

Shooting Star

Claire Libbert

ALIGHT flashed through the darkening sky, far far away and small. From somewhere up above came a faint humming noise that mingled discreetly with the droning sounds made by people closing doors and shutting windows and making ready to retire for the night.

"Look, Mother! A shooting star!"

"Yes, dear. Now go to sleep."

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"Hey, Mik! Look in the viewscope. They certainly don't know we're coming."

"No, not yet. We just now passed into their atmosphere."

Two men bent over a luminous green screen, staring at the image of the planet beneath them. The taller of the two crossed to the instrument panel and began checking gauges.

"Jon, these dials can't be right. According to them the nitrogen in this air is not adequate for life. No creature can exist under these conditions."

"I don't know. The scout ships found plenty of life. Part of it is highly civilized, too. They've got large colonies of odd metallic and stone buildings and a primitive sort of flying machine. Most important, they're not very far from space travel. Here, look at the pictures our patrols have taken with the long-range camera."

Their heads met over the glossy prints spread out on the smooth counter, while the small torpedo-shaped ship warped closer to the quiet world beneath them.

Jon raised his head. "I know it's orders, but I can't see why we have to destroy these people. Their planet's too small to be useful; their air is too thin; their minerals don't seem to have any similarity to ours. I just don't see any reason for it."

"I've already told you. They're almost ready for space travel. It's no telling what that might mean. The interplanetary wars might start again. After a millenium of peace, a new planet will break into our system and disrupt the whole government. Protocol problems, petty grievances, worst of all—war! Innocent as they seem now, these people can't be allowed to go on."

Mik shrugged, "I don't like it! But, there's nothing else we can do. We're close enough now. Let's get on with it."

He sat hunched over the control board with his hand resting on the lever. That one small lever that would, in a few minutes, destroy a whole civilization.

The doomed planet whirled on in its appointed course.

Another flash. A meteor sped into the atmosphere of the small

green world. Like the hand of God it bore down upon the unsuspecting ship, until——

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There came a sound like distant drums. A small boy turned over in his sleep, dreaming of the pretty shooting star, not knowing how close he came to never seeing another star, or another night again.

Where's My Coffee?

Russ Bailey

JULY 19, 1950, was just like any other day for me. At 6:00 p. m. Corporal Green and I signed on duty in the control tower for the night shift. The traffic was slow that night, and by 7:30 p. m. I sent Corporal Green to the mess hall for a gallon of coffee. Little did I know that the next forty-five minutes were to be the longest of my life.

As I sat there alone in the tower listening to the hum of the transmitter and the static crackling of the radio receiver, my thoughts were suddenly interrupted by an F-51, with radio trouble, requesting landing instructions. I gave the landing instructions and advised him to watch for the light-gun signals before landing. I picked up the binoculars and began scanning the sky for the aircraft.

At 7:56 p. m. a B-29 reported an engine burning and requested an emergency landing. I cleared the aircraft for immediate landing and sent out a blind call to the F-51 to clear the traffic pattern. Receiving no answer, I immediately alerted base crash and fire fighting equipment to stand by on the runway, and then I notified base operations of the emergency.

I was not particularly worried at this time because I expected the F-51 to make a pass and receive a green light before landing.

The B-29 entered the traffic pattern at 8:03 p. m. and I advised him to check on the base leg for final clearance and for the F-51 which was somewhere in the traffic pattern. As the B-29 turned on base leg, I cleared him to land and advised him that I was still unable to contact the F-51.

I stood there watching the B-29 slowly settling on the final approach when I was suddenly horrified to see, off to the right, below and ahead of the smoking B-29, the F-51 turning onto final approach. I grabbed for the mike and the light-gun simultaneously to warn the B-29 and try to wave off the F-51. It was too late for the B-29 to go around, and evidently the F-51 did not see the red light, and so I hit the panic switch which alerted the flight line of an impending crash. I stood there awaiting the spectacle. I do not know when the F-51 pilot became aware of the B-29, but immediately upon landing, he turned off the runway and nosed over on the grass. The B-29 missed the F-51 by about five feet and managed a good landing.