard at the Lowry Field BOQ.

From a lot of women, such lyrics would have scandalized him. Somehow they seemed to suit this Mary. On thirty seconds' acquaintance, she reminded him of Sal, the brassy waitress with whom, among many others, the Lizards had cooped him up in a church in Fiat, Indiana. Her hair was midnightblack instead of Sal's peroxided yellow, and they didn't look like each other, either, but he thought he saw in Mary a lot of the same take-it-or-leave-it toughness Sal had shown.

He" still wished he'd laid Sal--especially considering the way everything else had turned out. It could have happened, but he'd figured Barbara was waiting for him, so he'd stayed good. Shows how much I know, he thought bitterly.

"Here you go, pal." Mary set knife and fork and a plate in front of him: falling-off-the-bone chicken in thick gravy, with dumplings and carrots. The smell alone was enough to put ten pounds on him.

He tasted. The taste was better than the sinell. He hadn't thought it could be. He made a wordless, full-mouth noise of bliss.

"Glad you like it," Mary said, sounding amused. A moment later she added, "Listen, it's about dinnertime, and like I said, we ain't exactly packed. You mind if I bring out a plate and join you?"

"Please," he said. "Why should I mind? This is your place and your terrific food-2' He thought he was going to say more, but took another bite instead.

"Be right with you, then." She went back to get some stew of her own. Jens twisted his head to watch the way she walked. Like a woman, he thought: what a surprise. Her long gray wool skirt didn't show much of her legs, but she had nice ankles. He wondered if she was older or younger than he. Close, either way.

She came back with not only a plate, but two glass beer mugs filled with a deep amber fluid. "You look like you could use one of these," she said as she sat down across the table

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from him. "Just homebrew, but it's not bad. Joe Simpson V makes it, he used to work down at the Coors brewery Golden, so he knows what he's doin'."

Jens gulped at the beer. It wasn't Coors-he'd drunk that Denver--but it was a long way from bad. "Oh, Lord," he s ecstatically. "Will you marry me?"

She paused with a forkful of dumpling halfway to mouth, gave him a long, appraising stare. He felt himself ing red; he'd just meant it for a joke. But maybe Mary what she saw. With a slightly wintry smile, she answered, dunno, but I'll tell you this right now-it's the best damn I had today, and that's a fact. Hell, if you was to tempt with a cigarette, who knows what I might up and do?" "I wish I could," he said, regretfully for two different sons. "I haven't seen one in months."

"Yeah, me neither." She let out a long, mournful si "Don't even know why I bothered to ask. If you had smo I'd've smelled 'em on you minute you walked in." She another bite, then said, "Mind if I ask you what your n is?"

He told her, and discovered in turn that her last name Cooley. Black Irish, he thought. That fit; her eyes were yery blue and her skin even fairer than his, transparent w rather than pink.

She might not have been able to smell tobacco smoke him, but he was sure she could smell sweat-getting the here from Denver had been work, no two ways about it. didn't worry him the way it would have a year before. could smell her, too, and it was amazing how fast you got to bodies that weren't as clean as they might have been. most everybody needed a bath, things evened out.

He finished the stew, scraped up gravy with his fork the plate was damn near clean again. He didn't want to up leave; he felt full and happy and more nearly homey than had since he'd found out he didn't really have a home more. To give himself an excuse to stay a while longer, pointed to the mug and said, "Could I have another one those, please? That one hit the spot, but it didn't quite fill UP.

"Sure thing, pal. I'll get me one, too." She headed for back room again. This time, Jens thought she might have

ticed him eyeing her as she walked, but if she had, she didn't let on. She soon came back with the beer.

"Thanks," he said as she sat down once more. The scritch of the chair legs on the bricks of the caf6 floor was almost the only sound. Jens asked, "How do you keep this place open with no customers?"

"What do you mean, no customers? You're here, aren't youT' Her face was full of impudent amusement. "But yeah, it's pretty quiet at dinnertime. Supper, now, folks come for supper. And I reckon the Army would shoot me if I closed up shop; I feed a lot of their people goin' in and out of Denver. But then, you said you're one of them, right?"

"Yeah." Jens took another pull at his beer. He eyed her over the top of the mug. "Bet you have to keep a shotgun by the till to keep some of the Army guys from getting too friendly." Mary laughed. "Spilling something hot on 'em mostly does the trick." She drank, too. " 'Course, the other thing is, there's passes and then there's passes."

Was that an invitation? It sure sounded like one. Jens hesitated, not least because the memory of his ignominious failure with that chippie back in Denver still stung. If he couldn't get it up twice running, what wa 's he supposed to do? Ride his bike off a cliff? He'd have plenty of chances, pedaling along US 40 through the mountains. Sometimes, though, leading with your chin was also a test of manhood. He stretched out his foot under the table. As if by accident, the side of his leg brushed against hers.

If she'd pulled away, he would have risen from the table feeling foolish, paid whatever she asked for the stew and the beer, and headed west. As it was, she stretched, too, slowly and languorously. He wondered if that sinuous motion came naturally or if she'd seen it in the movies and practiced. Either way, it made his heart thump like a drum.

He got up, walked around the table, and went down on one knee beside her. It was a position in which he could have proposed, although he had propositioning more in mind. He got the idea, though, that she didn't want a lot of talk.

When he leaned forward and kissed her, she grabbed his head and pulled him to her hard enough to mash his lips against her teeth. He broke away for a moment, partly to breathe and putly to let his mouth glide to her earlobe and

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then down the smooth side of her neck. She arched her b like a cat and sighed deep in her throat.

His hand slid under her skirt. Her legs parted for him. was gently rubbing at the crotch of her cotton panties when remembered that plate-glass window. Idaho Springs was much of a town, but anybody walking by could see in. anybody walking by could walk in. "Is there someplace we c go?" he asked hoarsely. file:///C//2590%20Sci-Fi%20and%20Fantasy%20E-books/Harry%20Turtledove%20-%20Worldwar%2002%20-%20Tilting%20the%20Balance.txt

That seemed to remind her of the big window, too. "C on back to the kitchen with me," she said. He didn't want take his hand away, but she couldn't stand up unless he di She paused only a moment, to scoop up an old Army bl ket from behind the counter on which the cash register sat. stove in the kitchen, a coal-burner burning wood these da, made the place hot, but Jens didn't care. He was plenty h himself.

He unbuttoned the buttons that ran down the back of Mar~ white blouse and unhooked her brassiere. Her breasts filled hands. He squeezed, not too hard. She shivered in his arms. fumbled at the button that held her skirt closed, undid it, yanked down the zipper beneath. The skirt made a puddle the floor. She stepped out of it, kicked off her shoes, pulled down her panties. Her pubic hair was startlingly against her pale, pale skin.

She spread the blanket on the floor while he tried not to his clothes getting out of them in excess haste. Everythi would be all right this time-he was sure of it.

Everything was better than all right. She moaned and g and called his name and squeezed him with those w contractions of the inner muscles so he exploded in the s instant she did. "Lord!" he said, more an exclamation of cere respect than a prayer.

She smiled up at him, her face-probably Re his-still little slack with pleasure. "That was good," she said. "Ai you're a gentleman, you know that?"

"How do you mean?" he asked absently, not quite listenin he was hoping he'd rise again.

But she answered: "You keep your weight on your elbows That made him not only laugh but also slip and stop being gentleman, at least by her standards. She squawked and w gled, and he slid out of her. When he sat back on his knee

she reached for her discarded clothes, so she hadn't been interested in a second round, anyhow.

Jens dressed even faster than he'd undressed. Where before he'd thought of nothing but getting his ashes hauled, now he recalled how much a stranger he was here, and what could happen to strangers when they fooled around with small-town women.

Another question formed in the back of his mind: did Mary expect to get paid? If he asked and the answer was no, he'd mortally offend her. If he didn't ask and the answer was yes, he'd offend her a different way, onethat might end up with his having a discussion he didn't want with the gunman behind that curtained window.

After a few seconds' thought, he found a compromise that pleased him. "What do I owe you for lunch and everythingT' he asked. If she wanted to interpret and everything to mean a couple of beers, fine. If she thought it meant more than that, well, okay, too.

"Paper money?" Mary asked. Jens nodded. She said, "Illirty bucks ought to cover it."

Given the way prices had gone crazy since the Lizards came, that wasn't out of line for good chicken stew and two mugs of beer. Jens felt a surge of pride that she hadn't been a pro. He dug in his pocket for a roll that would have astonished him in prewar days, peeled off two twenties, and gave them to her. "I'll get your change," she said, and started for the cash register.

"Don't be silly," he told her.

She smiled. "I said you were a gentleman."

"Listen, Mary, when I come back from where I'm going-_2' he began, with the sentimentality satiation and a bit of beer can bring.

She cut him off. "If I ever see you again, tell me whatever you're going to tell me. Till then, I'm not gonna worry about it . The war's made everybody a little bit crazy."

"Isn't that the truth?" he said, and thought about Barbara for the first time since he decided to try playing footsie with Mary. Take that, bitch, he said to himself. Aloud, to Mary, he went on, "Thanks for everything-and I mean for everything. I'd better be heading out now."

She sighed. "I know. Nobody ever stays in Idaho Springsexcept me." She took a couple of quick steps forward, pecked

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him on the cheek, and moved back again before he could her. "Wherever it is you're going to, you be careful, hear me "I will." Suddenly he wanted to stay in Idaho Springs, town he'd never heard of until he started planning the trip Hanford Amazing what a roll in the hay can do, he thoug] But discipline held, aided by doubts whether Mary wan anything more from him than that one roll, either. The doorbell jingled again as he walked out of the

Street Cafe. He climbed onto his bicycle. "Giddyap," he m

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tered as he started to pedal. The world wasn't such a bad o place after all.

He held that view even though he needed a solid day to to the top of Berthoud Pass, which wasn't much more twenty miles beyond Idaho Springs. He spent the night in mining hamlet of Empire, then tackled the run to the pass t next morning. He didn't think he'd ever worked so hard in life. He'd gained a thousand feet between Idaho Springs Empire, and picked up another three thousand in the ffiirte miles between Empire and the top of the pass. Not only w he going up an ever-steeper grade, he was doing it in air th got thinner and thinner. Berthoud Pass topped out at better th eleven thousand feet: 11,315, said a sign that announced Continental Divide. "Whew." Jens paused for a well-earned rest. He was co ered with sweat and his heart was beating harder than it h when he'd come atop Mary Cooley, a day before and most a mile lower. Denver had taken some getting used to. He w dered if anybody this side of an Andean Indian could hope get used to the thin air of Berthoud Pass.

And yet signs on side roads pointed the way to ski res People actually came up here for fun. He shook his head. "M I'm just glad it's downhill from here on out," he said, swiggi from one of the canteens he'd filled back at Bards Creek Empire. The kind folk there had also given him chunks roast chicken to take along. He gnawed on a drumstick as tried without much luck to catch his breath.

He thought he'd sweated out every drop of water in him, b emptying the canteen proved him wrong. He went off behi a boulder-not that anybody would have seen him if he taken a leak right out in the middle of US 40-and unzi his fly.

The second he started to whiz, he hissed in sudden and u

expected pain; somebody might as well have lighted a match and stuck it up his joint. And along with the urine came thick yellow pus. "What the hell is that?" he burst out, and then, a moment later, as realization struck, "Jesus Christ, I've got the fu king clap!"

And where he'd got it was painfully obvious, in the most literal sense of the word. Not from the palm of his own hand, that was for goddamn sure. Somebody who'd lie down with one stranger passing through Idaho Springs ... he wondered how many strangers she'd lain down with. One of them had left her a present, and she'd been generous enough to give it to him.

"That's great," he said. "That's just wonderful." Here he'd been on the point of rejoining the human race, and this had to happen. What he'd hoped would be his ticket out of the black gloorn'that had seized him ever since Barbara started laying that miserable ballplayer now turned out to be just another kick in the nuts-again, literally.

He thought about turning the bicycle around and heading back toward Idaho Springs. Give that tramp a Springfield thank-you, he thought. It would be an easy ride, too-all downhill. Down that grade, I could do twenty miles in twenty minutes. He knew he was exaggerating, but not by that much.

In the end, he shook his head. He didn't quite have coldblooded murder in him. Revenge was something else. As far as he was concerned, the whole human race had given him a screwing that made the dose he'd got from Mary Cooley look like a pat on the back by comparison.

Well, not quite like a pat on the back. As he climbed back onto the bicycle and started down the western slope of the Rockies, he was already dreading the next time he'd have to piss. Back before the war, sulfa had started knocking gonorrhea for a loop. If any doctor so much as had the stuff these days, he'd be saving it for matters more urgent than a case of VD.

"Hanford," Jens muttered. His breath smoked as the word escaped his lips; even now, the snow didn't lie that far above Berthoud Pass. He pedaled harder to get warm again.

He'd go on to Hanford. He'd see what there was to see. He'd head back for Denver and make his report. He wondered how much good it would do, or whether General Leslie hotshot Groves would pay the least bit of attention to it if he

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didn't like what he said. None of the Met Lab people paid attention to him these days. They were probably too bus laughing at him behind his back-and they'd laugh eve harder when he came home with a drippy faucet. So woul Barbara.

He wondered why he was wasting so much effort on sons o bitches-and one proper bitch-who wouldn't appreciate what he did if he went out and built a bomb singlehanded. But he'd said he'd go and he'd said he'd come back, and duty stil counted for a lot with him.

"Hell, hadn't been for duty, I'd still be married-yes, sir, I

sure would," he said. They'd asked him to take word about the Met Lab from Chicago to the government-in-hiding in West Virginia, and he'd gone and done it. But getting back hadn't been so easy-and nobody'd bothered to ask his wife to keep her legs closed while he was gone.

So he'd do what he'd promised. He hadn't made any promises about afterwards, though. He might take it into his head to ride east out of Denver after all.

He picked up speed and he rolled downhill. The thin air that blew against his face was spicy with the smell of the pines from the Arapaho National Forest all around.

"Or who knows9 'he said. "I might even run into some Lizards on the way to Hanford. They'd listen to me, I bet. What do you think?" The breeze didn't answer. file:///C|/2590% 20 Sci-Fi% 20 and% 20 Fantasy% 20 E-books/Harry% 20 Turtled ove% 20-% 20 Worldwar% 2002% 20-% 20 Tilting% 20 the% 20 Balance.txt

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Atvar stood on sand, looking out to sea. 'This is a most respectable climate," the fleetlord said. "Decently warm, decently dry---2' The wind blew bits of grit into his eyes. They bothered him not in the least; his nictitating membranes flicked them out of the way without conscious thought on his part. Kirel came crunching up beside him. "Even this northern Africa is not truly Home, though, Exalted Fleetlord," he said. "It grows beastly cold at night-and winter here, by the reports, is almost as hideous as anywhere else on Tosev 3."

"Not winter now." For a moment, Atvar turned an eye turret toward the star the Race called Tosev. As always, its light struck him as too harsh, too white, not quite Re the mellow sunshine of Home. "I thought I would come down to the planet's surface to see it at its best, not its worst."

"It is well-suited to us here," Kirel admitted. "Reports say the Tosevites from Europe there"-he pointed north across the blue, blue water----~'who were fighting here when we arrived, spent most of their time complaining about how hot and dry this part of their planet was. Even the natives don't care for the area during summer."

"I have long since given up trying to fathom the Big Uglies' tastes," Atvar said. "I would call them revoltingly ignorant, except that, were they only a little more ignorant, our conquest would have been accomplished some time ago."

"With the return of good-well, bearable-weather to the lands of our principal foes, the optimism I felt at the outset of our campaign here begins to return as well," Kirel said. "We've gained against the Deutsche from both cast and west; we're driving toward the capital of the SSSR, this Moskva be-

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ing an important rail and transport center along with an admin istrative site; we continue to consolidate our hold on China de spite bandits behind our lines; and the Americans fall back o the lesser continental land mass."

"All true," Atvar agreed, more happily than he'd spoken o the military situation on Tosev 3 for some time. "I begin ti hope the colonists may yet find a pacified world awaiting the settlement. During the past winter in this hemisphere, wouldn't have put much credit in that."

"Nor 1, Exalted, Fleetlord. But if our munitions hold out, think we can successfully complete the conquest and settl down to administering rather than fighting."

Atvar wished the shiplord hadn't added that qualifyin phrase. Munitions were a continuing problem. Provident &, usual, the Race had given the conquest fleet far more supplie and weapons systems than it had expected the warriors to need against the animal-riding, sword-swinging savages the probes had shown inhabiting Tosev 3.

The only trouble was that, while Atvar still reckoned the Big Uglies savages, these days they made landcruisers, fired automatic weapons, and were beginning to fly jet aircraft and launch missiles. What would have been lavish supplies agains primitives had to be carefully rationed to keep from running out before the Tosevites did. Atvar knew such care slowed the war effort, but he lacked the munitions to shut down all the Big Uglies' industrial areas and keep them shut down.

"It does make things harder," Kirel said when Atvar spoke of his concern. "Still, I count us ahead of the game in that we've not had to use nuclear weapons to any great degree. Wrecking the planet for the colonists would not leave our names in good odor in the annals of the Race." Would not leave Atvar's name in good odor, was what he meant, though be, was too polite to say so. The fleetlord won the glory-if any glory was to be won. If not, he won the blame. Atvar didn't intend to win any blame.

"Some males-Straha, for instance," he observed, "would destroy Tosev 3 in order to conquer it. They might as well be Big Uglies themselves, for all the care they give to the future." "Truth in your words, Exalted Fleetiord," Kirel said; he didn't care for Straha, either. But he was also a thoroughgoing and conscientious officer, so he added, "In truth, though,

sometimes the Tosevites are exasperating enough to make me wonder if we shouldn't exterminate them to keep them from troubling us later. Take this latest trouble with-what was that Big Ugly's name?-Moishe Russie."

"Oh yes-that." Atvar stuck out his tongue, as at a bad smell. "I thought it had to be one of Skorzeny's exploits till intelligence reminded me Russie belonged to one of the groups the Deutsche were busy slaughtering until we came to Tosev 3. Computer analysis makes it unlikely they would have tried to rescue one of their foes, and I must say I agree with the machines here."

"As do I," Kirel said with a hissing sigh. "But don't you think dismissing Zolraag as governor of the province was a trifle harsh? Other than when dealing with Russie and matters concerning him, his record was good enough."

"What he's cost us in those matters outweighs the rest," Atvar said. "He petitioned for a reconsideration; I denied it, We hold too much of Tosev 3 only because the locals submit to us out of fear. If we are made to look like idiots, we shall no longer be objects of fear, and we shall have to divert forces from serious fighting to hold down areas now quiet. No, Zolraag deserved sacking, and sacking he got."

Kirel cast his eyes to the ground in obedience to the fleetlord's will. Another male came up to him and Atvar, one whose rather drab body paint made him seem out of place in such august company. "I greet you, Exalted Fleetlord, Superb Shiplord," he said. His words were perfectly correct, his voice held the proper deference, and yet Atvar doubted his sinceriV even so.

"I greet you, Drefsab," the fleetlord returned, swinging one eye turret toward the intelligence operative. Drefsab's motions were quick and jerky. With another male, that might have betrayed a ginger habit, but Drefsab had moved that way even before he became addicted to the Tosevite herb; he had a Big Ugly's restlessness trapped in a body that belonged to the Race. Atvar said, "I presume you have come to report on the progress of your project in-what is the name of that Ernperorless land?"

"Nezavisna Drzava Hrvatska-the Independent State of Croatia," Drefsab answered. His clawed fingers twitched restlessly, a sure sign of disgust. "Do you know, Exalted Fleedor~

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there are times when the Big Uglies are as easy to manipula as hatchlings still wet from the juices of their eggs?"

"I wish there were more such times," Kirel observed.

"So do we all," Atvar said. "How have you managed to in nipulate the--Croats?-then?"

"Mey're subordinates of the Deutsche, of course," Drefsa said. "The Deutsche gained their support by giving them weal ons and a free hand against their local enemies, which esse file:///C//2590%20Sci-Fi%20and%20Fantasy%20E-books/Harry%20Turtledove%20-%20Worldwar%2002%20-%20Tilting%20the%20Balance.txt

tially means anyone who lives nearby and is not a Croat. A I had to do was promise more and better weapons and an e freer hand, and all at once they became most cooperative." Atvar felt faintly sick. 'Me guidelines on conquering T(sev 3 he'd brought from Home, tomes composed thousands (years before, after the Race subjected first the Rabotevs an then the Hallessi, suggested playing local groups against o another. That sounded clean and logical. The reality, at least o Tosev 3, was apt to be sordid and soaked in blood.

Drefsab went on, "When measured against Tosev 3 as whole-as opposed to Tosev 3 as a hole, which the Empe surely knows it is-the Independent State of Croatia is of n importance whatever, being barely visible to the naked ey But its position gives it importance to the Deutsche, who d not want us gaining influence there at their expense. And w have deliberately kept our effort there on a small scale, confin ing it to the coastal city of Split."

"If you can damage the Deutsche in this Croatia place, wh make only a small effort?" Kirel asked. "They are among th most dangerous of the Tosevites."

'To us, though, Superb Shiplord, Croatia has no great signi ficance," Drefsab said. "And, in any case, I am seeking t elicit a specific response from the Deutsche. I don't want the flooding the area with males; the terrain inland is mountainou and very bad for ' both armor and aircraft. I want them to brin in their own specialists in sabotage and destruction, and then want to trap and destroy those specialists."

'This is the lure you have prepared for Skorzeny," Atvar ex claimed.

"Exalted Heetlord, it is," Drefsab agreed. "As you poin ouL he has embarrassed the Race too many times. Soon he wil do so no more."

"Eliminating Skorzeny will go a long way toward getting ri(

of a weakness you just finished discussing, Exalted Heetlord," Kirel said excitedly. "Big Uglies around the world will have new reason to fear us once we take him out of play." "Exactly so." Atvar turned his eye turrets back toward Drefsab. "How fares your other battle?"

... Me one against the Tosevite herb, you mean?" Drefsab let out a long hiss. "I still taste now and again; that far, the addiction keeps its hold. I continue to struggle not to let it master all my thoughts. It has my body, but I work to keep my mind as free as I can."

"Another lonely battle, and a brave one," Atvar said. "So many yield both to ginger."

"As free as I can, I said," Drefsab answered. Dropping his eyes in deference, he went on, "Emperor knows the craving never leaves, not altogether. Under the worst circumstances, who knows what I might do for a taste? For that very reason, I attempt to avoid placing myself in those circumstances."

Atvar and Kirel also looked down at the yellow-brown sand. When the fleetlord raised his eyes once more, he said, "Your discipline in the face of this adversity does you great credit. Because of it, I am all the more certain you will succeed in eliminating that menace, Skorzeny."

"Exalted Fleetlord, it shall be done," Drefsab said.

Vyacheslav Molotov peered between the backs of Stalin and his generals to study the map pinned down on the table in front of them. From the way things looked, Soviet forces were effectively pinned down, too.

"Comrade General Secretary, if Moscow is to be held, we need more men, more armor, more aircraft, and above all more time to place our assets in proper position," Marshal Georgi Zhukov said. "Absent these, I do not see how we are to prevail."

Few men dared speak so boldly to Stalin; Zbukov had won the right by his successes first in Mongolia against the Japanese, then defending Moscow from the Germans, and finally in holding the Lizards at bay through the winter just past. Stalin sucked on his pipe. It was empty; not even he could get tobacco these days. He said, "Georgi Konstantinovich, you saved this city once. Can you not do it again?"

"Then I had fresh troops from Siberia, and the fascists were

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at the end of their tether," Zhukov answered. "Neither appli here. Without some special miracle, we shall be defeate the dialectic does not allow for miracles." Stalin grunted. Like so many revolutionaries, especial Georgian ones, he'd had seminary training. Now he said, ' dialectic may not allow for n-Aracles, Comrade Marshal, b nevertheless I think I may be able to furnish you with one. Zhukov scratched his head. He was a blocky, round-fac man, much more typically Russian in looks than the slend Molotov. "What sort of miracle do you have in mind?" asked.

Molotov had wondered the same thing, but all at once I knew. Fear coursed through him. "losef Vissarionovich, have discussed the reasons for not using this weapon," he sai urgently. "As far as I can see, they remain valid." That was as close as he'd come in years to criticizing Stah

The general secretary whirled around in surprise, the pip jumping in his mouth. "If the choice is between going down defeat after using every weapon we have and yielding tame without making every effort to hit back at the enemy, I prefo the former."

Zhukov didn't say anything. Ivan Koniev asked, "Wh

weapon is this? If we have a weapon that will let us hurt Lizards, I say we use it-and to the devil's grandmother wi the consequences."

After Zhukov, Koniev was the best general Stalin had. If didn't know about the explosive-metal bomb project, the s crecy was even more extraordinary than Molotov had imaj ined. He asked Stalin, "May we speak freely of this weapon?

The pipe waggled again. "The time has come when we ma speak freely of this weapon," Stalin answered. He turned Koniev. "We have, Ivan Stepanovich, a bomb of the sort th Lizards used on, Berlin and Washington. If they break throu at Kaluga and advance on Moscow, I propose to use it again them.,,

With his crooked front teeth, Koniev looked even more lik a middle-aged peasant than Zhukov did. "Bozhemoi, " he sai softly. "If we have such-you are right, Comrade General Se(retary: if we have such bombs, we should use them against th foe."

"We have one such bomb," Molotov said, "and no prospe

of getting more for some time. No one knows how many Of these bombs the Lizards have-but we may be about to find out by experiment."

"Oh," Koniev said, and then again, in a whisper, "Bozhemoi. " Glancing nervously at Stalin, he went on, "This is a choice we must face with great seriousness. One of these bombs, by report, can devastate a city as thoroughly as several weeks of unchallenged bombardment by an ordinary air force." Now the pipe worked angrily in Stalin's mouth. Before he could speak, Molotov said, "These reports are true, Comrade General. I have seen photographs of both Washington and Berlin. ne melted stump of the Washington Monument---2' He did not go on, both from the remembered horror of the photographs and for fear of further antagonizing Stalin. But he was too afraid of what would happen if explosive-metal bombs began to be used freely to keep silent.

Stalin -paced back and forth. He did not put down the incipient rebellion at once, which was unusual. Maybe, Molotov thought, he has doubts, too. Stalin nodded to Zhukov. "How say you, Georgi Konstantinovich?"

Zhukov and Stalin were the same sort of military team as Molotov and Stalin were a political team: Stalin the guiding will, the other man the instrument that shaped the will to practical ends. Zhukov licked his lips; plainly he was of two minds, too. At last he said, "Comrade General Secretary, if we do not use this weapon, I see nothing that will keep us from being overrun. We may be able to continue partisan warfare against the Lizards, but not much more. How can what they do to us after we use the weapon be worse than what they will do to us if we do not use it?"

"Have you seen the pictures of Berlin?" Molotov demanded. By then, he was certain, he had raised Stalin's wrath, but he was too upset even to be frightened. That was most unusual; he would have to examine the feeling later. No time now.

Zhukov nodded. "Comrade Foreign Commissar, I have. They are terrible. But have you seen pictures of Kiev after first the fascists and then the Lizards went through it? They are just as bad. This bomb is a more efficient means of destruction, but destruction will take place with it or without it."

As always, Molotov held his features immobile. Behind that unsmiling mask, his heart sank. It sank still ftirther when Gen-

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eral Koniev asked, "How do we deliver this bomb? Can drop it from an airplane? If we can do that, can we have so hope of putting an airplane where we most need it without Lizards' shooting it down?"

"Before we examine ways and means, we still need consider whether we should take this course." Molotov's i passive voice concealed the desperation that grew inside hi Stalin pretended he had not spoken and answered Koniev i stead: "Comrade, the bomb is too bulky to fit into any of o bombers, and, as you say, the Lizards shoot them down readily to make them a good way to deliver it anyhow. B planes are for taking bombs to an enemy who is far away. the enemy is instead coming to you-" He let the sentenc hang.

Molotov scratched his head, not sure where Stalin was goin with that. It must have made sense to Zhukov and Konie though; they both chuckled. Zhukov finished the phrase Stalin: '~--you put the bomb where he will be, and wait." "Just so," Stalin said happily. "In fact, we shall encourag him to concentrate in the sector where we shall place th bomb, to make sure we do him as much damage as we can. Now it made sense to Molotov, too, but it didn't make him an happier.

Koniev said, "Two risks here. The first is that the weapo will be discovered; past maskirovka, I don't see what we ca do about that. The second is that a weapon left behind won' go off when we want it to. How do we make sure that does n happen?"

"We have multiple devices to set it off," Stalin answ "One is by radio signal, one is with a battery, and one is Ari a clockwork manufactured by German prisoners in our ern ploy." He spoke utterly without irony; Molotov had no dou those prisoners were no longer among the living. "They did not know to what device the clockwork would be affixed, o course. But it has been tested repeatedly; it is most reliable." "Just as well, considering the use to which it will be put.' But Koniev nodded. "You are right, Comrade General Secretary: however vile the fascists may be, they make excellent mechanical devices. This clockwork or one of the other means you noted should definitely be able to set off the bomb at a time of our choosing."

"So the engineers and scientists have assured me," Stalin

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said with a slight purr in his voice that told what would happen if the engineers and scientists were wrong. Molotov would not have wanted to be in the shoes of the men who labored on that kolkhoz outside of Moscow.

He pushed forward between Zhukov and Koniev. Both officers looked at him in surprise; he was usually a good deal less assertive at military conferences, which he attended mostly so he would know how developments on the battlefield affected the foreign policy of the Soviet Union. He studied the map. Red units represented Soviet forces, green the Lizards, and oc casional pockets of blue German troops that still fought on in the land they had invaded almost two years before-

Even to his unsoldierly eye, the situation looked grim. The makeshift line patched together between Sukhimchi and Kaluga, wasn't going to hold. He could see that already; not enough Red Army forces were in place to hold back the advancing Lizard armor. And once the line was pierced, it was fall back or get cut off from your comrades and surrounded. Nazi panzers had done that to Soviet troops again and again in the desperate summer and fall of 1941.

Nonetheless, he stabbed a hesitant finger out toward Kaluga. "Cannot we stop them here?" he asked. "Any effort, it seems to me, would be better than using the explosive metal bomb and facing whatever retaliation the Lizards may choose to inflict."

"Even Kaluga is too close to Moscow, far too close," Stalin said. "From airstrips behind the city, they can smash us to pieces." But he glanced at ZhukOv before he went on, "If they don't come past Kaluga, we shall not deploy the bomb."

"'fliat is an excellent decision, losef Vissarionovich," Molotov said fulsomely. Zhukov and Koniev both nodded. Molotov felt sweat under the armpits of his white cotton shirt. He wondered if the Tsar,s courtiers had had to tread so carefully in guiding their sovereign toward a sensible course. He doubted it-not since the days of Peter the Great, anyhow, Or maybe Ivan the Terrible.

When Stalin spoke again, his voice held some of the steel that had given losef Dzhugashvili his revolutionary sobriquet: "If the Lizards advance past Kaluga, however, the bomb will be used against them."

Molotov looked to Koniev and Zhukov for support. He

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found none. The marshal and the general were both nodding, perhaps without enthusiasm but without hesitation, either. Molotov made his own head go up and down. Useless to argut with Stalin, he told himself. Useless to antagonize him. He kept on nodding, though in his heart winter's chill had returned to oust the bright spring day. Heinrich Jager glanced up at the sun before he raised the binoculars to his eyes. In the afternoon, the Lizards down in Split might have been able to spot reflections from the lenses. The hill-fortress of Klis in which he sheltered sat only a few kilometers inland from the city on the Adriatic coast.

The Zeiss optics brought Split leaping almost within arm's length. Sixteen hundred years after it was built, Diocletian's palace still dominated Jager's view of the city. Fortress is a better word, he thought. Actually, it was in essence a Roman legionary camp transformed into stone: a rough rectangle with sides of 150 to 200 meters, each one pierced by a single, central gate. Three of the four towers at the comers of the rectangle were still standing. Jager lowered the binoculars. "Not a place I'd care to try attacking, even nowadays, without heavy artillery on my side," he said.

Beside him, Otto Skor-zeny grunted. "I can see why you went into armor, Jager: you have no head for the subtleties."

"What's that Hungarian curse?-a horse's cock up your arse?" Jager said. Both men laughed. Jager peered through the binoculars again. Even they couldn't make the Lizard sentries on the walls of the palace and in positions around it seem much more than little moving antlike specks. They were wellsited, no doubt about that; in set-piece situations, the Lizards were quite competent.

Skorzeny chuckled again. "I wonder if our scaly friends down there knowthat we have better plans of their strongpoint than they do."

-Fhey wouldn't have picked it if they did," Jager answered. The plans hadn't come out of the archives of the German General Staff, but from the Zeitschrift ffir sudosteuropdischen Archdologie. Skorzeny found that vastly amusing, and called Jager "Herr Doktor Professor" every chance he got. But even Skorzeny had to admit that the quality of the plans couldn't have been better had military engineers drafted them.

,,I think you're right," the SS man said. "To them it's just the strongest building in town, so naturally it's where they moved in."

"Yes." Jager wondered if the Lizards had a concept of archaeology. Word filtering out of intelligence said they were conservative by nature (which he'd already discovered from fighting against them) and that they'd had their own culture as a going concern since the days when people were barbarians if not downright (and barely upright) savages. That made Jager think they wouldn , t reckon any building a mere millennium and a half old worth studying as a monument of antiquity.

"So, what are you going to do about getting those cursed creatures out of thereT' Marko Petrovic asked in fluent if accented German. The Croatian captain's khaki uniform contrasted with the field gray the Germans wore. Even though Petrovic wore a uniform, being around him made Jager nervous-he seemed more bandit chief than officer. His thick black beard only added to the effect. It did not, however, completely conceal facial scars that made the one searmng Skorzeny's cheek a mere scratch by comparison.

Skorzeny tumed to the Croat and said, "Patience, my friend. We want to do the job properly, not just quickly."

Petrovic scowled. His beard and scars made that scowl fearsome, but the look in his eye chilled Jager more. To Petrovic, it wasn't just a military problem; he took it personally. That would make him a bold fighter, but a heedless one: Jager performed the evaluation as automatically as he breathed.

"What's the complication?" the Croat demanded. "We're in easy shelling range of the place now. We move in some artillery, open up, aiid-11

The idea of shelling a building that had stood since the start of the fourth century sickened Jager, but that wasn't why he shook his head. "Artillery wouldn't root them all out, Captain, and it would give them an excuse to expand their perimeter to take in these hills. They're staying in town; I'd just as soon keep them down there as long as they're willing to sit quietly!, "You would not be bleating 'patience' if Split were a town

in the Reich," Petrovic said.

He had a point; Hitler waxed apoplectic over German temtory lost. Jager was not about to admit that, though. He said, "We have a chance to drive them out, not just annoy them. I aim to make certain we don't waste it."

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Petrovic glowered-like a lot of the locals, he had a fac(that was made for glowering: long and bony, with heavy eye. brows and deep-set eyes-but subsided. Skorzeny swatted hirr. on the back and said, "Don't you worry. We'll fix those miserable creatures for you." He sounded breezy and altogether confident.

If he convinced Petrovic, the Croat captain did a good job of hiding it. He said, "You Germans think you can do every-

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thing. You'd better be right this time, or--2' He didn't say or what, but walked off shaking his head.

Jager was glad he'd gone. "Some of these Croats are scary bastards," he said in a low voice. Skorzeny nodded, and anyone who worried him enough for him to admit it was a very rugged customer indeed. Jager went on, "We'd better get the Lizards out of there, because if we don't, Ante Pavelic and the Ustashi will be just as happy in bed with them as with us, as long as the Lizards let them go on killing Serbs and Jews and Bosnians and---P

their other neighbors," Skorzeny finished for him. He didn't acknowledge that the Germans had done the same thing on a bigger scale all through the east. He couldn't have been ignorant of that; he just deliberately didn't think about it. Jager had seen that with other German officers. He'd been the same way himself, until he saw too much for him to ignore. To him, a lot of his colleagues seemed willfully blind.

Skorzeny pulled a flask off his belt, unstoppered it, took a healthy belt, and passed it to Jager. It was vodka, made from potatoes that had died happy. Jager drank, too. "Zhiveli, " he said, one of the few words of Serbo-Croatian he'd picked up.

Skorzeny laughed. "That probably means something like 'here's hoping your sheep is a virgin,' " he said, which made Jager cough and choke. The SS man had another swig, then stowed the flask again. He glanced around with a skilled imitation of casual uninterest to make sure nobody but Jager was in earshot, then murmured, "I picked up something interesting in town yesterday." "Ali?" Jager said.

The SS colonel nodded. "You remember when I went into Besatigon, I had the devil's own time finding any Lizards to do business with, because one of their high mucky-mucks had gone through there and cleaned out a whole raft of the chaps who'd gotten themselves hooked on ginger?'

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"I remember your saying so, yes," Jager answered. "It didn't seem to stop you." He also remembered his own amazement and then awe as the bulky Skorzeny writhed his 'way out of a Lizard parizer several sizes too small for him.

"That's my job, not getting stopped," Skorzeny said with a smug grin that twisted the scar on his cheek. "Turns out the name of that mucky-muck was Drefsab, or something like that. Half the Lizards in Besanqon thought he was wonderful for doing such a good job of clearing out the ginger lickers; the other half hated him for doing such a good job."

"What about itT' Jager said, then paused. "Wait a minute, let me guess---this Dref-whoever is down there in Split now?" "You're clever, you know that?" The SS man eyed him half in annoyance at having his surprise spoiled, half in admiration.

"I wasn't stupid to bring you along here, either. That's it exactly, Jager: the very same Lizard."

"Coincidence?"

"Anything is possible." Skorzeny's tone said he didn't believe it for a minute. "But by what he did back in France, he's got to be one of their top troubleshooters. And there aren't any ginger lickers down there. The locals would be selling to them if there were, and the ten kilos I brought with me is gathering dust here in Kfis. And if it's not about ginger, what's he doing down thereT'

"Dickering with the Croats?"

Skorzeny rubbed his chin. "That makes more sense than anything I've come up with. The Lizards need to do some dickering, not just to get their toehold here but also because the Italians were occupying Split until they surrendered to the Lizards. Then the Croats threw 'em out. The scaly boys might be making a deal for Italy as well as for themselves. But it's like a song that's a little out of tune-it doesn't seem quite right to me somehow."

Jager, was indignant at having his brainchild criticized. "Why mtT'

"What this Drefsab did in Besangon, that was police work, security work--call it whatever you like. But would you send a Gestapo man to negotiate a treatyT'

Now Jager looked around to make certain neither Captain Petrovic nor any of his merry men could overhear. "If I were negotiating with Ante Pavelic and his Croatian thugs, I just might." file:///C//2590%20Sci-Fi%20and%20Fantasy%20E-books/Harry%20Turtledove%20-%20Worldwar%2002%20-%20Tilting%20the%20Balance.txt

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Skorzeny threw back his head and bellowed laughter. A cou-PXe I)i Tivitsntu In *ltvaAU d &t smt d ~_,Tvjvqw glanced ever to see what was so funny. Wheezing still, Skorzeny said, "Wicked man! I've told you before, you were wasted in panzers."

"You've told me lots of things. That doesn't make true," 3'~LgeT said, vinach made the SS man ~We I-am a shot the ribs with an elbow. He elbowed back, more to remin Skorzeny he couldn't be pushed around than because he fe Re fighting. Jager gave away centimeters, kilograms, an nasty attitude in any scrap with him; he didn't think Skorzen knew what quit meant, either.

"Here, dig out those plans again," Skorzeny said. "I think know what I want to do, but I'm not quite sure yet." Jag obediently dug. Skorzeny bent over the drawings, clucking a mother hen. "I like these underground galleries. We can things with them."

The halls to which he pointed lay below the southern part o Diocletian's palace. "There used to be upper halls above too, with the same plan, but those are long gone," Jager s

"Then screw them." Skorzeny didn't care about archaeo ogy, just military potential. "What I want to know is, what's i these galleries?'

"Back in Roman days, they used to be storerooms," Jage said. "I'm not so sure what's in there now. We need to talk our good and loyal Croatian allies." He was proud of hi that came out without a hint of irony.

"Yes, indeed," Skorzeny said, accepting the advice in th spirit in which it was given. "What I'm thinking is, maybe w can dig a tunnel from outside the wall into one of thos gallerieS--2'

"Always making sure we don't happen to tunnel into Lizards' barracks."

"That would make things more complicated." Skorzen chuckled. "But if we can do that, we have our good and lo allies make a nice, loud, showy attack on the walls, draw Lizard who happens to be underground up to the top ... then we bring in some of our]ads through the tunnel and up and-what was that? The horse's cock up the arse?'

"Yes," Jager said. "I like that." Then, like a proper devil' advocate, he started picking holes in the plan: "Moving and weapons into the city and into the place that houses

tunnel or at least somewhere close by it isn't going to be easy. And we'll need a lot of men. That's a big palace down there, big enough for a church and a baptistry and a museum to fit inside, plus God knows what all else. The Lizards will have packed a lot of fighters into it."

"I'm not worried about the Lizards," Skorzeny said. "If these Croats decide to hop into bed with them, though, that'll nail our hides to the wall. We have to keep that from happening, no matter what; I don't give a damn what we have to give Pavelic to keep him on our side."

"Free rein would probably do it, and he has that already, pretty much," Jager said with distaste. The Independent State of Croatia seemed to have only one plan for staying independent: hammering all its neighbors enough to make sure nobody close by got strong enough to take revenge,

If Skorzeny felt the same revulsion Jager did, he didn't show it. He said, "We can promise him more chunks of the coast that the Italians are still occupying. He'll like that-it'll give him fresh traitors to get rid of." He spoke without sarcasm; he might have been talking about the best way to sweeten the deal for a secondhand car.

Jager couldn't be so cold-blooded. Very softly, he said, "That Schweinhund Pavelic runs a filthy regime."

"You bet he does, but he's our Schweinhund, and we want to make sure he stays that way," Skorzeny answered, just as quietly. "If it does, every one of these Lizards, that Drefsab included, is ours, too." He brought a fist down onto his knee. "rhat will happen."

Compared to yielding to the Lizards, making deals with Ante Pavelic seemed worthwhile. Compared to anything else, Jager found it most repugnant. And yet, before the Lizards came, Pavelic had been a loyal and enthusiastic supporter of the German Reich. Jager wondered what that said about Germany. Nothing good, he thought.

Shanghai amazed Bobby Fiore. Much of the town was pure Chinese, and reminded him of a large-scale, rowdier version of the prison camp where he'd lived with Liu Han. So far, so good; he'd expected as much. What he hadn't expected was the long streets packed full of European-style buildings from the 1920s. It was as if part of Paris, say, had been picked up, carried halfway round the world, and dropped down smack in

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the middle of China. As far as Fiore was concerned, it didn fit.

The other thing that amazed him was how much damage t city had taken. You walked around, you knew they'd been a war here. The Japs had bombed the place to hell and gon and then burned it when they took it in 1937; he still reme bered the news photo of the naked little burned Chinese b(sitting up and crying in the ruins. When he first saw it, he been ready to go to war with Japan right then. But he'd cool down, and so had everybody else. Then Pearl Harbor c along and said he'd been right the first time. When the Lizards took Shanghai away from the Japs, the hadn't exactly given it a peck on the cheek, either. Who blocks were leveled, and human bones still lay here and the The Chinese weren't what you'd call eager to bury Japane remains, Their attitude was more on the order of let 'em ro

In spite of everything, though, the town, especially the Cb nese part of it, kept right on humming. The Lizards made the headquarters in some of the Westem-style buildings; the re remained ruins. In the Chinese districts, things were going u faster than you could shake a stick at them.

But since the Lizards mostly stayed in the International Se flement, Bobby Fiore mostly stayed there, too. The job he' taken on for the Reds was to keep on looking as much like Chinaman as he could, to keep his ears open, and to report t Nieh Ho-T'ing anything interesting he heard. The Red offic had promised he'd get to go along when the guerrillas tried raid based on what he'd learned.

So far, that hadn't happened. "And I'm not gonna wo about it, neither," Fiore muttered under his breath. "Yeah, wouldn't mind nailing a few of those scaly bastards, but didn't hire out to be no hero."

He walked across the Garden Bridge over Soochow C from the Bund to the Hongkew district to the north. Soocho Creek itself was filled with junks and other small Chines boats whose names Fiore didn't know: from all he'd hear(people were born and raised and grew up and died on thos boats. Some of them made their living fishing on the cree others worked on land but didn't have anyplace else to stay

The Hongkew district, in spite of its Chinese name, was p of the International Settlement. The Lizards had an observatio post, and probably a machine-gun nest, in the clock tower o

the Head Post Office, which lay along Soochow Creek between Broadway and North Szechuen Road.

Bobby Fiore was tempted to duck into the Temple of the Queen of Heaven just a few yards north of the Garden Bridge, even though the Chinese didn't mean the Virgin. In the temple's inner court were the images of the gods Lin Tsiang Ching, who was supposed to see everything within a thousand li of Shanghai, and Ching Tsiang Ching, who was supposed to hear everything within the same distance.

Fiore glanced up toward heaven. "They're just patron saints, kind of," he murmured to the Catholic God he assumed to be glancing down at him. The heavens remained mute. He walked past the Temple of the Queen of Heaven this time, though he'd gone in before.

Streets and sidewalks were crowded. No cars and trucks were running except Lizard models and human-made ones taken over by the Lizards, but people, rickshaws, pedicabs and draft animals took up the slack. Beggars staked out squ;;~s of sidewalk; some of them chalked on the paving stones messages of woe Fiore couldn't read. They reminded him of the poor out-of-work bastards who'd hawked apples on streetcomers when the Depression was at its worst.

If the streets had been crowded, the Hongkew marketplace, at the comer of Boone and Woosung Roads, was jammed. Fishermen from Soochow Creek, farmers, butchers-all cried their wares at something just over the top of their lungs. If the market in the prison camp where he'd stayed with Liu Han was Fan's Field in Decatur, this place had to be Yankee Stadium.

Not only locals shopped here, either. Lizards made their skittering, herky-jerky progress from one stall to another. They could simply have taken whatever they wanted; from what Nieh Ho-Ving had said, they'd done that at first.

"Now they pay," he'd said. "They learn that if they give nothing to get something, it is not in the market square the next time they want it."

Sure enough, a Lizard bought a live, kicking lobster and paid the stall keeper in Chinese silver dollars, which, for reasons Fiore could not fathom, were also called Mex dollars. The Lizard's companion said to him, "These are tasty creatures. Go on, lanxx, buy several more. We can cook them for the commandant's midday reception tomorrow."

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"It shall be done, superior Sir," said the lobster buyer, pre surnably lanxx. He went back to bargaining with the fishe man.

Fiore bent his head down and did his best to look Chinese The brim of his conical straw hat covered his nose and too round eyes; he wore drab, dark cottons that reminded him o pajamas, just like most other people. The Lizards should hav file:///C//2590%20Sci-Fi%20and%20Fantasy%20E-books/Harry%20Turtledove%20-%20Worldwar%2002%20-%20Tilting%20the%20Balance.txt

no reason to notice his skin wasn't exactly the right color. They didn't. They went off with their purchases, holding them carefully to avoid the lobsters' flailing claws. Bobby Fiore followed them back across the Garden Bridge. The Liz ards paid no attention to him; as far as they were concerned he was just another Big Ugly.

Now which commandant were you talking about? he asked them silently. They went through the Public Garden near the South edge of the Garden Bridge, and then on to the British Consulate. Fiore skinned back his teeth in a fierce grin; that was where the Lizard commandant for all Shanghai had his headquarters.

Not all of the International Settlement was posh buildings full of foreigners-or rather, now, full of Lizards. In an alley off Foochow Road, jammed in between other equally unpretentious erections, was a dilapidated place called the Sweetheart; the door had the name in English and what he presumed to be its equivalent in Chinese characters. When Fiore went inside, he was greeted by a blast of scratchy jazz from a phonograph and by the multilingual chatter of the working girls in the front lounge.

He snorted laughter. Nieh Ho-T'ing was one smart cookie. The Reds had a reputation for being bluenoses. Who would have figured one of their big wheels would set up shop in a whorehouse?

As far as Bobby knew, Nieh didn't go to bed with any of the girls. He didn't mind if Fiore enjoyed himself, though, and some of the Russians, girls whose parents had been on the losing side of the Revolution and had to get out one step ahead of Lenin's bully boys, were simply gorgeous. He wondered what they thought of being in cahoots with a Red now. He hadn't tried finding out; he'd learned to keep his mouth shut when he wasn't sure about the person he was talking to. He opened the door to the lounge. The jazz got louder. The

chatter, on the other hand, suddenly stopped. Then the girls recognized him and started gabbing again.

He looked around like a kid in a candy store. Russians, Eurasians, Chinese, Koreans, some in European-style lingerie, others in clinging dresses of Chinese silk slit up to here and sometimes down to there, too ... just being a fly on the wall at the Sweetheart was almost as good as getting laid at some of the dismal sporting houses he'd been to back in the States.

"Is Uncle Wu around?" he asked; that was the name Nieh Ho-T'ing used hereabouts. Another wonderful thing about the Sweetheart was that he could speak English. Almost all the girls understood it, and two or three of them were about as fluent as he was.

One of the Russians, a blonde in a silk dress slit up to here and then a couple of inches farther, pointed to the stairway and said , "Da, Bobby, he is in his room now."

"Thanks, Shura." Bobby made himself look away from the display of creamy thigh and head for the stairs.

Up on the second floor, he made sure he knocked on the third door on the left. If he'd picked the wrong one by mistake, he might have interrupted somebody who didn't want to be interrupted. Too many people in Shanghai carried guns to make that a good idea.

As a matter of fact, when Nieh Ho-Ving opened the door, he was holding a submachine gun himself. He relaxed when he saw Fiore--or relaxed as far as he ever did, which wasn't much. "Come in," he said, and closed the door behind Fiore. "What do you have for me?"

Bobby hated shifting from English to his halting Chinese, but he knew Nieh Ho-Ving would burst a blood vessel if he -rpret. The Red offi-

suggested using one of the hookers to inte cer waved him to a chair. On either wall, multitudes of mirrored images of him also sat down: this was a room in a brothel, sure enough.

He told Nieh Ho-T'ing what he'd heard in the Hongkew market. Nieh listened, asked questions, and finally nodded. "Luncheon tomorrow for their commandant in the British Consulate, you say?" he mused when Fiore was done. "Maybe we can make it a livelier occasion than the little scaly devils expect, eh?"

"'V-Ah " 'Robby Fiore said; one of his frustrations in speak-

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ing Chinese was that he couldn't qualify anything. He had t(go thumbs-up or thumbs-down, with nothing in the Middle. Nieh Ho-T'ing smiled, not altogether pleasantly. He said, was wise to use you and not liquidate you out in the country side. You have brought information I can employ, and which could not have had without you."

"That's nice," Fiore said with an uneasy answering smile

Liquidate wasn't a Chinese word he'd figured he'd pick up ir ordinary conversation, but Nieh used it a lot. The Reds were ir deadly earnest about what they did. You weren't with them you'd better have your life insurance paid up. The really crazy part of it was, whenever Nieh Ho-T'ing didn't make like a revolutionary or a Mafia soldier, he was as nice a guy as you'd ever want to meet. It was as if he put all the murderous stuff in a box and took it out whenever he needed it, but when he wasn't using it, you wouldn't guess it was there.

Now his smile was broad and happy, as if such things as liquidation had never crossed his mind. He said, "I'm going to do you a favor in return for the one you did me. I am sure you will take it in the intended spirit." "Yeah? What kind of favor?" Fiore asked suspiciously. Favors always sounded good Sometimes they were, as when Nieh had said it was okay for him to fool around with the girls downstairs. But sometimes ...

This was one of those times. Still beaming, Nieh said, "I am going to keep the promise I made you: you will be part of our raiding team."

"Uh, thank you." That was the best Fiore could do in Chinese. If he'd been speaking English, it would have come out, Oh boy, thanks a lot.

If Nieh Ho-Tmg noticed the irony and lack of enthusiasm, he didn't show it. "Aiding in the fight against the imperialist devils from another world is surely the duty of every human being. Those who do not join in the struggle are the devils' running dogs, and we know the fate of running dogs, eh?"

"Uh, yeah, sure," Bobby Fiore muttered. Talk about stuck between a rock and a hard place! If he came along for the ride, the Lizards would shoot him. If he didn't, the Chinese Reds would take care of the job. Either way, he could forget about finding out how the latest serial over at the Nanking on Avenue Edward VII was going to end.

Musingly, Nich Ho-Ying said, "your pistol is not a good enough weapon for this work. We will make certain you have a submachine gun.- He held up a hand. "No, don't thank me. It is for the mission as much as for yourself."

Bobby hadn't planned on thanking him. He wished he were back in the Lizard prison camp with Liu Han, and that he'd never, ever tried to teach that Chinaman named Lo how not to throw like a girl.

With a slight curl to his lip--he really was a bluenose at heart-Nieh said, "Why don't you go downstairs and amuse yourself for a time, if you have nothing better to do? I need to find out if we can do what needs doing on such short notice, and the best way to do it if we can."

Fiore didn't need any more urging to go downstairs. If he was going off to get shot at (he carefully didn't think of it as to get shot) tomorrow, he'd have fun tonight. Not much later, he ended up back in one of those mirrored rooms with Shura the White Russian blonde. By any objective standard, she was prettier and better in the sack than Liu Han had been, so he wondered why he didn't feel as happy as he might have when he went back to the room where he slept.

The only thing he could think of was that he'd cared about Liu Han and she about him, but Shura was just going through the motions, even if she played the mattress the way Billy Herman played second base. "Goddamn," he muttered sleepily. "I guess it was love." Next thing he knew, the sun was up.

He went down to breakfast like a condemned man heading off for his last meal. Even eyeing the girls couldn't snap him out of his funk. He was finishing his cup of tea when Nieh Ho-T"ing stuck his head into the kitchen and waved to him. '~Come here. We have things to talk about."

Bobby came. Nieh handed Fiore a rattan suitcase. It was heavy. When Fiore opened it, he found a Russian submachine gun, several magazines of ammunition, and four potat(>-masher grenades,

"You will not go in with us," Nieh said. "You loiter across from the front entrance to the British Consulate. When the time c the ards there if you can and help any human beings who come 019 through those doors."

"Okay," Fiore said in English when he was sure he understood what Nieh wanted from him. The Red nodded; he got

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that. Fiore switched to his lousy Chinese: "How will you ge in the consulate? How will you bring more guns in?'

"I should not tell you-security." But Nieh Ho-T'ing lookei too pleased with himself to keep his mouth shut altogether. Hi went on, "This much I will say: the consulate will have somi file:///C//2590%20Sci-Fi%20and%20Fantasy%20E-books/Harry%20Turtledove%20-%20Worldwar%2002%20-%20Tilting%20the%20Balance.txt

new human cooks and waiters today, and they will be bringinj in ducks to go with the lobsters for the commandant's feast.' He clammed up again-if Bobby couldn't work it out fron there, that was his tough luck. But he could, and started t(laugh when he thought about how those ducks would N stuffed. No wonder Nieh looked so sraug! "Good luck," Fior(said. He stuck out his hand, but yanked it back; Chinamer didn't go in for handshakes.

Nieh Ho-Ving surprised him, though, by reaching out am taking his hand. "My Soviet comrades have this custom; I know what it means," he said, then looked at his watch. "Take your place at noon. The banquet is supposed to begin at half past the hour, and will not last long."

"Okay," Fiore said. If he'd been in a town where he spoke the language, he would have thought about taking it on the lam with the arsenal. Getting the Reds mad at him, though, seemed a worse bet than taking his chances on the Lizards.

He had plenty of time for another screw before he took off. Shur-a came back upstairs with him willingly enough. Afterwards, she blinked when he gave her an extra couple of dollars Mex; he was usually as cheap as he could get away with. "You rob a bank, BobbyT' she asked.

-Rvo of 'em, babe," he said, deadpan, as he started to dress. .She blinked again, then decided it was a joke and laughed.

Suitcase in hand, he headed for the Bund. He knew Nieh Ho-T'ing and his buddies were taking the real risk; if the Lizards inside the British Consulate were on their toes, the scheme was dead in the water. He got to Number 33, the Bund, just as clocks were strWng twelve. Nieh would be pleased with him; when he said noon, he meant on the dot. Now Bobby had to hang around and look inconspicuous fill the fireworks started. He bought a bowl of watery soup from a passing vendor, then had an inspiration and bought the bowl itself. He sat down on the pavement with it beside him and made like a beggar.

Every once in a while, somebody tossed a copper in the

bowl, or even some silver. Bobby kept track-when the shooting started, he had just over a dollar, Mex.

The British Consulate was a large, imposing building. Not even its stonework, though, could muffle the rattle of automatic weapons fire. The Lizard guards at the main entrance whirled around and stared, as if unsure what to do next and unable to believe the ears they didn't have.

Fiore didn't give them much of a chance to think it over. As soon as he heard guns, he opened the suitcase, yanked out a grenade, unscrewed the metal cap at the bottom, pulled the porcelain bead inside to work the friction igniter, and let fly as if he were making a throw to the plate. .

Had there been a runner, he would have been out. The grenade landed right in the middle of the four Lizards. When it went ' off a second later, people who had been exclaiming over the shots inside the consulate started screaming and running instead.

The only trouble was, it didn't knock out all the Lizards. A couple of them started shooting, even if they didn't know just where it had come from. The screams along the Bund turned into shrieks. Fiore dove behind a solid bench of wood and iron; he opened up with the submachine gun. He hoped he didn't hit anybody on the street, but he wasn't going to lose any sleep if he did-those Lizards had to go down. And down they went.

More shots from inside the British Consulate, then those entry doors burst open. Nieh and half a dozen other Chinamen, some wearing cooks' clothes, the rest looking like penguins in fancy waiter getup (though waiters didn't commonly tote automatic weapons), sprinted down the steps and then down the street.

Lizards opened up on them from the roof and from secondstory windows. The fleeing humans started spinning and dropping and kicking, like flies swatted not quite hard enough to die right away. "You just talked about the bastards at the door, goddammit," Bobby muttered, as if Nieh Ho-T'ing were close enough to hear. "You didn't say nothin' about the rest of 'em." He raised the submachine gun and blazed away at the Lizards till his magazine ran dry. He grabbed another one, slammed it into the weapon, and had just started shooting

again when a burst of three bullets stitched -across his chest.

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The submachine gun fell out of his hands. He tried to reach it, found he couldn't. He didn't hurt. Then he did. Then didn't, ever again.

Brigadier General Leslie Groves strode across the campus the University of Denver with his head down, as if he were bull looking to trample anyone who got in his way. That h charging attitude had been instinctive in him until one day noticed and deliberately cultivated it. Thanks in no small p to that, not a whole lot of people got in his way these day "Physicists," he snorted under his breath, again bullish file:///C//2590%20Sci-Fi%20and%20Fantasy%20E-books/Harry%20Turtledove%20-%20Worldwar%2002%20-%20Tilting%20the%20Balance.txt

The trouble with them was, they were so lost in their own efied world a lot of the time that they didn't always feel t pressure he put on them, let alone yield to it.

He didn't note anything out of the ordinary about the until he walked into the Science building and discovered didn't recognize any of the soldiers crowding the downstai lobby. That made him frown; Sam Yeager and the rest of t dogfaces with the Met Lab crew were as familiar to him as shoelaces.

He looked around for the highest-ranking officer he cou find. "Why have we been invaded, Major?" he asked.

The fellow with the gold oak leaves on his shoulders s luted. "If you'd be so kind as to come with me, General-_2' said in the polite phrases lower-ranking officers use to gi their superiors orders.

Groves was so kind as to come with him until he figured o where he was going, which didn't take long. "Major, if I n an escort to find my own office, I'm the wrong man to he this project," he growled- The major didn't answer; he ju kept walking. Groves fumed but followed. Sure enough, the were heading for his office. In front of it stood a couple men who looked as tough and alert as soldiers but wo medium-snappy civilian suits. A light went on in Grove head. He turned to the major and asked, "Secret Service?" "Yes, sir."

One of the T-men, after checking Groves' face against a li tle photo he held in the palm of his hand, nodded to the othe The second one opened the door and said, "General Groves here, sir."

"Well, he'd better come in, then, hadn't he?" an infinitel

familiar voice replied from within. "It being his office, after all."

"Why the devil didn't I get any warning President Roosevelt was coming to Denver?" Groves hissed to the major.

"Security," the other officer whispered back. "We have to assume the Lizards monitor everything we broadcast, and we've lost couriers, too. ne less we say, the safer FDR is. Now go on in; he's been waiting for you."

Groves went in. He'd met Roosevelt before, and knew the President wasn't as vibrant in person as he appeared in the newsreels: being cooped up in a wheelchair would do that to you. But since the last time he'd seen FDR, a year earlier at White Sulphur Springs, the change was shocking. Roosevelt's flesh seemed to have fallen in on his bones; he might have aged a decade or more in that year. He looked like a man wom to death's door.

For all that, though, his grip was still strong when he reached out to shake General Groves' hand after the engineer had saluted. "You've lost weight, General," he observed, amusement in his eyes-his body might be falling to pieces around it, but his mind was still sharp.

"Yes, sir," Groves answered. Roosevelt had lost weight, too, but he wasn't about to remark on it.

"Sit down, sit down." The President waved him to the swivel chair behind his desk. Groves obediently sat. Roosevelt turned the wheelchair to face him. Even his hands had lost flesh; the skin hung loose on them. He sighed and said, "I wish to God I had a cigarette, but that's neither here nor there-certainly not here, worse luck." FDR sighed again. "Do you know, General, when Einstein sent me that letter of his back in '39, 1 had the feeling all his talk of nuclear weapons -nd bombs that could blow up the world was likely to be so much moonshine, but I couldn't take the chance of being wrong. And, it turns out, I was right-and how I wish I hadn't been!"

"Yes, sir," Groves repeated, but then added, "If you hadil't been right, though, sir, we'd have been in no position to resist the Lizards and to copy what they've done."

"That's true, but it's not what I meant," Roosevelt said, "I wish I'd been right, and that all the talk about nuclear weapons and atomic power and who knows what were so much moon-

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shine. Then all I'd have to worry about would be beating ler and Hirohito, and the Lizards would be back on the seco planet of the star Tau Ceti where they belong, and peop wouldn't meet them for another million years, if we ever did

"Is that where they're from?" Groves asked with intere "I'll have to have our liaison man put the question to the ard POWs we have here."

FDR made a gesture of indifference. "As you like, and you have the time; otherwise don't trouble yourself about These Lizards are an astonishing intelligence resource, aren file:///C|/2590% 20Sci-Fi% 20 and% 20 Fantasy% 20 E-books/Harry% 20 Turtled ove% 20-% 20 Worldwar% 2002% 20-% 20 Tilting% 20 the% 20 Balance.txt

they?"

"Yes, sir," Groves said enthusiastically. "The ones we ha here have been extremely cooperative."

"Not just them, General. With what we're learning fro systematic interrogation of all our captives, we'll leap forw by decades, maybe centuries." Roosevelt's expression, whic had brightened, turned cloudy again. "If we win the war, th is-which is what I came to talk about. What I want to kno is, how soon will we have nuclear weapons of our own to u against the Lizards?" He leaned forward in his chair, intend awaiting Groves' reply.

Groves nodded; he'd expected the question. "Sir, I am tol we can have one nuclear bomb fairly soon. England suppli us with enough plutonium that we need to manufacture only few more kilograms of our own to have enough for a bomb Within a year, the scientists here tell me."

"That's not soon enough." Roosevelt made a sour face. "I may do, but every day they shave off it will bring the cou one day closer to being saved. How long for more after th first?"

Now it was Groves' turn to look unhappy. "You unders sir, that we have to come up with all the explosive material them on our own. The pile-that's what they call it---the Me Lab staff has built here isn't ideally designed for that, althoug we are improving it as we gain experience. And one of physicists is scouting a site where we can build a pile that wil give us larger amounts of plutonium." He wondered how Jens Larssen was doing.

"I know about Hanford," Roosevelt said impatiently. "I don't need the technical details, General--4hat's why you're here. But I do need to know how long I have to wait for my

weaponry so I can make sure there's still a country left when I get it."

"I understand," Groves said. "If all goes well-if the pile goes up on schedule and works as advertised, and if the Lizards don't overrun Hanford or wherever we put it-you should have more bombs starting about six months after the first one: by the end of 1944, more or less."

"Not soon enough," Roosevelt repeated. "Still, we're better off than the rest. The Germans might have been tight there, with us, but you've no doubt heard about the mistakes they made with their pile. The British are relying on us; we're passing information to the Japanese, who are well behind us; and the Russians-I don't know about the Russians."

Groves' opinion of Soviet scientific prowess was not high. T"hen he remembered the Russians had got some plutonium from that raid on the Lizards, too. "A wild card," he said.

"That's right." Roosevelt nodded emphatically. His famous jaw still had granite in it, no matter how badly the rest of his features had weathered. "I've been in touch with Stalin. He's worried-the Lizards are pushing hard against Moscow. If it falls, who can say whether the Russians will keep on listening to their government, and if they don't, we've lost a big piece of the war."

"Yes, sir," Groves said. Although he was as securityconscious as a man in his position had to be, he also had a well-honed curiosity-and how often did you get to pick the brain of the President of the United States? "How bad is it over in the Soviet Union, sir?"

"It's not good," FDR said. "Stalin told me that if I had any men to spare, he'd leave them under their own officers, leave them under my direct personal command if that was wanted, as long as they went over there and fought the Lizards."

Groves' lips puckered into a soundless whistle. That was a cry of pain if ever he'd heard one. "He's not just worried, sit, he's desperate. What did you tell him?"

"I answered no, of course," Roosevelt said. "We have a few small differences with the Lizards on our own soil at the moment." The high-pitched laugh so familiar from the radio and the newsreel screen filled the office. As it had so often in the past, it lifted Groves' spirits-but only for a moment. The danger facing-filling-the United States was too great to be

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laughed off. The President continued, "For instance, the Li ards are pushing hard against Chicago, too. They have us c in half along the Mississippi almost as badly as the North with the South during the Civil War, to say nothing of other areas they've carved out of the country. It hinders us e ery way you can think of, militarily and economically both "Believe me, sir, I understand that," Groves said, re

ing how he'd had to bring the plutonium to Denver by way

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Canada. "What can we do about it, though?" "Fight 'em," Roosevelt answered. "If they're going to be us, they'll have to beat us, no other way. From what we he from prisoners we've captured, they've taken over two whole worlds before they attacked us, and they've ruled th for thousands of years. If we lose, General, if we lay down at give up, it's for keeps. That's why I came to talk about atomic bomb: if I have any weapon I can use against tho dastardly creatures, I want to know about it."

"I'm sorry I can't give you better news, sir."

"So am I." Roosevelt hunched his shoulders and let out other long sigh. His shirt and jacket both seemed a couple sizes too big. The burden of the war was killing him; Grovi realized with a jolt that that was literally true. He wonde where Vice President Henry Wallace was and what sort shape he was in.

He couldn't say that to the President. What he did say wa "The trick will be to get through the time between using one bomb we can make fairly quickly and the rest, which w take longer."

"Yes indeed," FDR said. "I'd hoped that would be a s gap. As it is, we'll have to be very careful picking the when we use the first one. You're right that we would be vulnerable to whatever atomic response the Lizards make."

Groves had seen pictures of the slag heap the Lizards It made of Washington, D.C. He heard men who'd seen it about the incongruous beauty of the tall cloud of dust and gas that had sprouted over the city like a gigantic, pois toadstool. He imagined such toadstools springing into bein above other cities across the United States, across the woricL bit of Latin from his prep-school days came back to haunt hin they make a desen and they call it peace.

When he murmured that aloud, the President nodded an

said, "Exactly so. And in a curious way, that may tum out to be one of our greatest strengths. Our Lizard prisoners insist to a man-well, to a Lizard-that they don't want to use their atomic weapons here on a large scale. They say it would do too much damage to the planet: they want to control Earth and settle colonists on it, not just smash us by any means that come to hand."

"Whereas, we can do anything we have to, to get rid of them," Groves said. "Yes, sir, I see what you mean. Odd that we should have fewer constraints on our strategy than they do when they have the more powerful weapons."

"That's just what I mean," Roosevelt agreed. "If wehumanity, that is-can say, 'If we don't get to keep our world, you won't use it, either,' that will give our scaly friends something new and interesting to think about. Their colonization fleet will be here in a generation's time, and I gather it can't be conveniently recalled. If the Lizards lay Earth to waste, the colonists are like somebody invited to a party at a house that's just burnt to the ground: all dressed up with no place to go."

"And no one to pass them a hose to put out the fire, either," Groves observed.

That won a chuckle from FDR. "Nice to know you were paying attention when I made my Lend-Lease speech."

Any military man who didn't pay attention to what his commander-in-chief said was an idiot, as far as Groves was concerned. He replied, "The question is how far we can push that line of reasoning, sir. If the Lizards are faced with the prospect of either losing the war or hurting us as badly as we hurt them, which will they choose?"

"I don't know," Roosevelt said, which made Groves respect his honesty. "I tell you this, though, General: compared to the problems we have right now, I shouldn't mind facing that one at all. I want you and your crew here to exert every effort possible to producing that first atomic bomb and then as many more as fast as you can. If we go down, I'd sooner go down with guns blazing than with our hands in the air." "Yes, sir, so would I," Groves said. "We'll do everything we

can, sir."

"I'm sure you will, General." Roosevelt tumed his wheelchair and rolled toward the door. He got to it and opened it before Groves could come around the desk to do the job for him. That made the old jaunty look come back to his haggard fea-

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tures, just for a moment. He liked to preserve as much pendence as his circumstances allowed. And in that, Groves thought, he was a good representativ for the whole planet. 508

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Mordechai Anielewicz had never imagined he would be relieved that the Lizards had set up a rocket battery right outside Leczna, but he was. That gave him an excuse to stay indoors, which meant he didn't have to see Zofia Klopotowski for a while.

,,It's not that I don't like her, you understand," he told Dr. Judah Ussishkin over the chessboard one night.

"No, it wouldn't be that, would it?" Ussishkin's voice was dry. He moved a knight. "She's fond of you, too."

Anielewicz's face flamed as he studied the move. Zofia would have been more fond of him in direct proportion to any increased stamina he showed. He'd never imagined an affair with a woman who was more lecherous than he was; up till now, he'd always had to do the persuading. But Zofia would drop anything to get between the sheets--or under a wagon, or into the backseat of Dr. Ussishkin's moribund Fiat.

Trying to keep his mind on the game, Mordechai pushed a pawn one square ahead. That kept the knight from taking a position in which, with one more move, it could fork his queen and a rook.

A beatific smile wreathed Ussishkin's tired face. "Ali, my boy, you are learning," he said. "Your defense has made good progress since we began to play. Soon, now, you will learn to put together an effective attack, and then you will be a player to be reckoned with."

'~Corrring from you, Doctor, that's a compliment." Anielewicz wanted to be a player to be reckoned with, and he wanted to mount an effective attack. He hadn't got to be head of the Jewish fighters in Lizard-occupied Poland by sitting back and

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waiting for things to happen; his instinct was to try to make them happen. Against Ussishkin, he hadn't been able to, no yet.

He did his best; the midgame might have seen a machine gun rake the chessboard, so fast and furious did pieces fall. Bir when the exchanges were done, he found himself down a bishop and a pawn and facing another losing position. He tipped over his king.

"You make me work harder all the time," Ussishkin said. "I got some plum brandy for stitching up a farmer's cut hand yes terday. Will you take a glass with me?"

"Yes, thank you, but don't ask me for another game of chess afterwards," Mordechai said. "If I can't beat you sober, I'm sure I can't beat you shikker"

Ussishkin smiled as he poured. "Chess and brandy do no mix." The brandy came from a bottle that had once, by its label, held vodka. People still had vodka these days, but it was file:///C|/2590% 20Sci-Fi% 20 and % 20 Fantasy% 20 E-books/Harry% 20 Turtled ove% 20-% 20 Worldwar% 2002% 20-% 20 Tilting% 20 the% 20 Balance.txt the state of the state of

homemade. For that matter, the plum brandy had to be home made, too. Ussishkin lifted his glass in salute. "L'chayni. " 'Vchaym. " Anielewicz drank. The raw brandy charred al the way down; sweat sprang out on his face. "Phew! If that were any stronger, you wouldn't need gasoline for your automobile."

"Ali, but if I got it running, think how disappointed you and Zofia would be," Ussishkin said. Mordechai blushed again. In the candlelight, the doctor didn't notice, or pretended he didn't He turned serious. "I know telling a young man to be carefir is more often than not a waste of time, but I will try with you Do be careful. If you make her pregnant, her father will no be pleased, which means the rest of the Poles here will not be pleased, either. We and they have gotten on as well as could be expected, all things considered. I would not like that to change."

"No, neither would I," Mordechai said. For one thing Leczna held a good many more Poles than Jews; strife would not be to the minority's advantage. For another, strife among the locals was liable to draw the Lizards' unwelcome attention to the town. They already had more interest than Anielewicz Eked, for they drew their food locally. He preferred staying in obscurity.

"You seem sensible, for one so young." Ussishkin sipped hi

brandy again. He didn't cough or flush or give any other sip he wasn't drinking water. An aspiring engineer fill the war, Anielewicz guessed he'd had his gullet plated with stainless steel. The doctor went on, "You should also remember-if she does conceive, the child would be raised a Catholic. And she might try to insist on your marrying her. I doubt"-now Ussishkin coughed, not from the plum brandy but to show he did more than doubt--2'she would convert. Would you?"

"No." Mordechai answered without hesitation. Before the Germans invaded, he hadn't been pious; he'd lived in the secular world, not that of the shtetl and the yeshiva. But the Nazis didn't care whether you were secular or not. They wanted to be rid of you any which way. More and more, he'd decided that if he was a Jew, he'd be a Jew. Turning Christian was not an option.

"Marriages of mixed religion are sometimes happy, but more often battlegrounds," Ussishkin observed.

Mordechai didn't want to marry Zofia Klopotowski. He wouldn't have wanted to marry her if she were Jewish. He did, however, want to keep on making love with her, if not quite as often as she had in mind. If he did, she'd probably catch sooner or later, which would lead to the unpleasant consequences the doctor had outlined- He knocked back the rest of his brandy, wheezed, and said, "Life is never simple."

"There I cannot argue with you. Death is simple; I have seen so much death these past few years that it seems very simple to me." Ussishkin exhaled, a long, gusty breath that made candle flames flutter. Then he poured fresh plum brandy into his glass. "And if I start talking like a philosopher instead of a tired doctor, I must need to be more sober or more drunk." He sipped. "You see my choice."

"Oh, yes." Mordechai put an edge of irony in his voice. He wondered how many years had rolled past since Judah Ussishkin last got truly drunk. Probably more than I've been alive, he thought.

Far off in the distance, he heard airplane engines, at first like gnats with deep voices but rapidly swelling to full-thmated roars. Then roars, these harsh and abrupt, rose from the rocket battery the Lizards had stationed out beyond the beet fields. Ussishkin's face grew sad. "More death tonight, this time in

the air.11

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"Yes." Anielewicz wondered how many German or Russian planes, how many young Germans or Russians, were falling out of the sky. Almost as many as the Lizards had shot attheir rockets were ungodly accurate. Flying a mission knowing you were likely to run into such took courage. Even if you were a Nazi, it took courage.

Somewhere not far away, a thunderclap announced a bomber's return to earth. Dr. Ussishkin gulped down the second file:///C//2590%20Sci-Fi%20and%20Fantasy%20E-books/Harry%20Turtledove%20-%20Worldwar%2002%20-%20Tilting%20the%20Balance.txt

glass of brandy, then got himself a third. Anielewicz raised an eyebrow; maybe he did mean to get drunk. The physician said "A pity the Lizards can slay with impunity." "Not with impunity. We--2' Anielewicz shut up. One glass

of brandy had led him to say one word too many. He didn't know how much Ussishkin knew about his role as Jewish figbting leader; he'd carefully refrained from asking the doctor, for fear of giving away more than he learned. But Ussishkin had to be aware he was part of the resistance, for Anielewicz was not the first man who'd taken refuge here.

In a musing voice, as if speculating about an obscure and much disputed biblical text, Ussishkin said, "I wonder if anything could be done about those rockets without endangering the townsfolk." "Something could probably be done," Anielewicz said; he'd studied the site with professional interest while the Lizards prepared it. "What would happen to the town afterwards is a different question."

'ne Lizards are not the hostage takers the Nazis were,' Ussishkin said, still musingly.

"I have the feeling they knew war only from books before they got here," Mordechai answered. "A lot of the filthy stuff, no matter how well it works, doesn't get into that kind o book." He glanced sharply over at Ussishkin. "Or are you saying I should do something about that rocket installation?"

The doctor hesitated; he knew they were treading dangerous ground. At last he said, "I thought you might perhaps have some experience in such things. Was I wrong?"

"Yes-and no," Anielewicz said. Sometimes you had to know when to drop your cover, too. "Playing games with the Lizards here is a lot different from what it's like in a place like Warsaw. A lot more buildings to hide among there-a lot more people to hide among, too. Here their rocket launchers and evfile:///C//2590%20Sci-Fi%20and%20Fantasy%20E-books/Harry%20Turtledove%20-%20Worldwar%2002%20-%20Tilting%20the%20Balance.txt

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erything they use for them are set up right out in the openhard to get at without being spotted."

"I don't suppose the razor-wire circles around them make matters any easier, either," Ussishkin murmured.

"They certainly don't." Anielewicz thought about going off in the night and trying to pot a few Lizards from long range with his Mauser. But the Lizards had gadgets that let them see in the dark the way cats wished they could. Even without those gadgets, sniping wouldn't really hurt the effectiveness of the battery: the Lizards would just replace whatever males he managed to wound or kill.

Then, all of a sudden, he laughed out loud. "And what amuses youT' Judah Ussishkin asked. "Somehow I doubt it's razor wire."

"No, not razor wire," Anielewicz admitted. "But I think I know how to get through it." He explained. It didn't take long, By the time he was done, Ussishkin's eyes were wide and staring. "This will work?" he demanded.

"They had enough trouble with it in Warsaw," Mordechai said. "I don't know just what it will do here, but it ought to do something."

"You're still lying low, aren't you?" Ussishkin said, then answered his own question: "Yes, of course you are. And even if you weren't, I'd be a better choice to approach Tadeusz Sobieski, anyhow. He's known me all his life; when he was born, my Sarah delivered him. I'll talk with him first thing in the morning. We'll see if he can be as generous to the Lizards as you have in mind."

With that, Anielewicz had to be content. He stayed inside Dr. Ussishkin's house. Sarah wouldn't let him help with the cooking or cleaning, so he read books and studied the chessboard. Every day, a horse-drawn wagon rattled down the stree~ carrying supplies from Sobieski the grocer to the Lizards at their rocket battery.

For several days, nothing happened. Then one bright, sunny afternoon, a time when neither the Luftwaffe nor the Red Air Force would be insane enough to put planes in the air over Poland, the battery launched all its rockets, one after another, roar! roar! roar! into the sky.

Farmworkers came running in from the fields. Mordechai felt like hugging himself with glee as he listened to scraps of

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their excited conversation: "The things have gone crazy!' "Shot off their rockets, then started shooting at each other!' "Never seen fireworks like them in all my born days!" Dr. Ussishkin came into the house a few minutes later. "You were right, it seems," he said to Anielewicz. "This was the day Tadeusz laced all the supplies with as much ginger as he had. They do have a strong reaction to the stuff, don't they?" "It's more than a drunk for them; more like a drug," Mordechai answered. "It makes them fast and nervous-hairtrigger, I guess you might say. Somebody must have imagined he heard engines or thought he saw something in one of their instruments, and that would have been plenty to touch them Off."

"I wonder what they'll do now," Ussishkin said. "Not the ones who went berserk out there today, but the higherranking ones who ordered the battery placed where it was."

They didn't have long to wait for their answer. At least one of the Lizards must have survived and radioed Lublin, for inside the hour several Lizard lorries from the urban center rolled through the streets of Leczna. When they left the next day, they took the rocket launchers with them. If the battery went up again, it went up somewhere else.

With the Lizards out of the neighborhood, Anielewicz had no more excuse for staying indoors all the time. Zofia Klopotowski waylaid him and dragged him into the bushes, or as near as made no difference. After his spell of celibacy, he kept up with her for a while, but then his ardor began to flag.

Just as he'd never imagined he'd have been relieved to see the Lizards erect their rocket battery in his own back yard, so to speak, he found equally surprising his halfhearted wish that they'd come back.

A disheveled soldier shouted frantically in Russian. When George Bagnall didn't understand fast enough to suit him, he started to point his submachine gun at the grounded aviator. By then, Bagnall had had a bellyful of frantic Russians. He'd even had a bellyful of frantic Germans, a species that did not exist in stereotype but proved quite common under the stress of combat. He got to his feet, knocked the gun barrel aside with a contemptuous swipe, and growled, "Why don't you shove that thing up your arse--or would you rather I did

He spoke in English, but the tone got across. So did his manner The Red Army man stopped treating turn like a servant and started treating him like an officer. The old saw about the Hun being either at your throat or at your feet seemed to apply even more to Russians than it did to Germans. If you gave in to them, they rode roughshod over you, but if you showed a little bulge, they figured you had to be the boss and started tugging at their forelocks.

Bagnall turned to Jerome Jones. "What's this bloody goon babbling about? I have more Russian than I did when we got stuck here-not hard, that, since I had none-but I can't make head nor tail of it when he goes on so blinking fast."

"I'll see if I can find out, sit," Jones answered. The radarman had spoken a little Russian before he landed in Pskov; after several months-and no doubt a good deal of intimate practice with the fair Tatiana, Bagnall thought enviously-he was pretty fluent. He said something to the Russian soldier, who shouted and pointed to the map on the wall.

"The usual?" Bagnall asked.

"The usual," Jones agreed tiredly: "wanting to know if his unit should conform to General Chill's orders and pull back from the second line to the third one." He switched back to Russian, calmed down the soldier, and sent him on his way. "They'll obey, even if he is a Nazi. They probably should have obeyed two hours ago, before Ivan there came looking for us, but, God willing, they won't have taken too many extra casualties for being stubborn."

Bagnall sighed. "When I proposed this scheme, I thought we'd get only the serious business." He made a face. "I was young and naive-I admit it."

"You'd damned well better," said Ken Embry, who was pouring himself a glass of herb-and-root tea from a battered samovar on the opposite side of the gloomy room in the Pskov Krom "You must have thought being tsar came with the droit de seigneur attached."

"Only for Jones here," Bagnall retorted, which made the radarman stammer and cough. "At the time, I remember thinking two things. First was to keep the Nazis and Bolshies ftom bashing each other so the Lizards wouldn't have themselves a walkover here."

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said. "If the Lizards committed more tanks to this front, have a dry time of it, but they seem to have decided they them elsewhere. They get no complaints from me on that score, I assure you." "Nor from me," Bagnall said. "They're quite enough trouble as is." 'There's fighting on the outskirts of Kaluga, the wireless re-

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| | mind as to why we needed this particular headache?" | |
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| | "After that raid on the Lizards' outpost, I had a serious | |
| dis- | | |
| | inclination toward infantry combat, if you must know," | |
| Bagnall | | |
| | said. "What of you?" | |
| | "Well, I must admit that, given the choice between another stint of it and ending up in the kip with that barmaid in | |
| Dover | seine of it and chang up in the kip with that barmara in | |
| | we all knew, I'd be likely to choose Sylvia," Embry said | |
| judi- | | |
| | ciously. "I do believe, however, that we perform a useful | |
| func- | | |
| | don here. If we didn't, I'd feel worse about not shouldering | |
| my | tructur wifle and going out to do on die for Hely Mathem Dug | |
| | trusty rifle and going out to do or die for Holy Mother Rus- sia." | |
| | "Oh, guite," Bagnall agreed. "Keeping the Gen-nans and the | |
| | Soviets from each other's throats isn't the least | |
| contribution we | | |
| | could make to the war effort in Pskov." | |
| _ | Lizard planes roared low overhead. Antiaircraft guns, | |
| mostly | German three shalls into the side of them addies to the | |
| racket | German, threw shells into the air at them, adding to the | |
| Tacket | that pierced the Krom's thick stone walls. None of the | |
| antiair- | and proceed and head being being warry, hone of the | |
| "We've managed that, for the moment, anyhow," Embrycraft guns was stationed very close to | | |
| Pskov's old citadel. The | | |

ack-ack wasn't good enough to keep the Lizards from hitting just about anything they wanted to hit, and drew their notice to whatever it tried to protect. Bagnall approved of not having their notice drawn to the Krom: being buried under tons of rock was not the way of shuffling off this mortal coil he had in mind.

Lieutenant General Kurt Chill stalked into the room, followed by Brigadier Aleksandr German, one of the chiefs of what had been the partisan Forest Republic until the Lizards came. Both men looked furious. They had even more basic reasons than most in Pskov for disliking and distrusting each other: it wasn't just Wehrmacht against Red Army with them, it was Nazi against Jew.

"Well, gentlemen, what seems to be the bone of contention now?" Bagnall asked, as if the disagreements in Pskov were over'the teams to pick for a football pool rather than moves that would get men killed. Sometimes that detached tone helped calm the excited men who came for arbitration.

And sometimes it didn't. Aleksandr German shouted, '71ris Hitlerite maniac won't give me the support I need. If he doesn't send some men, a lot of the left is going to come apart And does he care? Not even a little bit. As long as he can keep his precious troops intact, who cares what happens to the front?"

Bagnall could barely follow the partisan brigadier's fast, guttural Yiddish. It was close enough to German for Chill to have no trouble understanding it, though. He snapped, "The man is a fool. He wants me to commit elements of the 122nd Antitank Battalion to an area where no panzers are opposing his forces. If I send the battalion piecemeal into fights which are not its proper province, none of it will be left when it is most desperately needed, as it will be."

"You've got those damned 88s," Aleksandr German said. "T'hey aren't just antitank guns, and we're getting chewed up because we don't have any artillery to answer the Lizards." -Let's look at the situation map," Bagnall said.

"We've had to fall back here and here," Aleksandr German said, pointing. "If they force a crossing of this stream, we're in trouble, because they can nip in toward the center and start rolling up the line. We're holding there for now, but God knows how long we can keep doing it without some helpwhich Herr General Chill won't give us."

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Chill pointed at the map, too. "You have Russian units here you can draw on for reinforcements."

"I have bodies, God knows," Aleksandr German said, and then was seized by a coughing fit as he realized he'd twice invoked a deity he wasn't supposed to believe in. He wiped his mouth on a sleeve and went on, "Bodies won't do the job by themselves, though. I need to break up the Lizards' concentrations back of their lines."

"It's a wasteful use of antitank troops," Chill said. "I've been wasting Russians-why should your pampered

pets be any different?" Aleksandr German retorted.

"They are specialists, and irreplaceable," the Wehrmacht man replied. "If we expend them here, they will not be available when and where their unique training and equipment are truly essential."

Aleksandr German slammed a fist against the map. "They are essential now, in the place where I requested diem," he shouted. "If we don't use them there, we won't have a later for you to trot them out with all your fancy talk about right timing and right equipment. Look at the mess my men are in." Chill looked, then shook his head with a disdainful expression on his face.

"Maybe you should reconsider," Bagnall told him.

The German general fixed him with a baleful stare. "I knew this piece of dumbheadedness was doomed to fail the moment it was suggested," he said. "It is nothing more than a smokescreen to get good German troops thrown into the fire to save the Anglo-Russian alliance."

"Oh, balls," Bagnall said in English. Chill understood him; his face got even chillier. Aleksandr German didn't, but he got the tone. The RAF man went on, in German again, "Not half an hour ago, I sent a Russian off confirming your-or some German's, anyhow-order to fall back. I'm trying to do the best job I can, given my look at the map."

"Perhaps you left your spectacles behind when you left London," Chill suggested acidly.

"Maybe I did, but I don't think so." Bagnall turned to Aleksandr German. "Brigadier, I know there aren't many tanks on your section of the front; if the Lizards had a lot of tanks, they'd be here by now, and we'd all be dead, not bickering. But are they using those troop carriers with the turret-mounted guns?"

518 WORLDWAR: TILTING THE BALANCE "Yes, we have seen a good many of them," the partisan leader answered at once. "There!" Bagnall said to Kurt Chill. "Are those troop carriers a good enough target for your antitank lads? You'd have to be lucky to take out a Lizard tank with an 88, but you can do all sorts of lovely things to a troop carrier with one." "This is so." Chill rounded on Aleksandr German. "Why did you not say light armor was part of the threat you were facing? Had I known, I would have released units from the battalion at once." "Who can tell what will make up a fascist's mind?" Aleksandr German answered. "If you're going to send men, you'd better go and do it." They left the map room together, arguing now about how many men and guns and where they needed to go rather than whether to send any at all. Bagnall indulged in the luxury of a long, heartfelt "Whew!" Jerome Jones walked over and patted him on the back. "Nicely done," Ken Embry said. "We are earning our keep here after all, seems to me." He got himself a glass of hot, brownish muck from the samovar, then let one eyelid droop in an unmistakable wink. "D'you suppose Comrade Brigadier German has really seen a whole fleet of armored troop carriers, or even so many as one?" Jones gaped; his head swung from Embry to Bagnall and back again. Bagnall said, "I haven't the foggiest notion, truth to tell. But he picked up his cue in a hurry, didn't he? If armor rumbles into the neighborhood, even a literal-minded Jerry can hardly quarrel with rolling out the antitank guns, now can he?" "Doesn't look as though he can, at any rate," Embry said. "I would have to say that hand goes to the heroic partisan." He raised his glass in salute. 'Vomrade German is one very sharp chap," Bagnall said. "How good he is as a soldier or a leader of men I'm still not certain, but he misses very little." "You threw out that line sure it was a lie and expecting him to snap at it anyhow," Jones said, almost in accusation. "Haven't you ever done the like, with a barmaid for instance?" Bagnall asked, and was amused to watch the radarman turn red. "My notion was that if he said no, we'd be no worse off than we were already: Chill was going to balk, and we have nothing save whatever he uses as a sense of honor to Harry Turdedove 519 get him to keep the promise he made to accept our decision.

Giving him a reason he could swallow for doing what we wanted looked to be a good idea."

"And next time, with luck, he'll be likelier to go along," Embry said. "Unless, of course, his men get wiped out and the position overrun, which is a risk in this business."

"If that happens, it will announce itself," Bagnall said, ,'most likely by artillery shells starting to land on Pskov." He pointed to the map. "We can't lose much more ground without file:///C//2590%20Sci-Fi%20and%20Fantasy%20E-books/Harry%20Turtledove%20-%20Worldwar%2002%20-%20Tilting%20the%20Balance.txt

coming into range of their guns."

"Nothing to do now but wait," Jones said. "Feels like being back at Dover, waiting for the Jerries to fly over and show up on the radar screen: it's a cricket match with the other side at bat, and you have to respond to what their batsman does." Hours passed. A babushka brought in bowls of borscht, thick beet soup with a dollop of sour cream floating on top. Bagnall mechanically spooned it up till the bowl was empty. He'd never fancied either beets or sour cream, but he fancied going hungry even less. Fue4 he told himself. Nasty-tasting fuel, but you need to top off your tanks.

Evening came late to Pskov these days: the town didn't have the white nights of Leningrad to the north and east, but twilight lingered long. The western sky was still a bright salmonpink when Tatiana came into the map room. Just the sight of her roused all the Englishmen, who were fighting yawns: even in the shapeless blouse and baggy trousers of a Red Army soldier, she seemed much too decorative to have a rifle with a telescopic sight slung over her back.

Jerome Jones greeted her in Russian. She nodded to him, but astonished Bagnall by walking up to him and kissing him to a point just short of asphyxiation. Her clothes might have concealed her shape, but she felt all woman in his arms. "My God!" he exclaimed in delighted amazement. "What's

that in aid of?"

"I'll ask," Jones said, much less enthusiastically. He started speaking Russian again; Tatiana replied volubly. He translated. "She says she's thanking you for getting the Nazi mothermolester-her words-to move his guns forward. They hit a munitions store when they shelled the rear area, and took out several troop carriers at the front lines."

"They really were there," Embry broke in.

Tatiana went on right through him. After a moment, Jones followed her: "She says she had a good day sniping, too, thanks to the confusion the guns sowed among them, and she thanks you for that, too."

"Looks as though we've held, at least for the time being," Embry said.

Bagnall nodded, but he kept glancing over at Tatiana. She was watching him, too, as if through that rifle sight. Her gaze was smoky as the fires Pskov used for heating and cooking. It warmed Bagnall and chilled him at the same time. He could tell she wanted to sleep with him, but the only reason he could see for it was that he'd helped her do a better job of killing.

The old saw about the female of the species being more deadly than the male floated through his mind. He'd heard it a dozen times over the years, but never expected to run across its exemplification. He didn't meet Tatiana's gaze again. No matter how pretty she was, as far as he was concerned, Jerome Jones was welcome to her.

Crack! Sam Yeager took an automatic step back. Then he realized the line drive was hit in front of him. He dashed in, dove. The ball stuck in his glove. His right hand closed over it to make sure it didn't pop out. He rolled over on the grass, held up his glove to show he had the ball.

The fellow who'd smacked the drive flipped away his bat in disgust. Yeager's teammates and, from behind the backstop, Barbara yelled and clapped. "Nice catch, Sam!" "Great play!" "You're a regular Hoover out there."

He threw the ball back to the PFC who was playing short, wondering what all the fuss was about. If you couldn't make that play, you weren't a ballplayer, not by the standards he set for himself. Of course, by those standards he was probably the only ballplayer at the Sunday afternoon pickup game. He might not have ever come close to the big leagues, but even a Class B outfielder looked like Joe DiMaglgio here.

After an error on a routine ground ball, a strikeout ended the inning. Yeager tossed his glove to the ground outside the foul line and trotted in to the chicken-wire cage that served for a dugout. He was due to lead off the bottom of the sixth. He'd walked his first time up and swung at a bad ball the

second, hitting a little bleeder that had been an easy out. The

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pitcher for the other side had a pretty strong arm, but he also thought he was Bob Feller--or maybe getting Yeager the last time had made him cocky. After wasting a curve down and away, he tried to bust Sam in on the fists with a fastball.

It wasn't fast enough or far enough in. Sam's eyes lit up as soon as he pulled the trigger. Thwack! When you hit the ball dead square, your hands hardly know it's met the bat-but the rest of you does, and so does everybody else. The pitcher wheeled through one of those ungainly pirouettes pitchers turn to follow the flight of a long ball. The ball would have been out of Fan's Field or any other park in the Tbree-I League, but the field they were playing on didn't have fences. The left fielder and center fielder both chased after the drive. Sam ran like hell. He scored standing up. His teammates pounded him on the back and slapped him on the butt.

Behind the backstop, Barbara bounced up and down. Beside her, Ullhass and Ristin hissed excitedly. They weren't about to try going anywhere, not with so many soldiers around.

Yeager sat down on the park bench in the dugout. "Whew!" he said, panting. "I'm getting too old to work that hard." Somebody found a threadbare towel and fanned him with it, as if he were between rounds in a fight with Joe Louis. "I'm not dead yet," he exclaimed, and made a grab for it. He got another hit his next time up, a line single to center, stole second, and went to third when the catcher's throw flew over the shortstop's head. The next batter picked him up with a ground single between the drawn-in shortstop and third baseman; that was the last run in a 7-3 win.

"You beat them almost singlehanded," Barbara said when he came around the wire fence to join her and the Lizard POWs. "I like to play," he answered. Lowering his voice, he added,

"And this isn't near as tough a game as I'm used to." "You certainly made it look easy," she said.

"Make the plays and it does look easy, like anything else," he said. "Mess them up and you make people think nobody could ever play it right. God knows I've done that often enough, too--otherwise I wouldn't have been in the bush leagues all those years."

"How can you hit a round ball with a round stick and have it go so far?" Ristin asked. "It seems impossible."

"It's a bat, not a stick," Yeager answered "As to how you hit it, it takes practice." He'd let the Lizards swing at easy tosses a few times. They choked way up on the bat; they were only about the size of ten-year-olds. Even so, they had trouble making contact.

"Come on," somebody called. "Picnic's starting."

It wasn't a proper picnic, to Yeager's way of thinking: no fire for wieners, just sandwiches and some beer. But the MPs and air raid wardens would have come down on them like a ton of bricks-if Lizard bombers hadn't already used the point of flame as a target for some of their explosive goodies.

The sandwiches were tasty: ham and roast beef on homebaked bread. And the Coors brewery was close enough to Denver that even horse-drawn wagons brought enough into town to keep people happy. The beer wasn't as cold as Sam would have 'liked, but he'd grown up in the days before iceboxes were universal, and failing back to those days wasn't too hard for him.

The breeze kicked up as the sun went down. Yeager wouldn't have minded a fire then, not at all: Denver nights got chilly in a hurry. Ullhass and Ristin felt it worse than he did; they put on the heavy wool sweaters they'd had knotted around their skinny, scaly waists. The sky got dark in a hurry, too, once the sun slipped behind the Rockies. Stars glittered brightly in the midnight-blue bowl of the heavens.

The ballplayers were used to having the Lizard POWs around. One of them pointed up to the points of light in the sky and asked "Hey, Ristin, which one of those do you come from?"

"It is behind Tosev-your star for this world," Ristin answered. "You cannot see it now."

"The Lizards come from the second planet of Tau Ceti," Yeager said. "They've got their hooks on the second planet of Epsilon Eridani and the first planet of Epsilon Indi. We were next on the Est."

"nose are the names of stars?" said the fellow who'd asked Ristin where he was from. "I've never heard of any of 'em."

"I hadn't, either, not till the Lizards came," Sam answered. "I grew up on a farm, too-I thought I knew stars like the back of my hand. I knew the Dippers and Orion and the Dogs and the zodiac and things like that, but there's a lot more sky

Harry Turdedove' 5 than I ever figured on. And Epsilon Indi's like the Southe Cross-too far south to see from here."

"So what're these places like?" the man asked.

"Tosev is hotter and brighter than the sun-the sun Home, I mean," Ristin said. "Rabotev-what you call Epsil Eridani'!--he hissed the name-"is like our sun, but Halle Epsilon Indi"-another hiss-"is cooler and more orang Next to any of the worlds the Race rules, Tosev 3 is cold wet and not very comfortable." He gave a theatrical shiver.

"The sun's a type-G star, a yellow one," Yeager added. is Tau Ceti, but it's at the cool end of the G range and file:///C|/2590% 20Sci-Fi% 20 and % 20 Fantasy% 20 E-books/Harry% 20 Turtled ove% 20-% 20 Worldwar% 2002% 20-% 20 Tilting% 20 the% 20 Balance.txt the state of the state of

sun's at the warm end. Epsilon Eridani's at the warm end the K range, which is the next one over from G, and Epsil Indi's a little fellow at the cool end of that range." "How much of this stuff did you know before you s riding herd on the Lizards there?" somebody asked slyly.

"Some; not all," Yeager said. "If I hadn't known some, would have been lost-but then, if I hadn't known som I wouldn't have gotten the job in the first place." He "I've learned a heck of a lot since then, too." He would h made that stronger if Barbara hadn't been sitting on the gra beside him.

She reached out and squeezed his hand. "I'm proud of much you know," she said. He grinned like a fool. Till B bara, he'd never known a woman who gave a damn how

he was-and precious few men, either. If a ballplayer re books on the train or the bus, he got tagged "Professor," an it wasn't the sort of nickname you wanted to have. He climbed to his feet. "Come on, Ullhass, Ristin-time take you back to your nice heated room." The adjective got t Lizards moving in a hurry; as it usually did. Sam chuckle under his breath. He'd always figured white men knew than Indians, because Columbus had found America and Indians hadn't discovered Europe. By that standard, the ards knew more than people: Sam might have flown to planets in his mind, but the Lizards had come here for real. A the same, though, the gap wasn't so wide that he couldn't m nipulate them.

"So long, Sam See you in the morning Way to pl today, Slugger." The ballplayers said their good-byes. Th pitcher off whom he'd homered and singled added, "I'll q

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you next time--or maybe we'll be on the same side and I won't have to worry about it."

"They like you," Barbara remarked as they picked their way across the dark University of Denver campus with Ristin and Ullhass.

Keeping an eye on them made his answer come slower than it would have otherwise: "Why shouldn't they like me? I'm a regular guy; I get along with people, pretty well."

Now Barbara walked along silently for a while. At last she said, "When I would go out with Jens, it was always as if we were on the outside looking in, not part of the crowd. This is different. I like it."

"Okay, good," he said. "I like it, too." Every time she compared him favorably to her former husband, he swelled with pride. He laughed a little. Maybe she was using that the same way he~ used the promise of heat with the Lizards.

"What's funnyT' Barbara asked.

"Nothing's funny. I'm happy, that's all." He slipped an arm around her waist, "Crazy thing to say in the iniddle of a war, isn't it? But it's true."

He got Ristin and Ullhass settled in their secured quarters, then headed back to the apartment with Barbara. They were just coming to East Evans Street when a flight of Lizard planes roared over downtown Denver to the north. Along with the roar of their engines and the flat crummp! of exploding bombs came the roar of all the antiaircraft guns in town. Inside half a minute, the sky turned into a Fourth of July extravaganza, with tracers and bursting shells and wildly wigwagging searchlights doing duty for skyrockets and pinwheels and Roman candles.

Shrapnel pattered down like hail. "We better not stand here watching like a couple of dummies," Sam said. "Fhat stuff's no good when it lands on your head." Holding Barbara's hand, he led her across the street and into the apartment building. He felt safer with a tile roof over him and solid brick walls all around.

The antiaircraft guns kept hammering for fifteen or twenty minutes, which had to be long after the Lizards' planes were gone. Behind blackout curtains, Sam and Barbara got ready for bed. When she tamed out the light, the bedroom was dark as the legendary coal cellar at midnight.

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Sam slid toward her under the cover. Even through his pa jamas and the cotton nightgown she wore, the feel of her in hi arms was worth all the gold in Fort Knox, and another fiv bucks besides. "Yeah, happy."

"So am I." Barbara giggled. "By the way he's poking in there, you're not just happy."

She wasn't shy about it, or upset, either. That was the goo(half of her having been married before: she was used to th(way men worked. But Yeager shook his head. "Nah, he,, homy, but I'm not really," he answered. "I'd sooner just hok you for a while and then go to sleep."

She squeezed him tight enough to bring the air out in a sur. prised oof "Mat's a very sweet thing to say."

"It's a very tired thing to say," he answered, which made he poke him in the ribs. "If I were ten years younger-aah phooey, if I were ten years younger, you wouldn't want any thing to do with me."

"You're right," she said. "But I like you fine the way you are. You really have learned an amazing amount about the Liz ards in a very short time." As if to prove her own point, she added an emphatic cough.

"Mm, I suppose so," he said. "Not as much as I want to though, not just for the sake of the war but because I'm curious, too. And there's one thing I don't begin to have a clue about."

"What's that?"

"How to get rid of them," Yeager said. Barbara nodded against his chest. He fell asleep with her still in his arms.

Ussmak gunned the landcruiser toward the next Tosevite town ahead: Mulhouse, its name was. After so long going up and down the road between Besangon and Belfort, pushing past Belfort made him feel he was exploring new territory. He spoke that conceit aloud: "We might as well be part of the band of Sherrati--you know, the first male to march all the way around Home."

"We studied Sherran just out of hatchlinghood, driver,' Nejas said. "How long ago did he live? A hundred fifty thousand years, something like that-long before the Emperors unified Home under their benevolent rule."

Ussmak cast down his eye turrets, but only for a perfunctory

instant. No matter how important formalities were to the life of the Race, not getting killed counted for even more. And the more built-up the area got, the more danger the landcruiser faced and the smaller the chance he had to react to it.

A cloth whipped in the breeze above a half-bumt building: not the red, white, and blue stripes of France, but a white circle on a red background, with a twisty black symbol on the white. The Big Uglies used such flapping rags to tell one of their tiny empires from the next. Ussmak felt a certain amount of pride that the forces of the Race had at last penetrated into Deutschland.

Bullets rattled off the landcruiser's flank and turret. The cupola up top closed with a clang. Ussmak hissed in relief- for the first time in a long while, he had himself a landcruiser commander whom he would have minded seeing dead.

"Driver halt," Nejas ordered, and Ussmak obediently pressed on the brake pedal. "Gunner, turret bearing 030. That building with the banner above it, two rounds high explosive. The machine gun is in there somewhere."

"Two rounds high explosive," Skoob echoed. "It shall be done, superior sit."

The landcruiser's main armament spoke once, twice. Inside the hull, shielded by steel and ceramic, the reports were not especially loud, but the heavy armored fighting vehicle rocked back on its tracks after each one. Through his vision slits, Ussmak watched the building, already in ruins, fly to pieces; the flag on the makeshift staff was wiped away as if it had never existed.

"Forward, driver," Nejas said in tones of satisfaction. "Forward, superior sir," Ussmak acknowledged, and stepped on the accelerator. No sooner had the landcruiser begun to roll, though, than more bullets pattered off its side and rear deck.

"Shall I give them another couple of rounds, superior sir?" Skoob asked.

"No, the infantry will dig them out soon enough," the landcruiser commander said. "Small-arms ammunition is still in good supply, but we're low on shells, and we'll need highexplosive as well as armor-piercing if we have to fight inside Mulhouse." He didn't sound happy at the prospect. Ussmak didn't blame him: landcruisers were made for quick, slashing attacks to cut off and trap large bodies of the enemy, not to get

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bogged down battling for a city one street at a time. But taking cities with infantry alone used up males at an alarming rate, even with air strikes. Armor had to help.

A cloud of dust rose not far in front of the landcruiser; dirt and asphalt rose in a graceful fountain, then pattered down again, some of it onto Ussmak's vision slits. He hit the cleaner button to clear them. Inside the landcruiser, he needed to worry about only a lucky hit from artillery-and if a round did pierce file:///C//2590%20Sci-Fi%20and%20Fantasy%20E-books/Harry%20Turtledove%20-%20Worldwar%2002%20-%20Tilting%20the%20Balance.txt

the vehicle, he'd probably be dead before he knew it. Night was falling when they approached the built-up area Ussmak had seen ahead. Nejas said, "We have orders to halt outside of town. This shall be done, of course." Again the commander sounded less than pleased. As if trying to convince himself, he went on, "However good our night-vision equipment may be, our commanders do not care to go in amongst the Big Uglies' buildings in darkness. This is no doubt a wise precaution."

Ussmak wondered. If you lost momentum, sometimes you had trouble getting it back again. He said, "Superior sir, just this once I wish our commanders would stick their tongues in the ginger jar." Maybe he'd have a taste himself after everything was secured for the night. Nejas had searched the landcruiser for his little vial, but he'd never found it. The commander said, "Just this once, maybe they should. I never thought I would hear myself say that, driver, but you may well be right."

Several landcruisers bivouacked together, under the cover of some broad, leafy trees. Not for the first time, Ussmak marveled at the spectacular profusion of plants on Tosev 3-far more varieties than Home enjoyed, or Rabotev 2, or Halless 1. He wondered if all the water on this world had something to do with that: it was the most obvious difference between the planets of the Empire and the Big Uglies' horneworld.

Even with infantry sentries all around, Nejas ordered his crewmales to stay in the landcruiser till they'd finished eating. Then he and Skoob took their blankets and went under the big armored hull to sleep, which gave them almost as much protection from the alert Deutsch snipers as staying inside the turret would have. Ussmak's seat flattened out enough to let him stay inside the forward hull section through the night.

That night should have passed peacefully, but it didn't. He jerked awake in alarm when the turret hatches clanged open.

Fearing Big Ugly raiders, he grabbed for his personal weapon and crawled back through the hull to poke his head up through the bottom of the turret ring.

The silhouette above him unmistakably belonged to a male of the Race. "What's going on?" Ussmak said indignantly. "I could have shot you as easy as not."

"Don't speak to me of shooting." NeJas sounded finious. "For a tenth of a day's pay, I'd tum the main armament of this landcruiser on what are lyingly called our supply services."

"Give the order, superior sir," Skoob said. The gunner had to be even more irate than his commander. "You wouldn't need to pay me to make me obey. I'd do it for free, and gladly. No supply service would be better than the mishatched one we have in place--or no worse, anyhow, for as best I can tell, we have no supply service in place."

"We expended a couple of rounds of high explosive against that machine-gun nest yesterday, if you'll recall?" NeJas said. "And we used the usual amount of armor-piercing finstabilized discarding sabot rounds, too-you may have noticed we've been fighting lately." He sounded as sardonic as Drefsab, the most cynical male Ussmak had ever met.

The driver caught the drift of the way things were going. "We didn't get resupplied?" he asked.

"We got resupplied," Skoob said. Again echoing his commander, he went on sarcastically, "In their infinite wisdom and generosity, the fleetlords of the supply service have deigned to dole out to us five magnificent new rounds, one of which is actually high explosive."

"Aii." Ussmak let out a hiss of pain. "They've shorted us before, but never anywhere near so badly. If they do that for another two or three days, we won't have any ammunition left."

"It's all right," Skoob said. "Before long, they'll stop issuing hydrogen, too, so we won't be going anywhere anyhow."

That alarmed Ussinak 0 over again. Nejas said, "It's not quite so bad. To make hydrogen, all they need is water and energy. If Tosev 3 has too much of anything, it's water, and energy is cheap. But ammunition needs precision manufacture, too, and the Big Uglies who can do precision manufacture, or most of them, anyhow, aren't on our side. So we're short on landcruiser shells. They made it sound very logical when they explained it."

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"Superior sir, I don't care about logic like that," the gunn retorted. "I have a logic of my own: if I don't get rounds my gun, and if the Race doesn't take over some of the plac here that can turn out our rounds, we'll los"ut how can w take them if we don't have the ammunition to do it?"

"Believe me, I wasn't supporting what the supply servic males said, just setting it forth," Nejas said. "As far as F concemed, they all come out of addled eggs. If we don't hav the ammunition to do the job now, it's just going to be tought later." The gunner grunted. "Right you are, superior sir. Let's ge what they gave us stowed-the Emperor knows we'll need tomorrow, even if the supply service hasn't a clue." One afte another, the five new rounds clunked into place in the racks '~Go back to sleep, driver," Nejas said when the job wa done. "That's what we're going to do, anyhow." Ussmak did his best to go back to sleep, but found himse worrying instead. Skoob's circular logic set his own head spin ning. If the Race didn't have the munitions to overcome th Big Ughes, how were they supposed to conquer Tosev 3? Fo that matter, how were they supposed to conquer Mulhouse 'They could fight their way into the town, but what were die3 supposed to do when they had no more shells and supply ser. vices had none to bring forward? Get killed, that's what, Ussmak thought. He'd come too close to getting killed already, he'd seen too many males die around him, to contemplate that with equanimity. He wiggled and twisted on the lowered seat, trying to find a position where he wouldn't have to think. The manufacturers of the seat seemed to have overlooked that important design feature.

When sleep would not come no matter how he tried to lure it, he sat up and ever so cautiously took his vial of ginger from its hiding place. Even though he was alone in the landcruiser, he let his eye turrets swivel in all directions to make sure no one was watching him. Only then did his tongue flick out to

taste the precious powder.

Instantly, his worries about how the advance into Deutschland would continue fell away. Of course the Race would do whatever was required. Ussmak could see, could all but reach out and touch, the best and easiest way to smash the Big Uglies once and for all. He wished Nejas and Skoob were in here with him. His wisdom would amaze them.

But somehow, try as he would, he couldn't make the image glittering in his ginger-filled mind turn from mere image into concrete words and plans. That was the herb's frustration: what it showed you seemed real until you tried to make it so. Then it proved as evanescent as the steam of his breath on a chilly Tosevite morning.

"Maybe if I have another taste, everything will come clear," Ussmak said. He reached for the vial again. Even before his hand closed on it, his tongue flicked out in anticipation.

Liu Han hated the little scaly devils' photographs, whether they moved or stood still. Oh, they were marvelous in their way, full of lifelike color and able to be viewed from more than one perspective, almost as if they were life itself magically.captured.

But they had seldom shown her anything she wanted to see. When the little devils held her prisoner on the airplane that never came down, they'd made moving pictures of the congress they'd forced her to have with men she hadn't wanted. Then, after Bobby Fiore put a child in her, they'd terrified her with images of a black woman dying in childbirth. And now ...

She stared down at the still photograph the scaly devil named Ttomalss had just handed her. A man lay on his back on the paved sidewalk of some city. His face looked peaceful, but he rested in a great glistening pool of blood and a submachine gun lay beside him.

"This is the Big Ugly male named Bobby Fiore?" Ttomalss asked in fair Chinese.

"Yes, superior sir," Liu Han said in a small voice. "Where is this picture from? May I ask?"

"From the city called Shanghai. You know this cityT'

"Yes, I know this city-I know of it, I should say, because I have never been there. I have never been close to it." Liu Han wanted to make that as plain as she could. If Bobby Fiore had been killed fighting against the scaly devils, as certainly looked likely, she didn't want Ttomalss to suspect she was involved. Of that -she was innoc-ent.

The little devil turned one eye turret toward the photograph, the other toward her. She always found that disconcerting. He said, "This male of yours met these evil males who fight us

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while he was in this camp. He met with them here, in this house. We have proof of this, and you do not ever say it is a lie. If he is with the Big Ugly bandits, maybe you are with these bandits, too?" In spite of the interrogative cough, his words sounded much more like a threat.

"No, superior sir." Liu Han used the other cough, the emphatic one. She would have been more emphatic still had she not been feeding the Communists information for weeks. Fear clogged her throat. To the little scaly devils, she was hardly more than an animal. Moreover, she was a woman, and women always ended up with the raw end of any deal. "I think you are telling me lies." Ttomalss used the em-

phatic cough, too.

Liu Han burst into tears. Part of that was strategy as calculating as any general's. Tears bothered the little scaly devils even more than they bothered men: the little devils never cried. Seeing water from a person's eyes affected them much as seeing smoke coming out of someone's ears would have affected her. It distracted them and kept them from pushing as hard as they would have otherwise.

But if she forced the timing of the tears, at bottom they were real enough. Without the scaly devils, she never would have

had anything to do with Bobby Fiore; he'd been just another of the men with whom they'd paired her. But he'd been as good to her as circumstances aflowed-and he was the father of the child that kicked in her belly even now. Seeing him dead in a great puddle of his own blood was like a blow to the face.

And she wept for herself. Just before the little scaly devils came down from the sky, the Japanese had bombed her village and killed her husband and son. Now Bobby Fiore was gone, too. Everyone she cared about seemed to die.

She hugged herself-, her forearms went around the swell of her abdomen. The baby kicked again. What would the little devils do with it once it came out into the world? Fear filled her again.

Ttomalss said, "Stop this disgusting dripping and answer what I say. I think you are lying, I tell you. I think you know much more of these bandits than you admit ... Is that the right word, admit? Good. I think you hide this from us. We do not put up with these lies forever, I promise. Maybe not for long at all."

"Do you know what I think?" Liu Han said. "I think you have night soil where your wits should be. How am I supposed to be a bandit? I am in this camp. You put me here. You put all the people in here. If there are bandits among them, whose fault is that? Not mine, I tell you."

She managed to startle Ttomalss enough to make him turn both eye turrets toward her. "There are bandits in this camp; I admit that. When we set it up, we did not know how many foolish and dangerous factions you Big Uglies had, so we did not weed you carefully before we planted you here. But just because the bandits are here does not mean a properly obedient person will have anything to do with them."

The phrase he used had the literal meaning of properly respec#741 to one's elders. Hearing a little devil speak of filial piety was almost enough to send Liu Han from tears to hysterical laughter. But she sensed she'd made him retreat; he spoke to her now more as equal to equal, not in the badgering way he'd used before.

She pressed her tiny advantage: "Besides, how could I have anything to do with bandits? You watch me all the time. The only place I ever go is to die market. What can I do there?"

"The bandits came here," Ttomalss said. 'This male"-he held up-the photo of Bobby Fiore's corpse-"went with them. You knew it, and you said nothing to us. You are not to be trusted."

"I did not know where Bobby Fiore went, or why," she returned. "I never saw him again after that-till now." She started to cry again.

"I told you not to do that," the little devil said peevishly. "I can't-help it," Liu Han said. "You show me a horrible picture that says my man is dead, you say I did all sorts of dreadful things"-most of which I did-----'and now you want me not to cry? Too much!"

Ttomalss threw his hands in the air, much as Liu Han's husband had when he'd given up arguing with her. She hardly mourried him and her boy any more; her life had taken too many other hanimer blows since they died. The scaly devil said, "Enough! Maybe you are telling the truth. Our drug to learn this works imperfectly, and I noted that we do not want to give it to you for fear of harming the hatchling growing inside you. You Big Uglies are revolting in so many different

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ways, and we have to learn about all of them if we are to ru you properly."

"Yes, superior sir." Being bold came anything but easy Liu Han, however useful she found it. She always breathed silent sigh of relief when she returned to the submissive behav ior that had been drilled into her since childhood. The scaly devil said, "You will be closely watched. If y have any sense, you will act in a way that shows you remern ber this." He stalked out of Liu Han's dwelling. Had he bee a man, he would have slammed the door behind him. Sinc he was a scaly devil, he left it open. Liu Han had le that meant he thought anyone on the street was welcome come in.

She poured herself a cup of tea from the battered brass p(that simmered above a charcoal brazier. Sipping it helped re her-but Dot enough. She walked over and closed the door, that didn't make her feel any more secure. She was as muc the little devils' captive here as she had been in the metal ce on the airplane that never came down.

She wanted to scream and curse and tell Ttomalss exact] what she thought of him, but made herself hold back. Scream ing and cursing would make her a scandal among her neigh

bors, and being the little scaly devils' creature made he scandal enough already. Besides, they might be taking cinema pictures of her, as they had to her shame up in th metal cell. If she cursed diem, they could find out about it. The baby moved inside her, not a kick this time but a sl oceanic roll followed by a quick flutter. Again her arms w protectively round her belly. If she kept on obeying the littl devils, what would the baby's fate be?

And if she didn't obey them, what would its fate be then She didn't think the Communists would disappear even if scaly devils conquered all of China (all of the world, she to herself, something that never would have occurred to h before she spent time with Bobby Fiore). They'd kept right o fighting the Japanese; they would count on the people to hi them from the little devils. And they were very good at re venge.

In the end, fear wasn't what made her go out of her hou. and walk slowly toward the prison camp marketplace. was: fury with the little scaly devils for turning her life upsi

down, for treating her like a beast rather than a human being, for showing her, without the slightest worry over what she might feel to see him dead, the picture of the man she'd come to love-all they wanted from her was to confirm the body did belong to Bobby Fiore.

"Bean sprouts!" "Candles!" "Fine tea here!" "Carved jade!" "Peas in their pods!" "Sandals and straw hats!" "You can't beat my tasty ducks!" "Fine silk parasols-keep your pretty skin white!" "Pork sits sweet in your belly!"

The hubbub of the market square surrounded Liu Han. Along with vendors shouting the virtues of their wares, customers shouted scorn in the age-old struggle to get a better price. The din was dreadful. Liu Han could hardly hear herself thinL

Ttomalsss had warned her she would be closely watched. She believed ihat; the little scaly devils didn't understand people well enough to lie convincingly. But just because they watched her and listened to her, could they understand anything she said in this racket? She couldn't understand people who were yelling right beside her, and the little devils had trouble following even the most plain-spoken Chinese. She could probably say most of what she wanted without their being any the wiser. She went slowly through the market, stopping now here,

now there to haggle and gossip. Even had she been foolish enough to go straight to her contact in the marketplace, the Communists would have trained her to know better. As things were, she spent a lot of time loudly complaining about the fittle devils to a cadaverous-looking man who sold herbal medicines--and who worked for the Kuomintang. If the scaly devils landed on him, they'd be doing the Communists a favor.

Eventually, in the course of her wanderings, she reached the poultry dealer who had his stand next to the big-bellied pork merchant with the open vest. As she looked over the cut-up chunks of duck and chicken, she remarked, as if it were something that mattered little to her, 'The little devils showed me a picture of Bobby Fiore today. They do not say so, but they put an end to him."

"I am sorry to hear this, but we know the ghost Life-Is-Transcendent has been seeking him." The poultry seller also spoke obliquely; that prancing ghost was a precursor of the god of death.

"He was in a city," Liu Han said.

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"May he have aided the rise of the proletarian movement,' the poultry seller answered. He paused, then asked very quietly, "Was the city ShanghaiT'

"What if it was?" Liu Han was indifferent. To her, one city was just like another. She'd never lived in a place that had more people than this prison.

"If it was," the fellow went on, "a heavy blow against oppression and for the liberty of the oppressed peasants and workers of the world was struck there not long ago. In his passing, the foreign devil may well have shown himself to be a hero of the Chinese people."

Liu Han nodded. Since the scaly devils had the photo of Bobby Fiore dead, she'd figured they were likely the ones who had shot him-and the likeliest reason they had for shooting him was his being part of a Red raiding team. He wouldn't have thought of himself as a hero of the Chinese people: she was sure of that. Though living with her had rubbed some of the rough edges off him, at heart he remained a foreign devil.

She didn't much care that he had died a hero, either. She would rather have had him back at her hut, foreign and difficult but alive. She would rather have had many things that hadn't happened. The poultry seller said, "What other interesting gossip have you heard?" The kind of gossip he found interesting had to do with the little scaly devils.

"What do you want for these chicken backs here?" she asked, not responding right away. He named, a price. She sluieked at him. He yelled back. She attacked his gouging with a fury that astonished her. Then, after a moment, she realized she'd found a safe way to vent her sorrow for Bobby Fiore.

For whatever reasons he had, the poultry seller got caught up in the squabble, too. "I tell you, foolish woman, you are too stingy to deserve to live," he shouted, waving his arms.

"And I tell you, the little scaly devils are on especial watch for your kind, so you had better take care!" Liu Han waved her arms, too. At the same time, she watched the poultry seller's face to make sure he understood your kind to mean Communists, riot thieving merchants. He nodded. He followed that perfectly well. She wondered how long he'd been a conspirator, looking for double meanings everywhere and finding them, too.

She hadn't been a conspirator long, but she'd managed to

put a double meaning across. Even if the little devils were listening to and understanding every word she said, they wouldn't have grasped the second message she'd given the poultry seller. She was learning the ways of conspiracy herself.

* XIX

London was packed with soldiers and RAF men, sailors an(government workers. Everyone looked worn and hungry an(shabby. The Germans and then the Lizards had given the cit3 a fearful pounding from the air. Bombs and fires had cut broa(swaths of devastation through it. The phrase on everyone's lip was, "It's not the place it used to be."

All the same, it struck Moishe Russie as a close approxima. tion to the earthly paradise. No one turned to scowl at him as he hurried west down Oxford Street toward Number 200. In Warsaw and Lodz, gentiles had made him feel he still wore the yellow Star of David on his chest even after the Lizards drove away the Nazis. The Lizards weren't hunting him here, either. There were no Lizards here. He didn't miss them.

And what the English reckoned privation looked like abundance to him. People ate mostly bread and potatoes, turnips and beets, and everything was rationed, but nobody starved. Nobody was close to starving. His son Reuven even got a weekly ration of milk: not a lot but, from what he remembered of his nutrition textbooks, enough.

They'd apologized for the modest Soho flat in which they'd set up his family, but it would have made three of the ones he'd had in Lodz. He hadn't seen so much furniture in years: they weren't burning it for fuel here. He even had hot water from a tap whenever he wanted it.

A guard in a tin hat in front of the BBC Overseas Services building nodded as he showed his pass and went in. Waiting inside, sipping a cup of ersatz tea quite as dreadful as anything available in Poland, stood Nathan Jacobi. "Good to see you, Mr. Russie," he said in English, and then fell back into Yid-

dish: "And now, shall we go and give the Lizards' little stumpy tails a good yank?"

"That would be a pleasure," Moishe said sincerely. He pulled his script from a coat pocket. "This is the latest draft, with all the censors' notes included. I'm ready to record it for broadcast."

"Jolly good," Jacobi said, again in English. Like David Goldfarb, he flipped back and forth between languages at will, sometimes hardly seeming to realize he was doing so. Unlike Goldfarb's, his Yiddish was not only fluent but elegant and unaccented; he spoke like an educated Warsaw Jew. Russie wondered if his English was as polished.

Jacobi led the way to a recording studio. But for a couple of glass squares so the engineers could watch the proceedings, the walls were covered with sound-deadening tiles, each punched with its own square grid of holes. On the table sat a microphone with a BBC plaque screwed onto its side. A bare electric bulb threw harsh light down onto the table and the chairs in front of it.

The arrangements were as up-to-date as human technology could produce. Moishe wished they impressed him more than they did. They were certainly finer than anything the Polish wireless services had had in 1939. But that was not the standard by which Russie judged them. In the first months after the Lizards took Warsaw, he'd broadcast anti-Nazi statements for them. Compared to their equipment, the BBC gear looked angular, bulky, and not very efficient, rather like an early wind-up gramophone with trumpet speaker set alongside a modem phonograph.

He sighed as he sat down on one of the hard-backed wooden chairs and set his script in front of him. The censors' stamps-a triangular one that said PASSED FOR SECURITY and a rectangle that read PASSED FOR CONTENT--obscured a couple of words. He bent down to peer at them and make sure he could read them without hesitation; even though the talk was being recorded for later broadcast, he wanted to be as smooth as he could.

He glanced over to the engineer in the next room. When the man suddenly shot out a finger toward him, he began to talk: "Good day, people of Earth. This is Moishe Russie speaking to you from London in free England. That I am here shows the

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Lizards lie when they say they are invincible and their victo inevitable. They are very strong; no one could deny that. B they are not superrnen'~-he'd had to borrow Obennensch from the German to put that across----~'and they can be beatei

"I do not intend to say anything about how I came from M land to London, for fear of closing that way for others wt may come after me. But I will say that I 'was rescued from Lizard prison in Lodz, that Englishmen and local Jews too part in the rescue, and they defeated both th~ Lizards and the human henchmen.

"Too many men, women, and children live in parts of th

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world under Lizard occupation. I understand that, if you are t survive, you must to some degree go on about your dail work. But I urge you from the bottom of my heart to cooperat with the enemy as little as you can and to sabotage his effort wherever you can. Those who serve as their prison guards an(police, those who seek work in their factories to make muni tions that will be used against their fellow human beings-the are traitors to mankind. When victory comes, collaborators wil be remembered ... and punished. If you see the chance, mov against them now."

He had his talk nicely timed-he'd practiced it with Rivk, back in the flat. He was just reaching his summing-up wher the engineer held up one finger to show he had a minute left and came to the end as the fellow drew his index finger acros., his throat. The engineer grinned and gave him a two-finger IV for victory.

Then it was Nathan Jacobi's turn. He read an English traris. lation (similarly stamped with censors' marks) of what Russi(had just said in Yiddish, the better to reach as large an audi. ence as possible. FES timing was as impeccable as Moishe'~ had been. This time the engineer signaled his approval with ar upraised thumb.,

"I think that went very well," Jacobi said. "With any luck a all, it should leave the Lizards quite nicely browned off." "I hope so," Moishe said. He got up and stretched. Wireles, broadcasting was not physically demanding, but it left hirr wom all the same. Getting out of the studio always came as i relief.

Jacobi held the door open for him. They went out together Waiting in the hallway stood a tall, thin, tweedy Englishmar

with a long, craggy face and dark hair combed high in a pompadour. He nodded to Jacobi. They spoke together in English. Jacobi turned to Moishe and switched to Yiddish: "I'd like to introduce you to Eric Blair. He's Wks producer of the Indian Section, and he goes in after us."

Russie stuck out his hand and said, "Tell him I'm pleased to meet him."

Blair shook hands with him, then spoke in English again. Jacobi translated: "He says he's even more pleased to meet you: you've escaped from two different sets of tyrants, and honestly described the evils of both. " He added, "Blair is a very fine fellow, hates tyrants of all stripes. He fought against the fascists in Spain-almost got killed there-but he couldn't stomach what the Communists were doing on the Republican side. An honest man."

"We'need more honest men," Moishe said.

Jacobi translated that for Blair. The Englishman smiled, but suffered a coughing fit before he could answer. Moishe had heard those wet coughs in Warsaw more times than he cared to remember. Tuberculosis, the medical student in him said. Blair mastered the coughs, then spoke apologetically to Jacobi.

"He says he's glad he did that out here rather than in the studio while he was recording," Jacobi said. Moishe nodded; he understood and admired the workmanlike, professional attitude. You worked as hard as you could for as long as you could, and if you fell in the traces you had to hope someone else would carry on.

Blair pulled his script from a waistcoat pocket and went into the studio. Jacobi said, "I'll see you later, Moishe. I'm afraid I have a mountain of forms to fill out. Perhaps we should put up stacks of paper in place of barrage balloons. They'd be rather better at keeping the Lizards away, I think."

lie headed away to his upstairs office. Moishe went outside. He decided not to head back to his flat right away, but walked west down Oxford Street toward Hyde Park. People-mostly women, often with small children in tow-bustled in and out of Selfridge's. He'd been in the great department store once or twice himself. Even with wartime shortages, it held more goods and more different kinds of goods than were likely to be left in all of Poland. He wondered if the British knew how lucky they were.

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The great marble arch where Oxford Street, Park Lane, and Bayswater Road came together marked the northeast comer of Hyde Park. Across Park Lane from the arch was the Speakers' Comer, where men and women climbed up on crates or chairs or whatever they had handy and harangued whoever would hear. He tried to imagine such a thing in Warsaw, whether under Poles, Nazis, or Lizards. The only thing he could picture was the public executions that would follow unbridled public file:///C//2590%20Sci-Fi%20and%20Fantasy%20E-books/Harry%20Turtledove%20-%20Worldwar%2002%20-%20Tilting%20the%20Balance.txt

speech. Maybe England had earned its luck after all. Only a handful of people listened to--or heckled-the speakers. The rest of the park was almost as crowded with people tending their gardens. Every bit of open space in London grew potatoes, wheat, maize, beets, beans, peas, cabbages. German submarines had put Britain under siege; the coming of the Lizards brought little relief. They weren't as hard on shipping, but America and the rest of the world had less to send these days.

The island wasn't having an easy time trying to feed itself. Perhaps in the long run it couldn't, not if it wanted to keep on turning out war goods, too. But if the English knew they were beaten, they didn't let on.

All through the park, trenches, some bare, some with corrugated tin roofs, were scattered among the garden plots. Like Warsaw, London had learned the value of air raid shelters no matter how makeshift. Moishe had dived into one of them himself when the sirens began to wail a few days before. The old woman sprawled in the dirt a few feet away had nodded politely, as if they were meeting over tea. They'd stayed in there till the all-clear sounded, then dusted themselves off and gone on about their business.

Moishe turned and retraced his steps down Oxford Street. He explored with caution; wandering a couple of blocks away from the streets he'd already learned had got him lost more than once. And he.was always looking the wrong way, forgetting traffic moved on the left side of the street, not the right. Had more motorcars been on the road, he probably would have been hit by now. He turned right onto Regent Street, then left onto Beak. A group of men was going into a restaurant there-the Barcelona, he saw as he drew closer. He recognized the tall, thin figure of Eric Blair in the party; the India Section man must have finished his talk and headed off for lunch.

Beak Street led Russie to Lexington and from it to Broadwick Street, on which sat his block of flats. As with much of the Soho district, it held more foreigners than Englishmen: Spaniards, Indians, Chinese, Greeks-and now a family of ghetto Jews.

He turned the key in the lock, opened the door. The rich odor of cooking soup greeted him like a friend from home. He shrugged out of his jacket; the electric fire here kept the flat comfortably warm. Not sleeping under mounds of blankets and overcoats was another reward of coming to England.

Rivka walked out of the kitchen to greet him. She wore a white blouse and a blue pleated skirt that reached halfway from the floor to her knees. Moishe thought it shockingly immodest, but all the skirts and dresses she'd been given when she got to England were of the same length.

"You look like an Englishwoman," he told her.

She cocked her head to one side, giving that a woman's consideration. After a moment, she shook her head. "I dress like an Englishwoman," she said, with the same precision a yeshiva student might have used to dissect a subtle Talmudic point. "But they're even pinker and blonder than the Poles, I think." She flicked an imaginary bit of lint from her own dark curls.

He yielded: "Well, maybe so. They all seem so heavy, too." He wondered whether that perception was real or just a product of so many years of looking at people who were slowlysometimes not so slowly-starving to death. The latter, he suspected. "That soup smells good." In his own mind, food had grown ever so much more important than it seemed before the war.

"Even with ration books, there's such a lot to buy here," Rivka answered. The pantry already bulged with tins and jars and with sacks of flour and potatoes. Rivka didn't take food for granted these days, either.

"Where's Reuven?" Moishe asked.

"Across the hall, playing with the Stephanopoulos twins." Rivka made a wry face. "They haven't a word in common, but they all like to throw things and yell, so they're friends."

"I suppose that's good." Moishe did wonder, though. In Poland, the Nazis-and the Poles, too-had cared too much that Jews were different from them. No one here seemed to care at all. In its own way, that was disconcerting, too.

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As if to ease his mind over something he hadn't even men tioned, Rivka said, "David's mother telephoned this momin while you were at the studio. We had a good chat."

"That is good," he said. Working phones were another thin he was having to get used to a over again.

"They want us over for supper tomorrow night," Rivka saic "We can take the underground; she gave me directions on ho to do it." She sounded excited, as if she were going on safari Moishe suddenly got the feeling she was adapting to the ne city, the new country, faster than he was.

Teerts felt bright, alert, and happy when Major Okamoto led him into the laboratory. He knew he felt that way because the Nipponese had laced his rice and raw fish with ginger-the spicy taste still lay hot on his tongue-but he didn't care. No matter what created it, the feeling was welcome. Until it wore off, he would feel like a male of the Race, a Ulercraft pilot, not a prisoner almost as much beneath contempt as the slops bucket in his cell.

Yoshio Nishina came round a comer. Teerts bowed in Nipponese politeness; no matter how much the ginger exhilarated him ' he was not so foolish as to forget altogether where he was. "Konichiwa, superior sir," he said, mixing his own language and Nipponese.

"Good day to you as well, Teerts," replied the leader of the Nipponese nuclear weapons research team. "We have something new for you to evaluate today."

He spoke slowly, not just to help Teerts understand but also, the male thought, because of some internal hesitation. "What is it, superior sir?" Teerts asked. The warm buzz of ginger spinning inside his head made him not want to care, but experience with the Nipponese made him wary in spite of the herb to which they'd addicted him.

Now Nishina spoke quickly, to Okamoto rather than directly to Teerts. The Nipponese officer translated: "We need you to examine the setup of the uranium hexafluoride diffusion system we are establishing."

Teerts was a little puzzled. That was simple enough for him to have understood it in Nipponese. These days, Okamoto mainly reserved his translations for more complicated matters of physics. But pondering the ways of Big Uglies, even with

a head full of ginger, seemed pointless. Teerts bowed again and said, "It shall be done, superior sit Show me these drawings I am to evaluate."

He sometimes wondered how the Big Uglies managed to build anything more complicated than a hut. Without computers that let them change plans with ease and view proposed objects from any angle, they had developed what seemed like a series of clumsy makeshifts to portray three-dimensional objects on two-dimensional paper. Some of them were Re single views of computer graphics. Others, weirdly, showed top, front, and side views and expected the individual doing the viewing to combine them in his mind and visualize what the object was supposed to look like. Not used to the convention, Teerts had endless trouble with it.

Now, Major Okamoto bared his teeth in the Tosevite gesture of amiability. When the scientists smiled at Teerts, they were generally sincere. He did not trust Okamoto as far. Sometimes the interpreter seemed amiable, but sometimes he made sport with his prisoner. Teerts was getting better at reading Tosevite expressions; Okamoto's smile did not strike him as pleasant.

The major said, "Dr. Nishina is not speaking of drawings. We have erected this facility and begun processing the gas with it. We want you to examine it, not pictures of it."

Teerts was appalled, for a whole queue of reasons. "I thought you were concentrating on production of element 94-plutonium, you call it. That's what you said before."

"We have decided to produce both explosive metals," Okamoto answered. "The plutonium project at the moment goes well, but more slowly than expected. We have tried to speed up the uranium hexafluoride project to compensate, but there are difficulties with it. You will evaluate and suggest ways to fix the problems."

"You don't expect me to go inside this plant of yours, do you?" Teerts said. "You want me to check it from the outside." "Whichever is necessary," Okamoto answered.

"But one reason you have so much trouble with uranium hexafluoride is that it's corrosive by nature," Teerts exclaimed in dismay, his voice turning into a guttural hiss of fright. "If I go in there, I may not come out. And I do not want to breathe either uranium or fluorine, you know."

"You are a prisoner. What you want is of no importance to

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me," Okamoto said. "You can obey or you can face the c sequences."

Ginger lent Teerts spirit he couldn't have summoned witho it. "I am not a physicist," he shouted, loud enough for stolid guard who accompanied Okamoto to unsling his rifle the first time in many days. "I am not an engineer, not a che ist, either. I am a pilot. If you want a pilot's view of what wrong with your plant, fine. I do not think it will help yo much, though." "You are a male of the Race." Major Okamoto fixed Tee with a glare from the narrow eyes in that flat, muzzleless fac never had he looked more alien, or more alarming. "By yo own boasting, your people have controlled atoms for thousand of years. Of course you will know more about them than w do."

"Honto, " Nishina said: "Ibat is true." He went on in Ni ponese, slowly, so Teerts could understand: "I was speaki with someone from the Army, telling him what the atomic ex plosive would be like. He said to me, 'If you want an explo sive, why not just use an explosiveT Bakatare--4diot!"

Teerts was of the opinion that most Big Ughes were idiots and that most of the ones who weren't idiots were savage vindictive instead. Expressing that opinion struck him as im politic. He said, "You Tosevites have controlled fire for thou sands of years. If someone sent one of you to inspect a facto that makes steel, how much would your report be worth him?"

He used Nipponese for as much of that as he could, spoke the rest in his own language. Okamoto interpreted Nishina. Then, much to Teerts' delight, the two of them go into a shouting match. The physicist believed Teerts, the majo thought he was lying. Finally, grudgingly, Okamoto yielded "If you don't think he can be trusted to be accurate, or if yo think he truly is too ignorant to be reliable, I must accept you judgment. But I tell you that with proper persuasion he could give us what we need to know."

"Superior sir, may I speak?" Teerts asked; he'd understood that well enough to respond to it. The surge of pleasure and nerve the ginger had brought was seeping away, leaving him more weary and glum than he would have been had he never set tongue on the stuff.

Okamoto gave him another baleful stare. "Speak." His voice held a clear warning that if Teerts' words were not very much to the point, he would regret it.

"Superior sir, I just wish to ask you this: have I not cooperated with you since the day I was captured? I have told everything I know about aircraft to the males of your Army and Navy, and I have told everything I know-much more than I thought I knew-to these males here, whom your Professor Nishina leads"-he bowed to the physicist-"even though they are trying to build weapons to harm the Race."

Okamoto bared his broad, flat teeth. To Teerts, they were unimpressive, being neither very sharp nor very numerous. He did, however, recognize the Big Ugly's ugly grimace as a threat gesture. Mastering himself, Okamoto answered, "You have cooperated, yes, but you are a prisoner, so you had better cooperate. We have given you better treatment since you showed yourself useful, too: more comfort, more food-2'

"Ginger," Teerts added. He wasn't sure whether he was agreeing with Okamoto or contradicting him. The herb made him feel wonderful while he tasted it, but the Big Uglies weren't giving it to him for his benefit: they wanted to use it to warp him to their will. He didn't think they had, so far--but how could he be sure?

"Ginger, hai," Okamoto said. "Suppose I tell you that, after you go look at this uranium hexafluoride setup, we will give you not just ginger powder with your rice and fish, but pickled ginger root, as much as you can eat? You'd go then, neh?"

As much ginger as he could eat ... did Tosev 3 hold that much ginger? The craving rose up and grabbed Teerts, like a hand around his throat. He needed all his will to say, "Superior sir, what good is ginger to me if I am not alive to taste it?"

Okamoto scowled again. He turned back to Nishina. "If he is not going to inspect the facility, do you have any more use for him today?" The physicist shook his head. To Teerts, Okamoto said, "Come along, then. I will take you back to your cell."

Teerts followed Okamoto out of the laboratory. The guard followed them both. Even through the melancholy he felt after ginger's exaltation left him, Teerts felt something akin to triumph.

That triumph faded as he went out onto the streets of Tokyo.

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Even more than he had in Harbin, he felt himself a mote among the vast swarms of Big Uglies in those streets. He'd been alone in Harbin, yes, but the Race was advancing on the mainland city; had things gone well, he could have been reuiiited with his own kith at any time. But things had not gone well.

Here in Tokyo, even the illusion of rescue was denied him. Sea protected the islands at the heart of the Tosevite empire of Nippon from immediate invasion by the Race. He was irremediably and permanently at the mercy of the Big Uglies. They stared at him as he walked down the street; hatred seemed to rise from them in almost visible waves, like heat from redglowing iron. For once, he was glad to be between Major Okamoto and the guard.

Tokyo struck him as a curious mixture. Some of the buildings were of stone and glass, others-more and more outside the central city---of wood and what looked like thick paper. The two styles seemed incompatible, as if they'd hatched from different eggs. He wondered how and why they coexisted here.

Air-raid sirens began to wail. As if by magic, the streets emptied. Okamoto led Teerts into a packed shelter in the basement of one of the stone-and-glass buildings. Outside, antiaircraft guns started pounding. Teerts hoped all the Race's pilots-males from his flight, perhaps-would return safely to their bases.

"Do you wonder why we hate you, when you do this to us?" Okamoto asked as the sharp, deep blasts of bombs contributed to the racket.

"No, superior sir," Teerts answered. He understood it well enough-and what it would do to him, sooner or later. His eye turrets swiveled this way and that. For the first time since he'd resigned himself to captivity, he began looking for ways to escape. He found none, but vowed to himself to keep looking.

Wearing His Majesty's uniform once more felt most welcome to David Goldfarb. The ribbon of the Military Medal, in the colors of the Union Jack, held a new place of pride just above his left breast pocket. He'd imagined the only way a radarman could win a ground combat medal was to have the Jerties or the Lizards invade England. Going to Poland as a commando hadn't been what he'd had in mind.

Bruntingthorpe had changed in the weeks he'd been away. More and more Pioneer and Meteor jet fighters sheltered in revetments. The place was becoming a working air base rather than an experimental station. But Fred I-Epple's team for evaluating Lizard engines and radars still worked here-and, Goldfarb had not been surprised to discover on his return, still shared a Nissen hut with the meteorologists. The one they had occupied was replaced, but somebody else worked in it these days.

He traded greetings with his comrades as he went in and got ready to go to work. The stuff brewing in the pot above the spirit lamp wasn't exactly tea, but with plenty of honey it was drinkable. He poured himself a cup, adulterated it to taste, and went over to the Lizard radar unit.

It hadn't languished while he'd been performing deeds of derring-do and speaking Yiddish. Another radarman, an impossibly young-looking fellow named Leo Horton, had made a good deal of progress on it in the interim.

"Morning to you," Horton said in a nasal Devonshire accent. "Morning," Goldfarb agreed. He sipped the not-quite-tea, hoping this morning's batch would carry a jolt. You couldn't gauge that in advance these days. Sometimes you could drink it by the gallon and do nothing but put your kidneys through their paces; sometimes half a cup would open your eyes wide as hangar doors. It all depended on what went into the witches' brew on any given day.

"I think I've made sense of some more of the circuitry," Horton said. He was frightfully clever, with a theoretical background in electronics and physics Goldfarb couldn't come close to matching. He also had a fine head for beer and, perhaps not least because he made them feel motherly, was cutting quite a swath through the barmaids up in Leicester. He reminded Goldfarb of an improved model of Jerome Jones, which was plenty to make him feel inadequate.

But business was business. "Good show," Goldfarb said. "Show me what you've got."

"You see this set of circuits here?" Horton pointed to an area of the disassembled radar not far from the magnetron. "I'm pretty sure it controls the strength of the signal."

"You know, I suspected that before I got drafted away from here," Goldfarb said. "I didn't have the chance to test it, though. What's your evidenceT'

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Horton opened a fat notebook with a cover almost the e dark blue of his RAF uniform. "Here, look at these osc scope readings when I shunt power through this lead he He pointed again to show which one he meant.

"I think you're right," Goldfarb said. "And look at amplification." He whistled softly. "We wouldn't just be moted-we'd be bloody knighted if we found out how the ards do this and we could fit it into our own sets." "Too true, but good luck," Horton replied. "I can tell

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what those circuits do, but I will be damned if I have slightest notion of how they do it. If you took one of our L and landed it at a Royal Flying Corps base in 1914-not you could, because no runways then were anywhere near I enough-the mechanics then would stand a better chance understanding the aircraft and all its systems than we do making sense of-this." He jabbed a thumb at the Lizard

"It's not quite so bad as that," Goldfarb said. "Group C tain Hipple and his crew have made good progress with engines."

"Oh, indeed. But he'd already figured out the basic pri ples involved."

"We have the basic principles of radar," Goldfarb protes "But their radar is further ahead of ours than their jet gines are," Horton said. "It's just the quality of the metall that drives the group captain mad. Here, the Lizards are us a whole different technology to achieve their results: no val everything so small the circuits only come clear under the croscope. Figuring out what anything does is a triumph; fi ing out how it does it is a wholly different question."

"Don't I know it," Goldfarb said ruefully. "Iliere have days-and plenty of 'em-when I'd sooner have kicked bleeding radar out onto the rubbish pitch than worked on "Ali, but you have managed to get away for a bit." H pointed to the Military Medal ribbon on Goldfarb's chest. wish I'd had the chance to try to earn one of those." Remembering terror and flight, Goldfarb started to say would have been just as glad not to have had the opportuin

But that wasn't really true. Getting his cousin Moishe and family out of Poland had been worth doing; he knew o pride that he'd been able to help there.

The other thing he noted, with a small shock, was the ei

of genuine envy in Horton's voice. The new radarman's savvy had intimidated him ever since he got back to Bruntingthorpe. Finding out that Horton admired him was like a tonic. He remembered the gap that had existed back at Dover between those who went up to do battle in the air and those who stayed behind and fought their war with electrons and phosphors.

But Goldfarb had crossed to the far side of that gap. Even before he went to Poland, he'd gone aloft in a Lancaster to test the practicability of airborne radar sets. He'd taken Lizard fire then, too, but returned safely. Ground combat, though, was something else again. If one of those Lizard rockets had struck the Lanc, he never would have seen the alien who killed him. Ground combat was personal. He'd shot people and Lizards in Lodz and watched them fall. He still had nasty dreams about it.

Leo Horton was still waiting for an answer. Goldfarb said, "In the long run, what we do here will have more effect on how the war ends than anything anyone accomplishes galbvanting about with a bloody knife between his teeth."

"You go gallivanting about with a knife between your teeth and it'll turn bloody in short order, that's for certain," Horton said.

Flight Officer Basil Roundbush came in and poured himself a cup of ersatz tea. His broad, ruddy face lit up in a smile. "Not bad today, by Jove," he said.

"Probably does taste better after you run it through that soup strainer you've got on your upper lip," Goldfarb said.

"You're a cheeky bugger, you know thatT' Roundbush took a step toward Goldfarb, as if in anger. Goldfarb needed a disunct effort of will to stand his ground; he gave away three or four inches and a couple of stone in weight. Not only that, Roundbush wore a virtual constellation of pot metal and bright ribbons on his chest. He'd flown Spitfires against the Luftwaffe in what then looked to be Britain's darkest hour.

"Just a joke, sir," Horton said hastily.

"You're new here," Roundbush said, his voice amused. "I know it's a joke, and what's more, Goldfarb there knows I know. Isn't that right, Goldfarb?" His expression defied the radarman to deny it.

"Yes, sir, I think so," Goldfarb answered, "although one can't be too certain with a man who grows such a vile carica-ture of a mustache."

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Leo Horton looked alanned. Roundbush threw back his head and roared laughter. "You are a cheeky bugger, and you skewered me as neatly there as if you were ErTol Flynn in one those Hollywood cinemas about pirates." He assumed a fencing stance and made cut-and-thrust motions that showed he had some idea of what he was about. He suddenly stopped and held up one finger. "I have it! Best way to rid ourselves of the Lizards would be to challenge them to a duel. Foil, ep6e, saber-makes no difference. Our champion against theirs, winner take all."

From one of the tables strewn with jet engine parts, Wing Commander Julian Peary called, "One of these days, Basil, you really should learn the difference between simplifying a problem and actually solving it."

"Yes, sir," Roundbush said, not at all respectfidly. Then he turned wistful: "It would be nice, though, wouldn't it, to take them on in a contest where we might have the advantage." "Something to that," Peary admitted.

Leo Horton bent over a scrap of paper, sketched rapidly. In a minute or two, he held up a creditable drawing of a Lizard wearing a long-snouted knight's helmet (complete with plume)

and holding a broadsword. Prepare to die, Earthling varlet, the alien proclaimed in a cartoon-style speech bubble. "That's not bad," Roundbush said. "We ought to post it on a board here." "That's quite good," Goldfarb said. "You should think of doing portrait sketches for the girls." Horton eyed him admiringly. "No flies on you. I've done that a few times. It works awfully well." "Unfair competition, that's what I call it," Basil Roundbush grumped. "I shall write my W and have him propose a bill classing it with all other forms of poaching." As helpful as he'd been before, Peary said, "You couldn't poach an egg, and I wouldn't give long odds about your writing, either." About then, Goldfarb noticed Fred Hipple standing in the doorway and listening to the back-and-forth. Roundbush saw the diminutive group captain at the same moment. Whatever hot reply he'd been about to make died in his throat with a gurgle. Hipple ran a forefinger along his thin brown mustache. "A band of brothers, one and all," he murmured as he came in-

side.

"Sir, if we can't rag one another, half the fun goes out of life," Roundbush said.

"For you, Basil, more than half, unless I'm sadly mistaken," Hipple said, which made the flight officer blush like a child. But Hippie's voice held no reproof-, he went on, "So long as it doesn't interfere with the quality of our work, I see no reason for the badinage not to continue."

I'Ah, capital," Roundbush said in relief. "That means I can include my distinguished gray-haired superior in that letter to my MP; perhaps I can arrange to have his tongue ruled a noxious substance and shipped out of the country, or at least possibly rabid and so subject to six months' quarantine."

Julian Peary was not about to let himself be upstaged: "If we inquire at all closely into what your tongue has been doing, Basil old boy, I dare say we'd find it needs more quarantine than a mere six months." Roundbush had turned pink at Hippie's gibe; now he went brick-red.

"rorpedoed at the waterline," Goldfarb whispered to Leo Horton. "He's sinking fast." The other radarman grinned and nodded.

Hippie turned to the two of them. Goldfarb was afraid he'd overheard, but he just said, "How are we coming at fitting a radar set into the Meteor fuselage, gentlemen?"

"As long as we don't fly with fuel tanks in there, we'll be fine, sir," Goldfarb answered, deadpan. Hipple gave him a fishy stare, then laughed-warily-and nodded. Goldfarb went on, "Horton, though, has made some exciting finds about which part of the circuitry controls signal amplitude."

He'd expected that to excite Hippie, who had been almost as eager to learn about radar as he had been to tinker with his beloved jet engines. But Hippie just asked, "Is it something we can apply immediately?"

"No, sit," Horton answered. "I know what they do, but not how they do it."

"Then we'll just have to leave it," Hippie said. "For now, we must be as utilitarian as possible."

Goldfarb and Horton exchanged glances. That didn't sound like the Fred Hippie they'd come to know. "What's up, sir?" Goldfarb asked. Roundbush and the other RAF officers who worked directly under the group captain also paid close attention.

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But Hipple just said, "Finie is not running in our favor the moment," and buried his nose in an engineering draV ing.

"Time for what?' Goldfarb asked Horton in a tiny The other radarman shrugged. One nwre thing to worry abou Goldfarb thought, and went back to work.

Except for being illuminated only by sunlight, Dr.

Sharp's office in Ogden didn't seem much different from ar Other Jens Larssen had visited. Dr. Sharp himself, a round li man with gold-rimmed glasses, looked at Jens over the tops them and said, "Son, you've got the clap." "I knew that, thanks," Jens said. Somehow he hadn't e pected such forthrightness from a doctor in Mormon Utah. f supposed doctors saw everything, even here. After that hesit tion, he went on, "Can you do anything about it?" "Not much," Dr. Sharp answered, altogether too cheerful for Jens' taste. "If I had sulfa, I could give you some of and cure you like nobody's business. If I had acriflavine, could squirt it up your pipe in a bulb syringe. You wouldn like that for beans, but it would do you some good. But sin4 I don't, no point fretting over it." The mere thought of somebody squirting medicine up b pipe made Larssen want to cover his crotch with both han "Well, what do you have that will do me some good?" he manded.

Dr. Sharp opened a drawer, pulled out several little f6i wrapped packets, and handed them to him. "Rubbers," he s as if Jens couldn't figure that out for himself. "Keep you passing it along for a while, anyway." He pulled out a founta pen and a book full of ruled pages. "Where'd you get it? know? Have to keep records, even with everything all gone hell these days."

"A waitress named Mary, back in Idaho Springs, Colorado "Well, well." The doctor scribbled a note. "You do g around, don't you, son? You know this here waitress' I name?"

"It was, uh, Cooley, I think."

"You think? You got to know her pretty well some way though, didn't you?" Dr. Sharp whistled tunelessly between h teeth. "Okay, never mind that for now. You screw else between there and hereT'

"No." Jens looked down at the rubbers in his hand. Next time he did end up in the sack with a woman, he might use one ... or he might not. After what the bitches had done to him, he figured he was entitled to get some of his own back.

"Just been a Boy Scout since you got your dose, have you?" Sharp said. "Bet you wish you were a Boy Scout when you got it, too."

"The thought had crossed my mind," Larssen said dryly. The doctor chuckled. Jens went on, "Truth is, I've been moving too much to spend time chasing skirt. I'm on government business."

"Who isn't, these days?" Dr. Sharp said. "Government's just about the last thing left that's working-and it isn't working what you'd call well. God only knows how we're supposed to hold an election for President next year, what with the Lizards holding down half the country and beating the tar out of the other half."

"I hadn't thought of that," Jens admitted. It was an interesting problem from a theoretical point of view: as a theoretical physicist, he could appreciate that. The only even remotely similar election would have been the one of 1864, and by then the North had pretty much won the Civil War; it wasn't invaded itself. "Maybe FDR has volunteered for the duration."

"Maybe he has," Sharp said. "Damned if I know who'd run against him, anyhow, or how he'd campaign if he did."

"Yeah," Jens said. "Look, Doc, if you don't have any medicine that'll help me, what am I supposed to do about what I've got?"

Dr. Sharp sighed. "Live with it as best you can. I don't know what else to tell you. The drugs we've been getting the past few years, they've let us take a real bite out of germs for the first time ever. I felt like I was really doing something worthwhile. And now I'm just an herb-and-root man again, same as my grandpa back before the turn of the century. Oh, I'm maybe a better surgeon than Gramps was, and I know about asepsis and he didn't, but that's about it. I'm sorry, son, but I don't have anything special to give you."

"I'm sorry, too," Larssen said. "Do you think I'm likely to find any other doctors who have the drugs you were talking about?" Even if the acriflavine treatment sounded worse than the disease it was supposed to help, at least it would be over pretty soon. You got gonorrhea for keeps.

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"Nobody else here in Ogden, that's for damn sure," Sharp answered. "We share what we have, not that it's Your best bet would be some fellow in a little town who hasn used up all his supplies and doesn't mind sharing them wi strangers passing through. A lot of that kind, though, won treat anybody but the people they live with. It's like we're ing back to tribes instead of being one country any more." Jens nodded. "I've seen that, too. I don't much like it, I don't know what to do about it, either." Before the came, he'd taken for granted the notion of a country stretchi from sea to shining sea. Now he saw it was an artificial co struct, built on the unspoken agreement of citizens and on lo freedom from internal strife. He wondered how many oth things he'd taken for granted weren't as self-evident as th(seemed to be.

Like Barbara always loving you, for instance, he thought Dr. Sharp stuck out a hand. "Sorry I couldn't help y more, son. No charge, not when I didn't do anything. G luck to you."

"Thanks a bunch, Doc." Larssen picked up the rifle he propped in a comer of the office, slung it over his shou and left without shaking hands. Sharp stared after him, but didn't want to get huffy with somebody packing a gun. Jens had chained his bicycle to a telephone pole outside doctor's office. It was still there when he went out to get Looking up and down Washington Boulevard (which US 8 turned into when it ran through Ogden), he saw quite a fe bikes parked with no chains at all. The Mormons were still trusting people. His mouth twisted. He'd been trusting, and look where it had got him.

"In Ogden goddamn Utah, on my way to a job nobody el wants," he muttered. A fellow in overalls driving a hors4 drawn wagon down the street gave him a reproachful stare. F glared back so fiercely that Mr. Overalls went back to mindi his own business, which was a pretty good idea any way yo looked at it.

A puff of breeze from the west brought the smell of th Great Salt Lake to his nostrils. Ogden lay in a narrow stretc of ground between the lake and the forest-covered Wasatc Mountains. Larssen had grown used to the tang of the sea i his grad school days out in Berkeley, but the Great Salt Lake odor was a lot stronger, almost unpleasant.

He'd heard you floated there, that you couldn't sink even if you wanted to. Wish I could throw Yeager in, and find out by experiment, he thought. And that waitress, too. I'd hold 'em under if they didn't drowr on their own.

He stowed the chain, swung up onto his bike, and started pedaling north up Washington. He rolled past City Hall Park and the three-story brick pile of the Broom Hotel, with its eighteen odd, bulging windows. Another three-story building, at the comer of Twenty-fourth Street, had the wooden statue of a horse atop it, complete with a tail that streamed in the breeze.

He had to stop there to let a convoy of wagons head west down Twenty-fourth. While he waited, he turned to a fellow on horseback and asked, "You live here?" When the man nodded, Jens went on, "What's the story of the horse?" He pointed to the statue.

"Oh, Nigger Boy?" the man said. "He was a local racehorse, and he'd beat critters you couldn't believe if you didn't see it. Now he's the best weather forecaster in town."

"Oh, yeah?" Jens said. "How's that?"

The local grinned. "If he's wet, you know it's raining; if he's covered with snow, you know it's been snowing. And if his tail's blowin' around like it is now, it's windy out."

"Walked into that one, didn't IT' Jens said, snorting. The last wagon of the convoy creaked by. He started rolling again, and soon passed Tabernacle Park. The Ogden Latter Day Saints Tabernacle was one of the biggest, fanciest buildings in town. He'd seen that elsewhere in Utah, too, the temples much more the focus of public life than the buildings dedicated to secular administration.

Separation of church and state was another of the thin~s he'd taken for granted that didn't turn out to be as automatic as he'd thought. Here in Utah, he got the feeling they separated things to keep outsiders happy, without really buying into the notion that that was the right and proper way to operate. He shrugged. It wasn't his problem. He had plenty of his

own.

Just past the city cemetery, a concrete bridge took him over the Ogden River, By then, he was just about out of town. The scrubby country ahead didn't look any too appetizing. No wonder the Mormons settled here, he thought. Who else would be crazy enough to want land like this?

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He lifted one hand to scratch his head. As far as he concerned, what the Mormons believed was good only belly laugh. Even so, he'd never felt safer in all his travels he did in Utah. Whether the doctrines were true or not, t turned out solid people.

Is that what the answer is? he wondered: as long as you riously believe in something, almost no matter what, you a pretty good chance of ending up okay? He didn't care for idea. He'd dedicated his career to pulling objective truth out the physical world. Theological mumbo-jumbo wasn't s posed to stack up against that kind of dedication. But it did. Maybe the Mormons didn't know a thing ab nuclear physics, but they seemed pretty much content with t lives they were living, which was a hell of a lot more than could say himself.

Putting your faith in what some book told you, without other evidence to show it was on the right track, struck him something right out of the Middle Ages. Ever since the Renal sance, people had been looking for a better, freer way to li Jesus loves mel This I knowl 'Cause the Biblel Tells me Jens' lip curled derisively. Sunday school pap, that's what was.

And yet ... When you looked at it the right way, accepti your religion could be oddly liberating. Instead of being free

make choices, you were free from making them: they'd ready been made for you, and a you had to do was follo along.

"Yeah, that's what Hitler and Stalin peddle, too," Larss said as he left Ogden behind. Thinking was what he did be the idea of turning that part of him over to somebody else se the heebie-jeebies running up and down his spine.

People looked up from whatever they were doing when rode past. He didn't know how they did it, but they could te he didn't belong here. Maybe somebody'd pinned a sign him: I AM A GENTILE. He laughed, partly at himself, partly Utah. Hell, even Jews were gentiles here.

Up ahead on US 89, a fellow was riding a buckboard th had probably been sitting in the barn since his grandfather day. As Jens put his back into pedaling and whizzed past th gray mule drawing the buggy, the man called out to him: "Yo headin' up toward Idaho, stranger?"

Stranger Yeah, they could tell, all right. Larssen almost kept going without answering, but the question hadn't sounded hostile or suspicious. He slowed down and said, "What if I am?" "Just that you oughta be careful, is all," the man on the buckboard answered. "Iliern Lizard things, there's some of lem up there, I hear tell."

"Are there?" Jens said. If he wanted to abdicate responsibility for his fife, that would be the way to do it. He had enough reasons for thinking it wouldn't be such a bad thing, either. He owed so many people so much . . . "Are there? Good." He turned on the heat, and left the fellow in the buggy staring after him.

The only way Mutt Daniels had ever wanted to see the south side of Chicago was to bring in a big-league team to play the White Sox at Comiskey Park. He'd learned, though, that what you wanted and what life handed you all too often weren't the same thing.

Take the gold bars he wore on his shoulders. He hadn't even changed shirts when he got 'em, because he had only one shirt. He'd just taken off the stripes with somebody's bayonet and put on lieutenant's insignia instead. People from his old squad still called him Sarge. He didn't care. He felt like a sergeant, and the platoon he was leading now had taken enough casualties that it had only two squads' worth of guys, anyway. One nice thing about turning into an officer was that he got his orders with one less layer of manure on top, and that they gave him a bigger picture of what was going on. As now: Captain Sid Klein (who'd been Lieutenant Klein till Captain Maczek got hit) drew in the dirt between the ruins of what hadn't been fancy apartment buildings even before the Lizards came, saying, "It may not look that way, boys, but the brass says we've got these scaly bastards right where we want 'ern." "Yeah, an' we retreated through half of Illinois to get 'em here, too, "Mutt said,

The captain was half his age; damn near everybody in the Army, seemed like, was half his age. Klein said, "You may think you're joking, but you're not. When it comes to maneuver, they got us licked. Their tanks and trucks are faster than ours, and they've got those goddamn helicopters to give it to us in the rear when we're bent over the wrong way. But that

Harry Turtledove 5 doesn't count for much in city fighting. block by block, body by body." Here it's just sluggil

midwestemer named Chester Hicks. -puts a lot a smkiuntncys opposite number for the company's first platoon W bodies underground ' " he observed.

"Lord, you can say that again," Daniels said. "I did some that block-by-block stuff last fall, and it's ugly. Even for w it's ugly."

Captain Klein nodded. "You bet it is. But the brass don think the Lizards can afford that kind of slugging any mor,

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When the Germans were blitzing across Russia in '41, they g their noses bloody when they went into the towns, not out o the plains. Maybe it'll be the same way here." "And if it ain't, so what, 'cause the Lizards drove us bac

here anyways," Mutt said.

ou re nght about that." Captain Klein sighed and ran hand through his short, curly red hair. "We gotta do all we can though. Go on back to your boys and give 'em the word."

Mutt's platoon was defending a couple of blocks of East 111th Street. Off to the west was the Gothic ornateness of the Morgan Park Military Academy. Daniels wondered if the cadets were in the line somewhere, the way the boys from the Virginia Military Institute had marched out and fought during the States War. He didn't see anybody who looked like a cadet, but he knew that didn't mean anything. It was a hell of a big fight.

To the east was an American strongpoint on the high ground

of Pullman, and then, east of that ' the marsh around Lake Calumet. If the Lizards dislodged his boys, he aimed to fall back

to the east if he could. North of I I I th Street stood the low, orna buildings that housed the Pullman car shops. He'd fought through bloiks of factories before. That was even worse than the trenches had been back in France, but Captain Klein was light about one thing: digging determined troops out of a warren like that would cost the Lizards plenty. Some of the platoon's foxholes and bits of trench were on the south side of I 11 th, some on the north. Some were literally in the middle of the street; bombs and shells had torn big holes in the asphalt.

. Dracula Szabo waved to Daniels as he came up the broken sidewalk. Szabo was wearing the chevrons Mutt had cut off his own sleeve; Mutt's old squad belonged to him now. Mutt was

were supplies to scrounge, Dracula would figure out how to scrounge them. Now he said, "Took ya long enough to get back, Sarge-uh, I mean, Lieutenant. You're lucky we still got more o' what I came up with." "Not more fancy booze?" Mutt said. "I told you a dozen times, if it ain't beer or bourbon, I ain't interested-not real interested, anyways, " he amended hastily. "Better'n booze," Dracula said, and before Daniels could deny that anything was better than booze, he named something that was, or at least harder to come by: "I found somebody's stash o' cigarettes: ten bee-yoo-tee-full, lovely cartons of Pall Malls." "Goddamn," Mutt said reverently. "How'd you manage that oneT'. "C'mere an' I'll show ya." Proud of his exploit, Szabo led Daniels to one of the battered houses on the south side of 111th Street, then down into the basement. It was dark down there, and full of cobwebs. Mutt didn't like it worth a damn. Dracula seemed right at home; he might have been in a Transylvanian castle. He started stomping on the floor. "It was somewhere right around here," he muttered, then grunted in satisfaction. "There. You hear that?" "A hollow," Daniels said. "You betcha," Szabo agreed. He flicked on his Zippo, lifted up the board, pointed. "Lined with lead, too, so it don't get wet in there." He reached in, pulled out a couple of cartons, and handed them to Mutt. "Here, these are the last ones." The precious tobacco had disappeared into Daniels' pack by the time he went outside again. He didn't know whether Dracula was telling the truth, but if he tried putting the arm on him this time, he was liable never to see any more bounty. "I want to jam a whole pack in my face all at once," he said, "but I figure the first drag'll be enough to do for me---or maybe do me in, I ain't had one in so long." "Yeah, 1, know what you mean," Szabo said. "It's been a while even for me." Mutt gave him a sharp stare at that-had he been holding out on other finds?-but Szabo just gazed back, bland as a preacher. Mutt gave up. SuddenIv he gxirmed and headed off to a brick cottage a few Harry Turtledove 56 hundred yards north of the front lines. The house had a big cross painted inside a whitewashed circle on the roof and a re cross flag flying on a tall pole above it to show the Li what it was. Before Mutt got halfway there, the grin evaporated. "Sh don't even smoke," he muttered to himself. "She said a much." He stopped, kicking a stone in irresolution. Then h pressed on, even so. "I know what to do with 'em just th same.,,

sure the men would get on better than most: as long as there

Perhaps because of the warning tokens, the house that hel

the aid station and several around it were more or less intact though cattle could have grazed on their lawns. Here and there untended zinnias and roses bloomed brightly. A medic on the front steps of the aid station nodded to Daniels. "Morning, Lieutenant."

"Mornin'." Mutt went on up the stairs past the tired-looking medic and into the aid station. Things had been pretty quiet the past couple of days; the Lizards didn't seem any too enthusiastic about the street fighting they'd have to do to take Chicago. Only a handful of injured men sprawled on the cots and couches packed into every available inch of floor space.

Lucille Potter bent over one of those men, changing a wound dressing. ne fellow sucked in his breath to keep from crying out. When he was able to drive some of the rawness from his voice, he said carefully, "Ibat hurt some, ma'am." "I know it did, Henry," she answered, "but we have to keep the wound as clean as we can if we don't want it to get infected." Like a lot of nurses, she used the royal we when talking to patients. She looked up and saw Daniels. "Hello, Mutt. What brings you here?"

'~Got a present for you, Miss Lucille," Daniels said. Henry and a couple of the other guys in the aid station laughed. One of them managed a wheezing wolf whistle.

Lucille's face froze. The look she gave Mutt said, You're going to have to stay after school, Charlie. She figured he was trying to get her into the sack with whatever his present turned out to be. As a matter of fact, he was, but he was smart enough to figure out that sometimes the indirect approach was the only one that stood a chance-if any approach stood a chance, which wasn't nearly obvious.

He shrugged off his pack, reached into it, and pulled out one of the cigarette cartons. The wounded dogface who'd let out

these out with the guys who come through here and want lem.11 Flesh clung too close to the bony underpinnings of her face for it to soften much, but her eyes were warm as she surehandedly caught the carton of Pall Malls. "Thank you, Mutt; I'll do that," she said. "A lot of people will be glad you found those." "Don't give me the credit for that," he said. "Dracula found lem.11 "I might have known," she answered, smiling now. "But you were the one who thought to bring them here, so I'll thank you for that." "Me too, sir," Henry said. "Ain't seen a butt-uh, a eigaretto---Lin a he-heck of a long time." "Got that right," the whistler said. "Ma'am, can I have one now, please? I'll be a good boy all the way till Christmas if I can, I promise." He drew a bandaged hand over his chest in a crisscross pattern'. "Victor, you're impossible," Lucille said, but she couldn't keep from laughing. She opened the carton, then opened a pack. The wounded men sighed as she took out a cigarette for each of them. Mutt could smell the tobacco all the way across the room. Lucille went through her pockets. Her mouth twisted in annoyance. "Does anyone have a match?" "I do." Mutt produced a box. "Good for startin' fires at night-and besides, you never can tell when you might come across somethin'." He handed the matches to Lucille. She lit cigarettes for her patients. The aroma of fresh tobacco had made his nose sit up and take notice. Real tobacco smoke, harsh and sweet at the same time, was almost too much to bear. "Give the lieutenant one, too, ma'am," Victor said. "Hadn't've been for him, none of us'd have any." The other wounded soldiers agreed loudly. A couple of them paused to cough in the middle of agreeing; after you hadn't smoked for a while, you lost the knack. Lucille brought the pack over to him. He took out a cigarette, tapped it against the pahn of his hand to tamp down the tobacco, and stuck it in his mouth. He started to reach for the Harry Turtledove 563 matches, too, but Lucille had already struck one. He bent down over it to get a light. "Now this here's livin'," he said, sucking in long, d p drag of smoke: "gettin' а ce woman." Your cigarette lit for you by a beautiful The GIs whooped. Lucille sent him an I'll-get-you-later look. He ignored it, partly on general principles, partly because

the wolf whistle whistled again, a single low, awed note. Mutt tossed the pack underhanded to Lucille. "Here you go. Share

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he was busy coughing himself-the smoke tasted great, but it felt like mustard gas in his lungs. Spit flooded into his mouth. He felt dizzy, fight-headed, the same way he had when he first puffed on a corncob pipe back in the dying days of the last century.

"Cigarettes may be good for morale," Lucille said primly, "but they're extremely unhealthful."

"What with everything out there that can kill me quick or chop me up, I ain't gonna worry about somethin' that's liable to kill me slow," Mutt said. He took another drag. This one did what it was supposed to do; his body remembered all the smoke he'd put into it after all.

The wounded soldiers laughed again. Lucille sent him that narrow-eyed stare again; if they'd been by themselves, she

would have tapped her foot on the ground, too. Then a smile slowly stole across her face. "There is something to that," she admitted.

Mutt beamed; any concessions he managed to get from her made him feel grand. He brought his right hand up to the rim of his helmet in a sketched salute. "I'm gonna get back to my platoon, Miss Lucille," he said. "Hope those cigarettes last you a good long time, on account of that'll mean not too many guys gettin' hurt."

"Thank you for your kindness, Mutt," she answered. The soldiers echoed her. He nodded and waved and went outside.

The cigarette was still hanging out of the comer of his mouth, but the medic taking a break on the front steps didn't notice till he caught the smell of smoke. When he did, his head came up as if he were a bird dog taking a scent. He stared in disbelieving envy as Mutt smoked the Pall Mall down to where the coal singed his lips, then stubbed out the tiny butt on the sidewalk.

Everything stayed pretty quiet as Mutt made his way back to his unit. Off in the distance somewhere, artillery rumbled, like far-off thunder. A couple of plumes of smoke rose, one over

toward Lake Calumet, the other way off in the west. But for somebody who'd seen more close combat than he wanted to think about, that kind of stuff was hardly worth noticing.

When he got back, he discovered that a lot of his dogfaces had acquired cigarettes, too. Dracula Szabo was looking sleek and prosperous. Mutt suspected he hadn't given his chums smokes for free. Keeping your lieutenant happy was part of the cost of doing business, but the rest of the soldiers were the guys you did business with. As long as nobody in the platoon beefed to Mutt about being gouged, he was willing to look the other way.

He sent scouts out well south of I I I th Street to make sure the Lizards wouldn't get away with pulling a fast one after darkness fell. He was sorting through ration cans to see what he'd have for supper when Lucille Potter came up.

Everyone in the platoon who saw her greeted her like an older sister or a favorite aunt or even a mom: she'd been "theirs" for a long time before the shortage of anybody who knew anything about patching up the wounded forced her out of the front line. '~Got some smokes for the guys you're taking care of, Miss Lucille," Dracula said.

"That's been taken care of, Bela, thank you, though you're kind to offer." She turned to Mutt, raised one eyebrow. "The ones you brought came from your own supply?"

"Well, yeah, Miss Lucille." Mutt kicked at bits of broken concrete from what had been a sidewalk.

"That just makes it nicer of you," she said, and he felt he'd done his problem on the blackboard right. "To share what Dracula passed on to you in particular-I don't think that that many people would have done as much."

"Wasn't so much of a much," he said, though under dirt and stubble he knew he was turning red. He held out a can of beef stew to Lucille. "Care to stay for some supper?"

"All right." She pulled a can opener out of a pistol-style holster on her belt and made short work of the lid to the stew. She dug in with a spoon, then sighed. "Another cow that died of old age-and the potatoes and carrots with it."

Mutt opened an identical can. He sighed, too, after his first taste. "You're right about that, sure enough. But it does stick to your ribs. Better food than they gave us in France, I'll tell you that. The trick in France was getting the Frenchies to feed you. Then you ate good. They could make horse meat taste

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Re a T-bone." He didn't know what all he'd eaten Ove There, but he remembered it fondly.

Before Lucille answered, Lizard artillery opened up, off the east. Shells whistled in maybe half a mile away I not clos enough to make him dive for cover. He looked over to see i they'd done any damage. At first he didn't notice anythin Dew, but then he saw that the ornate water tower that had tow ered over the Pullman car factory wasn't there any more.

Lucille saw that, too. She said, "I don't think there are m people---civilian people, I mean-left in Chicago to feed us

This was the second biggest city in the United States a ye ago. Now it might as well be a ghost town out West some where."

"Yeah, I been by some o' those, places like Arizona, Ne vada. Whatever they used to be for isn't around any more, and they aren't, either. Chicago is--or was-about bringin' things in and shippin' 'em out, or makin' 'em here and shippin' 'em out. What with the Lizards, that isn't around any more, either,' Mutt said.

As if to punctuate his words, more shells thumped in, these a little closer than the ones before. "They're working over the front line," Lucille Potter observed. "But, Mutt, those ghost towns out West never had more than a few hundred people, a few thousand at most. Chicago had more than three million. Where is everybody?"

"A lot of 'em are dead," he answered bleakly, and she nodded. "A lot of 'em run off, either scared away by the fighting or on account of their factories couldn't go on working because of the Lizards or 'cause nobody could get food to 'em here. So one way or another, they ain't here no more." "You're right," she said. "You have a sensible way of looking at things."

"Yeah?" Mutt glanced around. None of his men was real close; they were all going about their own business. He lowered his voice even so: "I'm so all-fired sensible, how come I got stuck on you?"

"Most likely just because we lived in each other's pockets for too long." Lucille shook her head. "If things were different, Mutt, it might have worked both ways. Even the way things are, I sometimes wonder-" She stopped and looked unhappy, plainly thinking she'd said too much.

Mutt unwrapped a chocolate bar. Like smoking, the simple

action gave him something to do with his hands while he thought. He broke the bar in half and gave Lucille a piece. Then, ever so cautiously, he said, "You mean you might be lookin' at--tryin' a man?" He wasn't sure how to phrase that to keep from offending her, but did his best.

Lucille's face was wary, but she nodded. "Might be looking at it is about right, Mutt. I'm closer to it, I think, than I've ever been in my life, but I'd be lying if I said I was ready yet. I hope you can understand that and be patient."

"Miss Lucille, you get as old as I am, some things you ain't in a hurry about like you was when you were younger. It's just that --- ~' Mutt was going to say something about the uncertainty of war arguing against delay, but he never got the chance: the uncertainty of war came to him.

The hideous whistle in the air rose to a banshee shriek. His body realized the Lizard shells were aimed straight at him before his mind did. Without conscious thought, he flattened out just as they landed.

The cluster of explosions-three in all-left him stunned. They picked hun up from the ground and threw him back down as if a professional wrestler had body-slammed him. The blast tore at his ears and at his insides; somebody might have been reaching in through his nose and trying to rip out his lungs. Shell fragments whistled and whined all around him.

More shells crashed home, these not quite so close. Through the ringing in his ears and the crazy hammering of his heart, Mutt heard somebody scream. Somebody else-was that Dracula's voice?-shouted, "Miss Lucille!"

Mutt dug his face out of the dirt. "Aw, heck," he said. -Mey tagged somebody."

Lucille Potter didn't answer. She didn't move. One of those shell fragments that missed Mutt had neatly clipped off the top of her head. He could see her brain in there, Blood ran down into her graying hair. Her eyes were wide and staring. She'd never known what hit her, anyhow.

"Miss LucilleT' Yeah, that was Dracula calling. "We need you over here."

Mutt didn't say anything. He looked at her body, at the ruined Chicago neighborhood that had just had a little more ruin rained onto it. Without intending to, he started to cry. He couldn't remember the last time he'd done that. The tears

Harry Turdedove 567 rolled down his cheeks and made tiny damp spots on the chewed-up ground. Then they soaked in and were gone as if they'd never existed-

Just like Lucille, he thought, and cried even harder.

Harry Turdedove

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"Assembled shiplords, I am pleased to report to you that progress in the conquest of Tosev 3, while slower than we hoped when we reached this planet, is nonetheless accelerating," Atvar told the throng of high-ranking males aboard the 127th Emperor Hetto. After some time down on Tosev 3, being back on his bannership felt good.

"Some details would be appreciated," Shiplord Straha called out.

"I have assembled the shiplords here this day to give those details," Atvar said. He did not show Straha the dislike he felt. Straha was waiting for him to get into trouble, for the campaign to fail. If enough went wrong, the shiplords; might tum Atyar out of power and set someone in his place. Straha wanted to be that someone.

Kirel had had such ambitions, too, but Kirel was a good male-he put the cause of the Race ahead of personal ambition. All Straha cared about was himself and the moment. For all the forethought and restraint he showed, he might as well have been a Big Ugly.

To Kirel, Atvar murmured, "The first situation map, please." "It shall be done, Exalted Fleetlord," Kirel replied. He touched a button on the podium. A large hologram sprang into being behind the two males.

"This is the big northern land area of the main continental mass," Atvar said by way of explanation. "As you will see, we have smashed through the line of defense centered on the town of Kaluga which the SSSR threw up in a last desperate attempt to hold our forces away from their capital, "The fall of this capital will give me particular

satisfaction,

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and not just from the military and strategic perspective," Kirel said. "Me regime currently ruling the SSSR came to power, assembled shiplords, as many of you know, after murdering their emperor."

Although most of the males in the hall did know that, a murmur of horror ran through it just the same. Impericide was not a crime the Race had imagined until the Big Uglies brought it to their notice.

"The military and strategic considerations are not to be taken lightly, either," Atvar said. "Moskva being not only an administrative but also a communications hub, its capture will go a long way toward taking the SSSR out of the war. That accomplished, we shall be able to devote more of our resources to the defeat of Deutschland, and shall be able to attack the Deutsche from improved positions."

He enjoyed the buzz of approval that rose from the shiplords; he had not heard that sound often enough while discussing Tosevite affairs. At his hand signal, Kirel pressed the button again and brought up another map.

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Atvar said, "This is the island of Britain, which lies off the northwestern coast of Tosev 3's main continental mass. The British have also made themselves into unmitigated nuisances to us. Because the island was so small, we did not reckon it of major significance in our opening attacks. We made the same error with the island empire of Nippon, on the eastern edge of this same land mass. Air strikes have harmed both empires, but not enough. The males and mat6riel freed up after the defeat of the SSSR will allow us to mount full-scale invasions of all these pestilential islands."

"Permission to speak, Exalted Fleetlord?" Straha called.

"Speak," Atvar said. Straha hadn't asked for pen-nission the last time. The list of successes and anticipated successes must have served notice to him that he wasn't likely to be fleetlord any time soon.

Straha said, "With the Deutsche still holding northern-'France' is the proper geographic designation, is it not?---can we invade this Britain with reasonable hope of success, even assuming the SSSR drops out of the fight against us?"

"Computer models show our probability of success as being higher than seventy percent under the circumstances you describe," Atvar answered. "With the SSSR still in the war and forcing us to continue to expend resources to suppress it,

chances for a successful invasion of Britain drop to slightly be-low fifty percent. Shall I send you a printout of the analysis, Shiplord?"

"If you please, Exalted Fleetlord."

That was the most politeness Atvar had heard from Straha in a long time. The fleetlord signaled Kirel for the next map. When it appeared, Atvar said, "This, as you see, illustrates our position in the northern part of the lesser continental mass, particularly in our fight against the empire, or rather not-empire, known as the United States. The major urban center called Chicago, which eluded us in our previous attack, has now been reached by our armies; its reduction is only a matter of time."

Kirel said, "With other major moves planned, Exalted Fleetlord, can we afford the drain on our resources a hardfought city campaign would entail?"

"My judgment is that we can," Atvar answered. Kirel might be a good and loyal male, but he was also too cautious and conservative to suit the fleetlord. Straha, on the other hand, fairly bounced in his seat, so eager was he to mix it up with the Big Uglies. Yes, he might have been a Tosevite himself.

"If the fleetlord decrees it shall be done, then of course it shall be done," Kirel declared. Atvar knew he would have to go back into cold sleep if he wanted to live long enough to hear Stralia make the same pledge.

The fleetlord signaled to Kirel once more, and a new map replaced the one of the northern portion of the lesser continental mass, This one was far more detailed: it showed the street plan of a seacoast town and enough of the hinterland to depict a tumbledown ruin on a hilltop not far away.

"I admit, assembled shiplords, that the situation portrayed here lacks the large-scale strategic importance of those I have previously outlined," Atvar said. "Nonetheless, I shall set it forth for you because it also illustrates, in a different way, the progress we are making against the Tosevites. Have security briefings brought the Big Ugly narned Skorzeny to the attention of everyone gathered here at this time?"

"Me Tosevite terrorist? Yes, Exalted Fleetlord," one of the males said. Atvar was comfortably certain some of them had paid no attention to their security briefings. Some of thern never did. Well, no matter, not today. As far as Skorzeny was concerned, it would soon be no matter ever again, Atvar resumed: "One of our operatives has set up an elab-

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orate scheme in this town--it is known as Spht-to lure the vassal state known as Croatia out of the empire of Deutschland and toward acceptance of the dominion of the Race. If this succeeds, well and good. But the effort has deliberately been kept to a small scale, to let the Deutsche get the notion they can check it by similarly modest means. We have now confirmed that Skorzeny is operating in the area. All that remains is for our skilled operative to close the trap on him. I expect that to be completed within days. Without this Skorzeny, the Big Uglies will not be able to cause us nearly so much trou-

ble."

The assembled shiplords didn't quite burst into cheers, but they came close. Atvar basked in the warm glow of their approval as if he were lying on a sandbank under summer sunshine back on Home.

Heinrich Jager mooched through the streets of Split. In old Yugoslav Army boots, baggy civilian pants, and faded gray Italian Army tunic, he fit in perfectly. Half the men in town wore a mixture of military and civilian garb. Even his craggy features belonged here; he could have been a Croat or a Serb as easily as a German. He ambled right past a couple of Lizard patrols. They didn't turn so much as an eye turret his way.

The tavern across the street from the south wall of Diocletian's palace had seen better days. It had once had a window in front, but the square of plywood nailed where the window had been was weathered almost gray; it had been up there a long time.

Jager opened the door, slid inside, shut it behind him in a hurry. The fellow behind the bar was about fifty, going gray, with bushy eyebrows that grew together above his bony beak of a nose. Jager hadn't learned much in the way of Serbo-Croatian, but he had a little Italian. In that language, he said, "Are you Barisha?.l hear you've got some special brandy in stock."

The bartender looked him over. "We keep the special stuff in the back room," he said at last. "You want to come with me?"

"Si, grazie, " Jager said. A couple of old men sat at a table in the comer, drinking beer. They didn't look up when Jager accompanied Barisha into that back room. The back room was considerably bigger than the one in

front; it took up not only the rear of Barisha's tavern but also of the shuttered shops to either side. It needed to be large, for it was packed with poorly shaven men in a motley mixture of clothes. One of the tallest of them grinned at him, his teeth shining in the candlelight. "Thought you'd never get here," the fellow said in German.

"I'm here, Skorzeny," Jager answered. "You can take that makeup off your cheek now, if you care to."

"I was just getting used to going without the scar, too," the SS man said. "Come here-I've saved one of the Fallschirmjdgergewehrs for you." He held the weapon up over his head. Jager pushed his way through the crowd. Some of the men carried infantry rifles, others submachine guns. A few, like Skorzeny himself, had paratroop rifles-automatic weapons that fired a full-sized cartridge from a twenty-round box magazine. Jager eagerly took the FG-42 and several full magazines from Skorzeny. "This is as good as anything the Lizards carry," he said.

"Better than what the Lizards carry," Skorzeny said. "More powerful cartridge."

Not inclined to argue the point, Jager said, "When are we going to go down the hole?" He pointed to a black pit that, from the look of it, might have led straight down to hell. It didn't; it led to the underground galleries inside the wall to Diocletian's palace.

"Five minutes by my watch after Captain Petrovic and his merry boys start their attack on the palace," Skorzeny answered. "Five minutes," he repeated in Italian and Serbo-Croatian. Everybody nodded.

A couple of men came in after Jager. Skorzeny passed them submachine guns. Sneaking the weapons into Split had been harder than getting the men in, but Skorzeny and his local contacts, whoever they were, had managed the job.

A thuttering roar filled the back room, followed by another and another. In Italian, somebody yelled, "Start watching the time," to Skorzeny.

He shook his big head. "That's not fighting. That's just some of the Lizards heading off in helicopters." He grinned again. "So much the better. That leaves fewer of them for us to deal with."

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Even up front with the pilot and weapons officer, the helicopter was noisy. Drefsab didn't care to think about what it was like for the eight males back in the troop compartment. He waited until all three of his assault aircraft had taken off before he turned to the pilot and said, "On to the ruined castle at Klis. The Deutsche and the Croats there have been plotting against us long enough. This time we bag Skorzeny and all his henchmales."

"To the castle at Klis," the pilot repeated, as if he were hear-

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ing the order for the first time rather than something like the hundred and first. "It shall be done, superior sir."

The town of Split shrank as the helicopter gained height. Drefsab found it remarkably ugly: bricks and stucco and red tile roofs were nothing like the concrete and glass and stone of Home. The ruined castle, already growing larger in the distance as the pilot shoved the collective forward, struck him as even uglier.

"Why are you so hot to be rid of this particular Big Ugly, superior sir?" the pilot asked.

"Because he is the biggest nuisance on this entire nuisance of a planet," Drefsab answered. "He is responsible for more grief to the Race than any other three Big Ugly males I can think of." He didn't go into detail; the pilot had no need to know. But his sincerity was so obvious that the pilot turned one eye turret to look at him for a moment before returning full attention to the flight.

The ruined gray stone pile of Klis drew swiftly nearer. Drefsab waited for the Tosevites hiding within to open up with small-arms fire. Satellite and aerial reconnaissance both claimed they had no antiaircraft artillery in there. He hoped the males in recon knew whereof they spoke.

He wished he'd tasted ginger before he got into the helicopter. His body craved it. But he'd restrained himself. Ginger would take away his doubts, and against a foe as wily as Skorzeny he wanted them all in place.

"Shouldn't they be shooting at us by nowT' the weapons officer asked. The castle of Klis seemed very quiet and peaceful, as if no raiders had lived in it for thousands of years. Drefsab hissed softly. Thousands of years ago, the castle probably hadn't even been built. Tosev 3 was a new world.

He answered the male's question: "You never can tell with Big Uglies. They may be lying low, hoping to make us think

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they aren't really there. Or they may have some sort of ambush set."

"I'd like to see them try, superior sir," the weapons officer said. "It'd be a sorry-looking ambush after it bit down on us, " Drefsab liked his confidence. "Let's give the place a sandstorm of fire, to make sure we don't have any trouble getting our males on the ground."

"It shall be done." The weapons officer and the pilot spoke together. The pilot called on the radio to his opposite numbers in the other two helicopters. One of them dropped to the ground to unload its soldiers. The other, along with the heficopter in which Drefsab flew, popped up into the air and started pasting the castle of Klis with rockets and machine-gun bullets. No return fire came. As soon as the eight males had scuttled out of the landed helicopter, it rose into the air to join the barrage, while the second one descended to disgorge its soldiers.

Drefsab took a firm grip on his personal weapon. He intended to go down there with the fighting males, and to be certain Skorzeny was dead. There were whole little Tosevite empires that had caused the Race less trouble than that one Deutsch male. Stolen nuclear materials, Mussolini kidnapped to spew propaganda against the Race, a landcruiser lifted out from under everyone's snout at Besangon, and who could guess how many other crimes lay at his feet.

Males scrambled away from the second helicopter, opening up with their personal weapons to add to the fire that made whatever defenders huddled in Klis keep their heads down. The pilot started to lower Drefsab's helicopter to let off the males it carried, but before he could grab the collective, the radio speaker taped to his hearing diaphragm began to chatter.

"You'd better hear this, superior sir," he said, and touched the control that fed the incoming signal to the main speaker in the flight cabin.

Through engine noise and ordnance, a male's voice squawked, "Superior sir, the outwalls of our base are under attack by a motley crew of Big Uglies with rifles and other small arms. Their forcing a breach seems unlikely, but our defending males have taken some casualties." Some of the noise of firing, Drefsab realized, was coming out of the speaker.

"If the situation is not urgent, I shall continue neutralizing this target before I return," he answered. His mouth fell open

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in a laugh of amusement and relief. So Skorzeny had chosen this moment to attack, had he? Well, he would pay for it. The fighting males he'd left here would be destroyed. The Race would keep a garrison in Klis from now on. Control in this area would expand at the expense of the Deutsche, and one Drefsab, ginger-tasting addict though he was, would rise in prestige and importance to the leaders of the Race's forces on Tosev 3.

"Shall I proceed as planned, superior sir?" the pilot asked. "Yes," Drefsab said, and the helicopter lost altitude. Drefsab ran a battery check on the radio gear implanted in his helmet. If the main base needed to get in touch with him, he wanted to ensure that he wasn't cut off. That was the only special precaution he took against Skorzeny's attack.

Ever so gently, the helicopter's wheels touched ground. Drefsab clapped the helmet onto his head and hurried back into the fighting compartment to exit with the rest of the males. When Jager fought, he was usually closed up inside the thick steel shell of a panzer, which muffled the racket all around him. The tavern's wall didn't do nearly so good a job as that; the rifle and machine-gun fire from and at the wall of Diocletian's palace all sounded as if it were aimed right at him. The other soldiers and guerrillas in the back room of Barisha's tavern took no special notice, so he assumed they were used to this kind of din.

Through it, Skorzeny said, "Two minutes!" in German, Italian, and Serbo-Croatian. In German alone, he went on, "Do we have all the men with the automatic weapons closest to the hole?"

The question was rhetorical; he'd bullied people into place before the shooting outside started. With his FG-42, Jager was one of the lucky few who would lead the way through the tunnel. Around the troops with automatic rifles clustered those who carried submachine guns; the men who bore ordinary bolt-action rifles would bring up the rear.

"One minute!" Skorzeny said, and then, what seemed to Jager a year or two later, "Now!" He was the first one to plunge into the tunnel.

Jager went in either fourth or fifth; in all the jostling, he wasn't sure which. Ile dim light behind him vanished, leaving

him surrounded by absolute black. The toe of his boot caught the heel of the man in front of him. He stumbled and almost fell. When he straightened up, his head bumped the low ceilmg. Dirt showered down; some got inside his collar and slid down his back. He wished he had a helmet-for more reasons than keeping the dirt off. He also wondered how Skorzeny was faring in the tunnel-the SS man, who lacked only eight or ten centimeters of two meters, probably had to bend himself double to move at all.

Though the tunnel couldn't have been more than fifteen meters long, it seemed to go on forever. It was narrow as well as low-ceilinged; whenever his elbow bumped a wall, Jager felt as if it were closing in on him. He was afraid someone would start screaming in the confining dark. Some people couldn't even stand being shut up in a panzer with the hatches dogged. The tunnel was a hundred times worse.

He realized he could see the silhouette of the soldier in front of him. A couple of paces later, he emerged in a dusty storeroom illuminated only by lights from other rooms, none of them especially close. All the same, after the tunnel it seemed almost noonday bright.

"Spread out, spread out," Skorzeny urged in a hissing whisper. "Give the men behind you room to get out." When the whole force had emerged, Skorzeny thumped Jager on the back. "The colonel here, being an expert in archaeology, knows where the stairs are."

By now, the SS man-and several others among the raiders-had studied the underground maze enough to know it as well as Jager, if not better. He appreciated the nod even so: it reminded the men that his word counted next after Skorzeny's. He said, "I just don't want to find a lot of Lizards down here. If we have to fight underground, we won't get up to the surface and sweep them off the walls."

"That's what Petrovic's diversion is for," Skorzeny said: 'lo flush all of them up to the top so they won't notice us till too late-for thern."

Jager knew that was what the diversion was for. He also knew diversions weren't always diverting enough to do what they were supposed to do. He kept quiet. They'd find out soon enough how well this one had worked.

Skorzeny turned his attention to the group as a whole. "My advice is simple: shoot first." He repeated the phrase in Italian

and Serbo-Croatian. The men he led just grinned-they'd figured that one out for themselves. Skorzeny grinned, too. "Come on, you lugs." As he'd been first into the tunnel, he was first out of the storeroom.

Jager had never seen the underground maze of hallways and chambers in Diocletian's palace, not till now. But he moved through it confidently, counting off turns under his breath as he trotted along. A blast of heat came from one big room he passed: the Lizard barracks. If ever the raiders would be discovered down here, this was the place.

No shouts, no hisses, no gunfire. There ahead were the stone

stairs. Skorzeny bounded up them three at a time. The rest of the men, Jager still near the front of the pack, ran at his heels. The panzer colonel's stomach knotted. An eye turret turned at the wrong moment and the assault could still turn into a slaughter.

Trying to match the Lizards' swiveling eyes, his head twisted every which way as he reached the top of the stairs. The aliens were still banging away from the wall, but the bulk of the baptistry hid them from him-and him from them.

Skorzeny used hand signals to divide the raiders into two groups and to show no one had better argue against Jager's leading one of them. He pointed right and then forward to show Jager's group was to go around the baptistry, then led his own group to the left. "Come on," Jager hissed to his men. He trotted at their fore: if you wanted to impress anybody who'd already seen Skorzeny in action, you'd better lead from the front. Otherwise, your men wouldn't follow you for long.

He waved the group to a halt as they came to the comer of the baptistry. FG-42 at the ready, he stepped out into the narrow street that led north to the wall. As he did so, he heard Skorzeny's group start firing.

A Lizard a couple of hundred meters ahead whirled at that unexpected sound. It caught sight of Jager. Before it could bring up its rifle, he cut it down. "Forward!" he shouted, and ran up the street. The pound of boots on cobblestones behind him said he'd brought his troops with him.

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Personal weapon at the ready, Drefsab scrambled over a big gray stone and dropped down into the enclosed area of the casde of Klis. His feet scrunched on dry weeds. Several other males were already there, scurrying around and nervou ly checking anything that could hide a Big Ugly.

Thus far, they'd found precisely nothing. Drefsab was disappointed-he wanted Skorzeny dead and proved dead. But sealing off this place and taking possession of it for the Race wasn't bad in and of itself, either. High time to expand the foothold in Croatia beyond the town of Split, he thought.

"They've been here," a male said, pointing to the litter scattered wherever it wasn't visible from Split. "Why aren't they here nowT' He sounded indignant; to the Race, the world by rights should have been a neatly predictable place.

"They may have timed their attack in town to match ours here," Drefsab answered. "Their intelligence is revoltingly good." That didn't surprise him overmuch; only natural for beings of one kind to stick together against those of another, especially when the latter were trying to conquer them.

He badly wanted a taste of ginger. He'd all but promised the fleetlord that he'd bring back Skorzeny's head in a clear block of acrylic resin. Would Atvar be content if presented with a mere strategic gain rather than said head? Unless Skorzeny got himself killed and identified back in Split, it looked as if Drefsab would have to find out. Ginger wouldn't change that, but would keep him from having to think about it for a while.

Another male waved to him from a stone-fined hole in the ground. "Over here, superior sit," he said. "Looks Re the Big Uglies that haunted this place made their home underground."

Drefsab shone an electric torch into the hole. Even without it, he would have been sure this was a Big Ugly den: the Tosevites' rank, meaty smell filled the scent receptors on his tongue. He played the torch back and forth, then let out a low hiss. "This place will hold a lot of Big Uglies."

"That's true, superior sit," the male agreed. "Where do you suppose they've all gone?"

'~Some of them back to their villages, I suppose, and some into town to attack our walls," Drefsab answered. He stuck out v

it el

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his tongue. The words did not taste right. From all he'd learned of Skorzeny, such a simpleminded frontal assault seemed out of character.

"If you want us to set up camp in this pile of stones, superior sit, I hope you don't expect us to use that place down there." The soldier also stuck out his tongue, and waggled it in derision and disgust. "It stinks."

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"That it does," Drefsab said. "And no, I promise you won't have to set up your sleeping gear down there-not until we fu-

migate, anyhow." His mouth and the other male's dropped open in a laugh.

The speaker built into his helmet suddenly screamed at him: "Superior sir! Superior sit! We're under attack not just from outside the wall but also from within! Somehow a large party of Big Uglies managed to get inside the walls without being noticed. We're taking heavy casualties. Need for assistance urgent in the extreme!"

Drefsab made a noise like a pressure cooker forgotten on top of a hot stove. "None of them slipped away to their villages," he said when coherent speech returned. The male beside him stared in confusion; he hadn't heard the desperate call. Drefsab went on, "They all went down into Split." No, Skorzeny wasn't simplerninded at all.

"Who? The Big UgliesT' the male asked, still trying to figure out what was going on.

Drefsab ignored him. He waved to the soldiers scattered over the castle of Klis. "Back to the helicopters!" he shouted-"Quick as you can!"

A virtue of the Race was obedience to superiors. The males neither hesitated nor asked questions. They ran toward the helicopters as fast as their legs would take them. Behind the armor-glass windscreens, the pilots waved frantically. They'd got the message, too, then.

Drefsab dashed up to the cockpit. "To the fortress!" he snarled. "Skorzeny will pay for this. Oh, how he will pay." All the pilot said was, "It shall be done." He pulled up on the collective. The helicopter sprang into the air. It wheeled within its own diameter and darted back toward Split. Only

then did the pilot say, "May I ask your plan, superior sit?" "Use our firepower to blast the Big Uglies out of the fortress," Drefsab answered. "ney may have smuggled in men and rifles; I refuse to believe they could carry antiaircraft weapons into Split without our noticing."

"No doubt you are right about that, superior sir," the weapons officer said with all proper deference. "But I see I must remind you that we expended most of our munitions in the bombardment of that empty castle. We have little left to use back at the city."

Drefsab stared at him in blank dismay. After a moment, he

said, "Keep going anyhow. I'll think of something." The ground blurred by under the helicopter. He didn't have much time.

Jager had fought house to house, street to street, in towns and cities in the Ukraine. He'd hated it then. Even with a panzer wrapped around him, it was deadly dangerous work. Doing it in nothing but these ragged clothes struck him as clinically insane. "You'd never get me to join the infantry now," he muttered, sheltered in the doorway of a building near the wall. "I did that the last war."

Bullets sprayed past him, biting chips out of stone and brickwork. They stung when they hit; if you got one in the eye, it could blind you. The Lizards all had automatic weapons and, by ~he way they hosed fire around, they might have had all the ammunition in the world, too. Jager was too aware that he didn't. The FG-42 was a wonderful weapon, but it went through magazines in a hurry.

Several men in front of him shot back at the Lizards. That was the signal for him and half a dozen fellows with him to leapfrog forward past them. Leaving the doorway was as hard as getting out of a trench and springing across no-man's-land had been in France a generation ago. But fire and move was how you fought as a foot soldier if you wanted any kind of chance of living to do it again.

He bounded along the cobblestones, bent over as if his belly griped him to make himself as small a target for the Lizards as he could. The men firing hadn't suppressed all the enemies ahead. Bullets struck sparks from the cobbles close by his feet and ricocheted away at crazy angles.

He , d had a new doorway in mind when he started his dash. He threw himself into it, panting as if he'd just run a marathon rather than a few meters. A moment later, another fellow squeezed in behind him. In Slavic-accented German, he asked, 'Think any of the things are inside here?"

Jager made a sour face. "We're getting up close to their position. It could be."

"I have grenade," the Croat said, pulling a German potatomasher model from his belt. He tried a thick wooden door. The knob turned in his hand. That was plenty to make Jager suspicious, and the Croat as well. He unscrewed the grenade's pro-

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tective cap, yanked the igniter, opened the door, chucked in the grenade, and slammed it again.

The blast made Jager's head pound. Fragments rattled off the door. Jager flung it open once more, sprayed a quick burst into the chamber to catch any Lizards the grenade had missed. Then he dove behind a massive oaken desk that had probably sat there since the days of the Austro-Hungarian empire. The Croat ran to the next door in, fired a few rounds from his submachine gun, then peered around the comer. That was the right order in which to do things. He grunted. "I think we maybe are lucky."

"Better for us to shoot up the place and not need to than to need to and not do it," Jager said. The Croat nodded. Taking no chances even so, Jager crawled back to the outer doorway. Just as he got there, a blast like a 500-kilo bomb went off to the north. When he ever so cautiously looked out of the doorway, he saw a great hole in the outwall to Diocletian's palace. The antiquarian in him lamented. The soldier rejoiced-Skorzeny's raiders had distracted the Lizards enough to let Petrovic's men lay the explosives next to the wall.

He sprang to his feet, stormed forward. The best time to advance was while the enemy was momentarily stunned. Now the Lizards would have a doubly hard time: they'd have to fight Skorzeny's men and keep Petrovic's followers from getfing through the breach in the wall. This mad raid just might work.

Then a stuttering roar filled the sky. Jager dove for the nearest cover he could find. The Lizard helicopters were coming back.

Split was in flames, with smoke mounting fast into the sky. Drefsab hissed in astonished disbelief-who could have imagined a town could go from peace to ruin in so short a time? "Oh, Skorzeny, how you will pay," he whispered. Even as the helicopters reached the outskirts of Split, a big

explosion sent a great cloud of dust leaping into the air. "They've blown up part of the wall," the pilot said in dismay, scanning the electronically amplified vision display. "How did they get 0 these munitions into town under our muzzles?"

"Some have probably been there all along-the Big Uglies were fighting among themselves when we got here, you know. As for the rest, they're good at it," Drefsab said bitterly. "We

didn't X-ray every bit of every single animal cart going in, and now we're paying the price. But if we did that everywhere, we wouldn't have enough males to do anything else. The fault here is mine; I accept it. "

That made him feel virtuous. Otherwise, it did nothing to change matters. Split kept on burning. Radio calls for help kept pouring in. Every one of them reported some fresh Tosevite gain. "What do we do, superior sir?" the weapons officer asked, fixing Drefsab with worried eyes. "We have no rockets left, and our machine-gun ammunition is low."

Worries about conserving ammunition, Drefsab thought, had cost the R,7ce victolies. If they)ost here, it wou)dn't be on account of that. "If we don't expend what we have, our ground position in Split falls," he said. "Next to that, ammunition--or, come to that, three helicopters---counts for nothing. Maybe we can kili enough of the Big Ughes to make the rest break contact and give our males a chance. Let's go try."

"It shall be done, superior sir." Neither the pilot nor the weapons officer sounded enthusiastic. Drefsab couldn't blame them for that-even if the Big Uglies didn't have antiaircraft guns, the helicopters were still going into danger: if they'd armored all the wires and hydraulics heavily enough to protect them from rifle fire, the aircraft would have been too heavy to fly. But the pilot didn't hesitate. He radioed Drefsab's orders to his two comrades.

The three helicopters skimmed low over the rooftops of Split. They started taking fire long before they got to the rectangular stone wall the Race had used as a perimeter for its base. Some bullets went sparing! off armored sections; others punched through sheet metal in less vital spots.

Drefsab quickly realized the ground fire away from the fortress came from Big Uglies who just happened to have rifles and pistols. It tamed into a storm of bullets when the aircraft approached the fighting zone. "Shall I return fire against the Tosevite males outside the walls, superior sir?" the weapons officer asked.

"No," Drefsab said. "The ones who got inside are even more important. If we have only limited ammunition, we'll use it at the point of decision."

Again, the pilot relayed Drefsab's will to the males flying the other two helicopters. All three machines hovered above the narrowing area inside the walls that the Race still held. The

Harry Turtledove 583 machine guns roared. Drefsab felt a savage surge of satisfaction, almost as good as ginger, as Big Uglies twisted and fell under assault from the air. "We'll get them out of there yet!" he cried.

Another doorway. This time, Riger didn't think it would be cover enough. He kicked in the door and rolled inside, automatic rifle at the ready. No Lizard shot at him. He crawled toward a north-facing window. Outside, death reigned. He'd hated the Lizards' helicopters when he was in a panzer. Their rockets smashed through armor as if it were pasteboard. Against infantry, their machine guns were similarly destructive.

The fire wasn't aimed. It didn't need to be. As he'd seen in France in the last war, machine guns put out so many bullets that if this one didn't get you, the next one would. Without luck amounting to divine intervention, anyone caught on the street without cover would be dead.

The helicopters' noses seemed to be spitting flame. higer squeezed off a burst at the nearest of them, then rolled away as fast as he could. He had no idea whether he'd damaged the helicopter, but he was sure as need be that the Lizards would have spotted his muzzle flashes.

Sure enough, bullets battered the wall. Some pierced the

stones; others sent shards of glass from the broken window flying like shell fragments. Something bit higer in the leg. Blood began to soak into his trousers. It wasn't a flood. He cautiously tried putting weight on the leg. It held. He might not run as fast as usual for a while, but he could move around pretty well. He headed up to the second story of the building. When he got there, he planned on firing another burst at the helicopters. It would also let him deliver plunging fire against the Lizards at the base of the wall. He was still on the stairs when the firing from the helicopters died away: first one machine gun fell silent, then a second, then a third.

His first thought was to rush---or come as close as he could to rushing with a sliver of glass in his leg-back down and join the final attack that would sweep away the last of the Lizards. His second thought was that his first one was less than smart. The Lizards surely had imagination enough to stop shooting and see how many men they could fool into thinking they'd run out of ammunition.

He went up to the second floor after all. The helicopters still hung menacingly in the air, but they weren't shooting. Men on the ground- Skorzeny's forces and Petrovic's both-kept blazing away at them, though. Jdger fired, too. This time the Lizards didn't shoot back.

"Maybe you are out of amino," he muttered to himself. Even so, he didn't hurry downstairs and rush out into the street. Maybe they weren't out of ammo, too.

Drefsab turned to the weapons officer in anger and dismay when the machine gun stopped firing. "Is that all of it?" he demanded.

"Not quite, superior sir, but almost all," the fellow answered. "I've reserved the last couple of hundred rounds. Whatever decision you make on how or if we use them, though,'I suggest you make it quickly. We already have one male wounded back in the fighting compartment, and we can't stay under such intense fire indefinitely. The odds of any one bullet doing us significant damage are low, but we are encountering a great many bullets."

That was an understatement. The patter and clatter of incoming rounds all but deafened Drefsab. He said, "The area close to the wall is too built up to let us land and take aboard those of our males who still live." He added the interrogative cough to that, though it looked pretty plain to him. Maybe the pilot would tell him he was wrong.

But the pilot didn't. "We could fit the fuselages of our machines down there, superior sir, but the rotors-_2' He didn't finish the sentence, but Drefsab had no trouble finishing it for him. The pilot went on, "We do still have fuel enough to return to Italia, where the Race holds unchallenged control." He sounded hopeful.

"No," Drefsab said flatly. He reached into a pouch on his belt, took out a vial of ginger, and tasted. The pilot and weapons officer gaped at him. He didn't care. Atvar the fleetlord knew he was addicted, so what these low-grade officers thought mattered not at all to him. He said, "We shall not flex.,,

"But, superior sir--2' The pilot broke off, perhaps because of drilled subordination, perhaps because he couldn't decide whether to protest Drefsab's tactics or the vial of ginger he still held so blatantly in his left hand.

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Ginger certainty and ginger cunning rushed through Drefsab. "Ibe Big Uglies can't have brought all that many males into the fortress," he said. "If we land behind them, where we took off, we can catch them between two fires, as they've done with our males down there." Now the pilot had something concrete to which to object: "But, superior sir, we've twenty-three effectives at most; I don't file:///C//2590%20Sci-Fi%20and%20Fantasy%20E-books/Harry%20Turtledove%20-%20Worldwar%2002%20-%20Tilting%20the%20Balance.txt

know if anyone aboard the other helicopters is wounded." "Thirty," Drefsab corrected, his voice cold. "Pilots and weapons officers have their personal weapons, and I have mine. If we can drive the Big Uglies from the fortress, we may be able to hold on here long enough for reinforcements to arrive."

The pilot was still staring. Drefsab deliberately looked away from him, daring him to protest further. To underline his contempt, he tasted again. Ginger filled him with the burning urge to do something, and with the confidence that if he just acted boldly, everything would turn out fine.

"Back to the landing area," he snapped.

"It shall be done, superior sir," the pilot said miserably. He relayed Drefsab's command to the other two helicopters.

When the helicopters darted away, Jdger hoped with all his heart they were fleeing. But, though the engine noise diminished, it didn't vanish.

"Where are they going?" he muttered suspiciously. He couldn't believe they would just up and fly away, not when they'd done such a job of working over the humans' positions moments before. He tried to think himself into the head of the Lizard commander-Drefsab, Skorzeny had said his name was. The exercise had proved useful over and over again in the Soviet Union. If you could figure out what the other fellow needed to do, you were halfway to keeping him from doing it.

All right, assume this Drefsab was no fool. He wouldn't be, not if he'd made the Lizards shape up in Besangon (Jdger wondered how his regiment was faring; the news out of Franceand then out of Germany-hadn't been good) and been entrusted with swinging the Croats away from Germany.

What to do, then? Those big Lizard helicopters carried soldiers as well as munitions. What would Skorzeny do if he had some men he could put anywhere he wanted? The answer to

that formed of itself in Jdger's mind: he'd stick them up the enemy's rear. He'd done just that, here in Split. Next question was, would Skorzeny figure that out for himself? He'd better.

Jdger couldn't get in touch with him by radio or field telephone. But Skorzeny was no fool, either. He'd think of something like that ... Jdger told himself hopefully.

The panzer colonel wondered if he ought to head back toward the rear. Before he made up his mind, he decided to evaluate the position he already held. He moved toward the window, peered out from well back in the room so as not to make himself an obvious target for the Lizards by the wall.

He needed only a couple of seconds to realize he was in too good a place to abandon. He could see four or five Lizards no more than a hundred meters from him, and they didn't know he was there. He switched the FG-42 from automatic to singleshot, raised it, breathed out, and touched the trigger on the exhale. The automatic rifle bucked against his shoulder. One of the Lizards toppled over bonelessly.

Even single-shot, the weapon was a lot faster than a boltaction rifle. All you had to do was pull the trigger again. He missed a shot at his second Lizard, but his next round was on the way before the creature could react to the one before. He didn't think he made a clean kill on that Lizard, but he was sure he'd hit it. Getting it out of the fight would definitely do. Instinct made him move away from the window after

that. Hardly had he done so when bullets came searching for him. He nodded to himself. If you pushed things too far, you paid for it.

Firing broke out off to the south, at first mostly Lizards' weapons, then men's answering back. Riger nodded again. Drefsab was trying to retrieve the situation, all right. He might have been a nasty little alien from the black depths of unknown space, but he knew what fighting was all about.

Drefsab had been trained as an intelligence officer. When he got to Tosev 3, he'd never expected to meet combat face-toface. His brief forays in a landcruiser at Besanqon hadn't come close to preparing him for what infantry fighting --- especially in the heart of a town-was like.

The helicopters had remained under fire all the way to the landing area from which they'd taken off what seemed like a

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couple of years before. A male was hit exiting through the troop compartment door, and another couple as they skittered toward cover. The weapons officers had used up the last precious rounds in the helicopter machine guns trying to suppress the Big Ugly defenders.

Drefsab had never felt so naked as when sprinting across the cobblestones toward a pile of rubble. Not even ginger's bra-

vado could make him believe he was invulnerable to the bullets cracking' past him. But he reached the rubble without getting hit. He sprawled down behind it and started shooting back.

He didn't need long to realize only a couple of Tosevites were defending against the males of the Race. The soldiers' commander figured out the same thing at the same time. His orders crackled in the speaker inside Drefsab's helmet. Some of the males sprayed bullets at the Big Uglies to make them keep their heads down. Others moved to gain positions from which they could fire at the enemy from the side. Soon the Tosevites were down. The males of the Race ran forward.

They hadn't taken the Big Uglies as much by surprise as Drefsab had hoped- The trouble was, they were fighting in too small a space. An alert commander-and no one had ever faulted the Tosevites for that---could quickly pull some of his males from the fighting near the wall and send them to meet the new threat. And the males of the Race trapped against the wall had trouble exploiting that because of the danger from the Big Uglies in the buildings on the other side.

No sooner had that thought crossed Drefsab's mind than an explosion to the north made him sure another piece of the wall had just gone down. He hissed in dismay. His detachment couldn't hold the fortress by itself. If the males he was trying to rescue perished, Split would fall.

"Hurry!" he shouted. "We have to fight through the Tosevites and reach them."

Two of the helicopter pilots were already down. They'd joined the attack bravely enough, but they had even less notion of how to fight on the ground than Drefsab did. And so many bullets were in the air that the most skilled soldier, if he was unlucky, would fall as readily as anyone else.

Crouched in a doorway, Drefsab tasted again. He needed the spirit ginger brought him. If it drained away, he wouldn't be able to keep on fighting. So he told himself, at any rate.

One of the buildings ahead, or more than one, had caught fire. Smoke filled the narrow street. A determined maleespecially one who was full to bursting with ginger--could take advantage of the cover. Drefsab thought there would be plenty of hiding places ahead. He burst out of the doorway, sprinted up the street.

He changed directions every few steps. No one would get a good shot at him if he could help it. The thick smoke made him gasp and cough; nictitating membranes slid across his eyes to protect them from the stinging stuff.

Through the smoke, he didn't see the Tosevite until they almost ran into each other. He hadn't heard him, either; the din of battle made sure of that. Even for a Big Ugly, this male was enormous. He could have made two of Drefsab.

Weapons were great equalizers, though. As Drefsab swung his toward the Tosevite, he noted that the fellow had a sear on his face, hidden not quite well enough by paint and powder. He started to shout, "Skorzeny!"

But Skorzeny had a weapon, too, a rifle of unfamiliar make. It spat a stream of fire like the automatic rifles of the Race. Something hit Drefsab a series of hammer blows. He felt only the first one or two.

Lizard jets screamed overhead. Thunderous blasts ripped across the area Diocletian's palace had enclosed. Huddled in a doorway, Jager prayed the building wouldn't fall down on top of him. He didn't think much would be left of the palace by the time the bombers were done. Sixteen hundred years of history, blown to hell in an afternoon.

The jets unloaded their last bombs and flew away. Stunned, battered, but with no worse wounds than that chunk of glass in his leg, Jager slowly got to his feet. He looked around at the smoking ruins of what had been a scenic little port. "It's ours," he said.

"And a good thing, too," somebody behind him answered. He whirled. That hurt, but his battle reflexes permitted nothing less. There stood Skorzeny. Sweat had made his makeup run, but his face was so covered with grime and soot that the scar wasn't easy to spot, anyhow. He went on, "If we'd bogged down there, they might have been able to fly in reinforcements to their soldiers here. That wouldn't have been much fun."

"Not even a little bit," Jager said fervently. He looked

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around at the wreckage-and the carnage. "They're tougher than I thought they were."

"They can fight." Skorzeny looked around. If the devastation bothered him, he didn't show it. "We found out the Russians were tougher than we thought, too, but we would have licked them in the end." Nothing seemed to get him down. Give him a military job, no matter how bizarre or impossible file:///C|/2590% 20Sci-Fi% 20 and% 20 Fantasy% 20 E-books/Harry% 20 Turtled ove% 20-% 20 Worldwar% 2002% 20-% 20 Tilting% 20 the% 20 Balance.txt

it seemed, and he'd go out and do it.

A Croat aimed his rifle at a Lizard prisoner. "Halt!" Jager shouted as loud as he could-if the Croat understood-any German, that would be it.

"Stop that!" Skorzeny echoed, even louder than Jager. "What the bleeding hell do you think you're doing, you shitheaded syphilitic cretinous puddle of dog puke?"

The Croat understood German, all right. He swung his rifle away from the frightened, cringing Lizard-and halfway toward Skorzeny. "I get rid of this thing," he said. "Maybe I get rid of you first."

Most of the men on the battered streets, most of the men who had done the fighting in Split, were Croats, not Germans. A lot of them started drifting over toward Skorzeny and JA- ger. They didn't quite aim their weapons at the German officers, but they had them ready. Among them was Captain Petrovic. He looked as ready to get rid of the Germans as any of his troops.

Jager said, "Shooting Lizards is wasteful. They know so much that we don't. Better to keep them alive and squeeze it out of them."

The Croat with the rifle spat. "This I care for what they know. I know I enjoy killing this one, so I do it."

"If you kill that Lizard, I'll kill you," Skorzeny said, as casually as if he were sitting over coffee with the Croat. "If you try to kill me, I'll kill you. Colonel Jager is right, and you damn well know.it."

The Croat's scowl got blacker yet. He did not move his rifle another centimeter in Skorzeny's direction, though. Jager gestured to the Lizard: a peremptory come-here. The Lizard skittered over to stand beside him.

"Good," Skorzeny said softly. He turned to Petrovic, raised his voice: "Order your men to round up the rest of the Lizards and bring them here. From what I've heard, we should have twenty or so who surrendered, plus about as many wounded. I

want them all there-immediately. They're as big a haul as this whole town."

"You want," Petrovic said coldly. "So what? This is the Independent State of Croatia, not Germany. I give orders here, not you. What do you do if I tell you noT'

"Shoot you," Skorzeny answered. "If you think I can't take you out along with your cheerful friend over there"-he jerked his chin at the Croat who had threatened the Lizard-"before your bully boys bring me down, you're welcome to find out if you're right."

Petrovic was no coward. Had he been a coward, he wouldn't have thrown himself into the middle of the fighting that had just ended. Skorzeny stood, almost at ease, waiting for him to do whatever he would do. Jdger did his best to match the SS man's show of confidence. Matching his gall was something else agaift.

After a long, long pause, Petrovic barked orders in Serbo-Croatian. One of his men shouted a protest. Petrovic screamed abuse at him. Riger hadn't picked up much of the local language, but the invective sounded impressive as hell.

The Croats straggled away. A few minutes later, they started coming back with Lizard prisoners, first the males who had given up as the fighting ebbed and then, on makeshift litters, the crudely bandaged ones wounds had forced out of combat. Their sounds of pain were unpleasantly close to the ones men made.

"I wasn't sure you'd get away with that," Jdger murmured to Skorzeny.

"You have to make it personal," Skorzeny whispered back. "These bastards take everything personally. I just played their game with them and I won." His smile was smug as he added one final word: "Again."

Georg Schultz said, "I figured I'd get into Moscow one way or another, but I never guessed what those ways would befirst you flew me in, and now I'm retreating into it." "It isn't funny." Ludmila Gorbunova tore a chunk of black

bread with her teeth. Someone handed her a glass of ersatz tea. She gulped it down. Someone else gave her a bowl of shchi. She gulped the cabbage soup, too. While she refueled herself. aroundcrew men took care of her aircraft, vouring Pet-

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rol into it, loading on light bombs, and stowing the belts of machine-gun ammunition Schultz had filled.

"I never said it was funny," the German said. He looked wom unto death, his skin gray rather than fair~ his hair and beard unkempt, grease on his face and tunic-no one had much chance to wash these days. Purple pouches lay under his eyes.

Ludmila was sure she was no more prepossessing. She couldn't remember the last time she'd had more than a couple

of hours of sleep at a stretch. Even befort the Kaluga line began to unravel, she'd been desperately overtaxed. Since then ...

The cry was buy time. When the Germans neared Moscow in 1941, old men, boys, and tens of thousands of women had dug trenches and antitank obstacles to slow their progress. They were out again. How much good their barriers would do against the Lizards when stronger ones had already failed was questionable, but the Soviet capital would not fall without as niuch of a fight as the Soviet people could put up. "Ready, Comrade Pilot," one of the groundcrew men shouted.

Ready or not, Ludmila put down the bowl of shchi-thin, watery stuff, without ham or salanii, and without enough cab-

bage, too-and got up. She climbed wearily into the U-2 biplane. Georg Schultz said, "I hope you come back. I hope we're still here when you come back." Nikifor Sholudenkc, walked up just in time to hear the panzer-gunner-tumed-mechanic say that. The NKVD man bristled. "The penalty for defeatist talk is death," he said. Schultz rounded on him. "What's the penalty for killing the only decent technician this base has?" he retorted. "You do that, you do more to make your side lose than I do by talking." "This may be true," Sholudenko said, "but there is no fixed sentence for it." His, hand fell to the Tokarev pistol he wore on

Ludmila knew each of them wanted the other dead. Loudly,

she said, "Spin my prop, one of you. Save your war with each other until after we've held off the Lizards." If we hold off the Lizards, she added to herself. Had she said that aloud, she wondered whether Sholudenko would have come down on her for defeatism. Probably not. He didn't want to see her deadonlv naked.

The NKVD man and the ex-Wehrmacht sergeant both sprang toward the front of the Kukuruznik. Schultz got there first. When he yanked at the prop, Sholudenko had to back away; walking into a spinning prop blade would kill you as surely as a pistol, and a lot more messily.

Buzz! The prop caught; the five-cylinder radial engine spat out acrid exhaust fumes. Ludniila released the brake. The U-2 bounded over the rough airstrip (not really a strip at all, just a stretch of field), picking up speed. Ludmila gave it more throttle, eased the stick back. The ugly little biplane clawed its way into the air.

Even in flight, the U-2 did not go from duckling to swan. Yet, as a mosquito will bite and escape where a horsefly gets noticed and swatted, Kukuruzniks came back from missions more often than any other Soviet planes.

Not much was left of Kaluga. Ludmila flew over the outskirts of the industrial town. The Germans had wrecked part of it when they took it in their drive on Moscow in fall 1941, and the Russians had wrecked more when they took it back later the same year. Whatever they'd left standing, the Lizards had knocked down over the last couple of weeks.

The front lay north of Kaluga these days. The Lizards had cleared a few of the north-south streets through the town so they could move supplies forward. Lorries, some of their manufacture, others captured from the Nazis or the Soviets (some of those Russian-made, others American) rolled along, as if no enemies were to be found for a thousand kilometers.

I may not be much of an enemy, but I'm the best the Soviet Union has here, Ludmila thought. She worked her flaps and rudder, heeled the U-2 over into an attack run on the lorry column she'd spotted.

No one in the column spotted her until she was close enough to open fire. "The mosquito stings!" she hollered, and whooped with glee as Lizards bailed out of the lorries and dove for cover.

Some of them didn't bail out-some shot back. Bullets snarled past the U-2. Ludn-dla kept boring in. She pulled the bomb-release handle. The aircraft suddenly got lighter and more maneuverable as weight and drag fell away.

She gunned it for every ruble it was worth, although, with the Kukuruznik, such things were better measured in kopecks. The biplane shook slightly as the bombs exploded behind it

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Ludmila looked back over her shoulder. Some of the lorries were burning merrily. Between them and the little bomb craters she'd made, the Lizards wouldn't be moving much forward on that route for a while.

Pity the U-2 could carry only light bombs. "I don't just want to block off one road for a while," Ludmila said, as if a witch might hear and grant her wish. "I want to keep the Lizards from using the whole city."

What she wanted and what she could do, sadly, were not one and the same. She flew over Kaluga at rooftop height-not that many of the gutted houses and factories still had roofsshooting at whatever targets she saw. None was as good as that first line of lorries.

The Lizards shot back. After a while, they started shooting the instant she came into range, sometimes before she opened up herself. Time to go, she thought. The Lizards used many more radios than the Red Army did; they must have spread the word that she was buzzing around.

She got out of Kaluga as fast as she could, ducking down between ruined buildings to make herself as nearly unhittable as she could. It must have worked; she escaped with no more damage than a few bullet holes through the fabric covering of the U-2's wings and fuselage.

She flew off toward the west; the Lizards had to know the air base lay in that direction, and flying into the afternoon sun made her a harder target for gunners in Kaluga. But she zigzagged around a half-burned grove of plum trees and then headed east and north toward the front. With not much standing between the Lizards and Moscow, she had to do all she could, however little that was, to stem the tide of their advance.

Wreckage littered the ground north of Kaluga, the all-toofamiliar signs of a Soviet army in disintegration: shattered tanks and armored cars, trench lines reduced to craters by arfillery, unburied corpses in khaki. Even zooming by at full throttle, she gagged at the stink of death and decay that filled her nostrils.

Far less Lizard wreckage was strewn about. The Lizards made a point of salvaging their damaged equipment, which accounted for some of the disparity. But most of it sprang from their losing a lot less than their opponents had. That had been a constant of the war since its earliest days.

Artillery boomed and flashed, off toward the east. The Lizards' guns outranged those of the Red Army, too; from north of Kaluga, they could all but reach Moscow. Ludmila flew toward the guns. If she could shoot up the crews, that would be a good part of a day's work.

Though retreating, the Red Army hadn't given up the fight. She heard screams in the air; a ragged pattern of explosions tore up a square kilometer of ground not far ahead of the Kukuruznik. "Katyushas!" she cried in high glee. The rockets were some of the best weapons the Soviets had. Unlike more conventional artillery, they were easily portable, and a flight of them not only did a lot of damage but also spread terror.

Some Lizards were just emerging from their hidey-holes after the Katyusha salvo when Ludmila flew by. She opened up with her machine gun. The Lizards dove back into cover. She hoped some of them weren't fast enough to reach it, but was gone before she could be sure.

As she approached the Lizards' artillery position, she got down below treetop height. Some of those gun stations had tank chassis with antiaircraft cannon mounted in place of big guns protecting them. If she spotted one of those, she'd sheer off. A hit or two from their shells would turn the U-2 to kindling. She deliberately thought about it in terms of the aircraft rather than herself.

Jinking, weaving, Ludmila came up on the Lizard guns. She didn't see any of the antiaircraft tanks, so she bored in. "Za rodina!-For the motherland!" she shouted as her thumb came down on the firing button.

Lizard gunners scattered before her, like cockroaches across a kitchen floor when someone comes in with a lamp. Unlike cockroaches, some of them snatched up personal weapons and shot back. Muzzle flashes might have looked pretty as fireflies, but they meant the Lizards were trying to kill her. More thrumming noises spoke of bullets making hits on the Kukuruznik, but the little biplane kept flying.

Ludmila glanced at her fuel gauge. She had a bit more than half a tank left. Time to headfor home, she thought regretfully; she hadn't had such a good day shooting up the Lizards in a long time. But she also knew about stretching her luck. If she tried to go on until she found one more perfect target, she was only too likely to make one instead.

'There will be more tomorrow," she said, and then laughed

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at herself She wouldn't wait for tomorrow to go out again: as soon as she had more fuel, more bullets, more bombs, she'd be in the air again. They kept using you until they used you up Then they found somebody else-if they could.

What happens when they run out of everybody? she wondered. The answer came back stark: then we lose. It hadn't happened yet, no matter how black things sometimes looked. But when the Germans drove on Moscow in 1941, they'd faced Russian winter and fresh troops from Siberia. Now it was the beginning of summer, and if the Red Army had any fresh troops left, Ludmila didn't know where they might come from.

"Which means the veterans like me will just have to carry the load a while longer," she said, adding after a moment, "if any veterans like me are left alive." There was Georg Schultz, but he didn't really count; he'd started the war on the wrong side. Colonel Karpov had been through the whole thing, but he was more a military administrator than a fighting soldier. Ludmila had nothing against that; Karpov ran his air base as well as a man could in the chaos of a losing war. But it removed him from her list, or what would have been her list had she had anyone to put on it.

She wondered how Heinrich Jdger was doing these days. He'd been in it from the start, even if he came from the wrong side, too. The memory of their brief time together in Germany the winter before seemed faded, unreal. What would she do if she ever saw him again? She shook her head. For one thing, it wasn't likely. For another, how could she know till it happened?

Down on the ground, a man in a khaki Red Army uniform waved his cap as she flew by. She was back over Soviet-held territory now, well away from the bulge northeast of Kaluga where the Lizards were forcing their way toward Moscow. They were concentrating their effort on that push, and had loaded the bulge with troops and weapons. Ludmila dared hope the air base would still be operating when she got back to it.

The U-2 bucked in the air, as if it had taken a hit from an antiaircraft gun. Then the aircraft steadied. Ludmila swore; were Red Army gunners shooting at her again? She checked the sketchy instrument panel. Everything looked fine, though

she had trouble reading some of the dials because of the black shadow her head and shoulders cast on them.

She accepted that for a moment. Then she remembered she was flying into the sun.

Even as she wheeled the Kukuruznik through a tight turn, that impossible shadow began to fade. She looked back to see what could have made it; her first guess was a Lizard bomb. The shock wave from a bomb might have made her think she was hit.

But while the flash from a bomb might have given her a momentary shadow, it could hardly have lasted long enough for her to notice it. She figured that out while her head turned ahead of the plane's motion to see what had happened.

Because she checked the near distance first, she didn't spot anything, right away. Then she raised her eyes a little higher, and felt like the prize fool of all time. The fireball that had printed her shadow on the instrument panel was already dissipating, but not the enormous cloud of dust and wreckage it had raised.

"Bozhemoi-My God," she whispered. That growing cloud had to be at least twenty-five kilometers off to the east, maybe more. It towered thousands of meters into the air, glowing yellow and pink and salmon and colors for which she had no name. Its shape took her back to fall days before the war, when she and her family would hunt mushrooms in the woods outside Kiev.

"Bozhemoi, " she said again, when what it had to be hit her like a kick in the stomach: one of the Lizards' explosive-metal bombs, the kind that had flattened Berlin and Washington, D.C. She moaned, back deep in her throat-were the Lizards sealing the rodina's doom by raining such destruction on it?

The cloud climbed and climbed. Five thousand meters? Six? Eight? She couldn't begin to guess. She simply watched, stunned, flying the U-2 with hands and feet but without much conscious thought. Little by little, though, as her wits began to work once more, she noticed where the bomb had gone off: not ahead of the Lizards' lines, to clear the road to Moscow, but right at the front or a little behind it-at a spot where it would hurt the Lizards much more than the Soviet forces opposing them.

Had theLizards dropped it in the wrong place? She hadn't thought they made mistakes like that. Or, somehow, had the

Harry Turtledove 597 scientists of the Soviet Union devised an explosive-metal bomb of their own? "Please, God, let it be so," she said, and didn't feel the least

bit guilty about praying.

Reports flooded onto Atvar's desk: video of the nuclear explosion from a spy satellite, confmnation (as if he needed any) from those ground commanders lucky enough not to have been incinerated in the blast, sketchy preliminary lists of units that hadn't been so lucky. Kirel came in. Atvar grudged him a brief glance from one eye turret, then went back to plowing through the reports. "Forgive me, Exalted Fleetlord," Kirel said, "but I have a formal written communication from Straha, shiplord of the 206th Emperor Yower"

"Give it to me," Atvar said. Males used formal written commumcation only when they wanted to get something down on the record.

The communication was to the point: it read, FXALTED FLEETLORD, NOW WHAT?

"You've looked at it?" Atvar asked Kirel.

"Yes, Exalted Fleetlord," the shiplord answered glumly. "All right. Reply on the usual circuits-no need to imitate this." "Yes, Exalted Fleetlord," Kirel repeated. "And the reply is?" "Very simple-just three words: I don't know." Continue the most exciting journey through the past in all of science fiction!

Harry Turtledove's

WORLDWAR: UPSETTING THE BALANCE

> For a look at the third installment in the WORLOWAR series from the master of alternate history, read on...

Mordechai Anielewi

cz huddled in a deep foxhole in the

middle of a thick clump of bushes. He hoped it would give him good enough cover. The forest partisans must have miscalculated how much their raids were annoying the Lizards, for the aliens were doing their best to sweep them into oblivion.

Firing came from ahead of him and from both sides. He knew that meant he ought to get up and move, but getting up and moving struck him as the quickest and easiest way to get himself killed. Sometimes sitting tight was the best thing you could do.

The Lizards were worse in the woods than even an urban Jew like him. He heard them skittering past his hole in the ground. He clutched his Mauser. If the Lizards started poking through the bushes that shielded him, he'd sell his life as dear as he could. If they didn't, he had no intention of advertising his existence. The essence of partisan warfare was getting away to flght another day.

Time crawled by on leaden feet. He took a Wehrmachtissue canteen from his belt, sipped cautiously-he had less water than he wanted, and didn't know how long it would have to last. Going out to find more didn't strike him as a good idea, not right now. Ι

The bushes rustled. Sh'ma yisroayl, adonai elohaynu, adornai ekhod ran through his head: the first prayer a Jew learned, the last one that was supposed to cross his lips before he died. He didn't say it now: he might have been wrong. But, as silently as he could, he turned toward the direction of the rustling, He was afraid he'd have to pop up and start shooting; otherwise the Lizards could finish him off with grenades. "Shmuel?` A bare thread of whisper, but an unmistakably

human voice.

"Yes. Who's that?" The voice was too attenuated for him to recognize it, but he could make a good guess. "Jerzy?"

By way of reply, he got a laugh as discreet as the whisper had been. "You damn Jews are too damn smaM you know that?" the partisans' point man answered. "Come on, though. You can't hang around here. Sooner or later. they'll spot you. I did."

If Jerzy said staying around wasn't safe, it probably wasn't. AnielewiCz scrambled up and out of his hidey-hole. "How'd you notice me, anyway?" he asked. "I didn't think anybody could."

"That's just how," the point man answered. "I looked around and I saw an excellent hiding place that didn't look like it had anyone it in. I asked myself, who would be clever enough to take advantage of that kind of place? Your name popped into my head, and sG----"

"I suppose I should be flattered," Mordechai said. "You damn Poles are too damn smart, you know that?"

Jerzy stared at him, then laughed loud enough to alarm them both. "Let's get out of here,' he said then, quietly once more. "We'll head east, in the direction they're coming from. Now that the main line of them is past, we shouldn't have any trouble slipping away. They're probably aiming to drive us against some other force they have waiting. That*s how the Nazis hunted partisans, anyhow."

"We caught plenty of you Pole bastards, too," someone behind them said in German. They both whirled. Friedrich sneered at them. "Poles and Jews talk too fucking much."

"That's because we have Germans to talk about," Aniefewicz retorted. He hated the arrogant way Friedrich stood there, feet planted on the ground as if he'd sprung from it, every line of his body proclaiming that he thought himself a lord of creation, just as if it had been the winter of 194 1, with the Lizards nowhere to be seen and the Nazis bestriding Europe like a colossus and driving hard on Moscow.

The German glared at him. "You've got smart answers for everything, don't you?" he said. Anielewicz tensed. A couple of more words to Friedrich and somebody was liable to die right

there: he resolved he wouldn't be the one. But then the Nazi went on, "Well, that's just like a Jew. You're right about one thing-we'd better get out of here. Come on."

They headed east down a game track Mordechai never would have noticed for himself. Just as if they were raiding rather than running, Jerzy took the point and Friedrich the rear, leaving Anielewicz to move along in the middle, making enough noise to impersonate a large band of men. Friedrich said, "This partisan business stinks." Then he laughed softly. "Course, I don't remember hunting you bastards was a whole lot of fun, either."

"Hunting us bastards," Mordechal corrected him. "Remember which side you're on now." Having someone along who'd been on both sides could be useful. Anielewicz had theoretical knowledge of how partisan hunters had operated. Friedrich had done it. If only he weren't Friedrich...

Up ahead a few meters, Jerzy let out a hiss. "Hold up," he said. "We're coming to a road."

Mordechai stopped. He didn*t hear Friedrich behind him, so he assumed Friedrich stopped, too. He wouldn't have sworn to it, though: he hadn't heard Friedrich when they were moving, either. Jerzy said, "Come on up. I don't see anything. We'll cross one at a time."

Anielewicz moved up to him as quietly as he could. Sure enough, Friedrich was right behind him. Jerzy peered cautiously from behind a birch, then sprinted across the rutted, muddy dirt road and dove into the brush there. Mordechai waited a few seconds to make sure nothing untoward happened, then made the same dash and dive himself. Somehow Jerzy had done it silently, but the plants he dove into rustled and crackled in the most alarming way. His pique at himself only got worse when Friedrich, who would have made two of him, also crossed without producing any noise.

Jerzy cast about for the game trail, found it. and headed east once more. He said, "We want to get as far away from the fighting as we can. I don't know, but-"

"You feel it too, eh?" Friedrich said. "Like somebodyjust walked over your grave? I don't know what it is, but I don't like it. What about you, Shmuel?"

"No, not this time," Anielewicz admitted. He didn't trust his own instincts, though, not here. In the ghetto, he'd had a finetuned sense of when trouble was coming, He didn't have a feel for the forest, and he knew it. file:///C|/2590% 20Sci-Fi% 20 and % 20 Fantasy% 20 E-books/Harry% 20 Turtled ove% 20-% 20 Worldwar% 2002% 20-% 20 Tilting% 20 the% 20 Balance.txt the state of the state of

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