

BEYOND FANTASY FICTION

CONTENTS

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NOVELLA

NO MORE STARS 4 *by Charles Satterfield*

NOVELETS

THE AGONY OF THE LEAVES 84 *by Evelyn E. Smith*

MISS TARMITY'S PROFESSION 142 *by Roy Hutchins*

SHORT STORIES

DISASSEMBLY LINE 53 *by Theodore R. Cogswell*

A BRUSH WITH THE ENEMY 69 *by H. Chandler Elliott*

YOURS FOR THE ASKING 112 *by Winston Marks*

IT'S A GIFT 128 *by George Hayman*

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A Brush With the Enemy

By H. CHANDLER ELLIOTT

Illustrated by CONNELL

It was an impossible assignment

—old Carl had to stop a mechanized

army with nothing but a pot of paint!

THE manager of the toy-soldier factory was lean and efficient, with a black ribbon looped from his pince-nez. He was being efficient now. "What's this, Ruger, about you refusing to paint modern types, saying they're ugly? *Bosh!* Not so gaudy as the historicals, maybe, but very smart, very romantic, many of them. When we give an employee suitable work, we don't tolerate his acting like a prima donna."

Old Carl Ruger drew himself up. He was a stalwart old individual, with magnificent, upspiked mustaches. He sharpened the

mustaches and replied with dignity, "*Not* an employee, Herr Nasser—an artist, working on commission. I dislike the modern types, because they're ugly in *meaning*. Once, soldiering was a sport—a very rough sport, yes, and often one naturally got killed. But life was dull in those days, and a man needs peril in the open. *Now*, war is an industry men must toil at, though their lives are not at all dull."

"And how do *you* know so much about it, Ruger?" Nasser sneered.

"I was young, not so long ago

—and I was sergeant-major in the ski-troops. The Swiss army I enjoyed. They say we are the best in the world for our size still, though we have fought no wars for a century. Most armies today I would *not* enjoy.”

“So! And what work would Your Excellency *enjoy* doing now?”

“Greek warriors, knights, Bengalis, Highlanders, Anspachers, any gallant regiment that was colorful, drank of life like wine and even did some good at times. These are my comrades, Herr Nasser, and I will stand by them forever! Fly-boys too, fighters! *That’s* a game if you don’t mind risking a crash—which nobody seems to mind risking with an auto! But not bombers, no! And not uniforms that make all men alike and all miserable. If my work does not satisfy, I can go to Irrensee and work for Schnaufen and Company.”

Nasser looked baleful in a small way. “It would seem, the less demand we have for a model, the better you like it. Well—we shall see.”

IN SPITE of his sturdiness, Old Carl went home feeling as if a wind off the glaciers had chilled his precarious grip on independence. The town of Glocken paid its way in the world by making toys, and the main street was lined

with show windows where jungles of stuffed animals, hatcheries of doll-babies, tractors, balls, paints, and so on awaited wholesale buyers. Old Carl admired all, but only as he passed, because he loved most of all the soldiers, of which he hauled a cartful on an express wagon he had salvaged.

In his attic, he transformed little silver potentialities into brilliant martial figures. His big fingers worked so skillfully that he kept himself very comfortably at only a penny apiece. Yet he finished each with such excellent care that its future owner could imagine it was a real little man, not a dummy. He knew every detail of every uniform, from French zouaves to Canadian mounties, from Marathon to Mukden, from savage tribe to proud navy. At night, he slept on a camp cot while the soldiers dried, watching him with their hundreds of eyes. In the morning, he packed them in long, shiny, exciting boxes, loaded them on his wagon and returned to the factory to exchange them for another batch.

And so it went for a while, after Nasser’s veiled threat. Sometimes the types Old Carl liked were not sufficient to keep him busy. But he didn’t mind losing a little money in a good cause. However, a few weeks later, when he appeared one morning, he was directed to a distant corner of the factory. There,

he found Nasser waiting beside a long machine, all levers, pulleys and dials. With a dill-pickle smile, Nasser said, "Watch this, Ruger."

From a box he took a dozen silvery figures, pre-1914 French infantry as Old Carl knew at a glance, clipped them to a pulley belt and closed a switch. The belt began to move. Brushes and spray nozzles popped out beside it, jiggling and poking. The figures were quickly smeared with green stands, black boots, red trousers, blue coats, pink faces and red kepis. On each was implanted a row of buttons and a face of equally impersonal black dots. It was all done in two minutes—it would have taken Old Carl forty. He stared dumbfounded, feeling as if his fingers were numbing and slipping from his grip on a mountainside.

"Well," said Nasser, "what do you think of that, eh?"

Old Carl examined the result. "They all look exactly alike. Only misfortune will distinguish them."

"Well, dumbhead, that is how soldiers are supposed to look."

Old Carl clutched at any twig that might stay his fall. "For your battle-dress monstrosities, this will be ideal, though it will rob good workmen. But for real warriors—knights, cavaliers, guardsmen—it is worthless."

"So *you* think, Ruger. But our buyers will not agree. And the machine will paint what I tell it to.

For special jobs—your knights and cavaliers—we can use you. No doubt, you have money laid by for your old age, and these little *commissions* will amuse you—since you are an *artist*—and buy you luxuries, eh?" Mean sarcasm and petty triumph leered through the words.

OLD Carl did have money saved, enough to keep him for two months, as if he hung by a slowly fraying rope. He had a little pension too, but not nearly enough to maintain him in the independence that was his pride in life. And he missed the work—maybe twenty special models a week and dancing attendance for those? No!

A trip to Irrensee deepened his gloom. There too, they had installed machines that turned out stolid dummies instead of gallant adventurers. The foreman—an ignoramus who would have put blue coats on British grenadiers—remarked, "They'll pay for themselves in two years."

Yes, thought Old Carl, out of my money, that I would have earned making something real.

He got handy man jobs, but found no joy in cutting lawns and painting furniture. And, with the approach of winter, a man his age, however sturdy, met difficulty in finding such work. He had to postpone paying his rent because, if he spent his pension on that, he could

get no decent food. So, sure as fate, the night before Christmas, his landlord came knocking.

This landlord was short and plump as Nasser was tall and skinny, but he looked and was just as mean. He said without ceremony, "You're no longer working, Ruger. You have nothing to pay the month's rent you owe me. That won't do . . . Now, I am a humane man. In my own car, I will drive you to the Old Men's Home in Stauffhausen. You would begin auspiciously there tonight, because they have mutton stew and, on Christmas day, they get suet pudding and extra tobacco. You will not need your brushes and things, therefore I will accept them for your rent because I am humane."

Old Carl choked down his fury. He, a recent sergeant-major in the famous ski troops, to end his days among derelicts—who had lost health, wealth and pride, by folly—in a place where mutton stew was a treat! He, who relished good sausage and beer and cheese, and had the painting of millions of soldiers in him. No!

But this little rascal, as oily as a castor bean, might be ugly if he were openly defied. Old Carl sounded as submissive as he could. "Yes, sir. In an hour?"

In that hour, he packed his paints—worth six months' rent—clean clothes, all the food he had

and three bottles of beer, in a carton. He then lashed it to his wagon and simply walked away with it.

"For," he told himself, "we of this canton come of a people fond of machinery and, perhaps, it is natural for us to use it even to paint soldiers. So I will cross the mountains to the French cantons, where they are artists and will appreciate a fellow-artist." He wasn't too convinced himself, but it was at least a plan of campaign.

He hastened through the town followed by the good wishes of golliwogs, chessmen and other friends.

He paused a moment only to stare somberly at the stupendous block castle in one show window. Ach, for such a castle of his own to shut out the dull and ugly world! But now he had to flee even from scoundrels. For he knew the landlord would be angry when he found his prey had escaped, paints, clothes and all—even though Old Carl had left, on the paint-daubed table, an IOU which he would surely pay when his luck changed.

Beyond the town, he struck out along the fine Autobahn. "In my youth," he muttered, "I often marched sixty kilometers in a day, and it will be strange if I cannot still do thirty. I will stop at the free hostels, and my last pension money will buy me food. In a week, I shall be in Geneva, and



then we shall see." A feeling of adventure made his feet march briskly, and the wagon rumbled sturdily behind.

Then it began to snow—lightly at first—sticking to eyebrows and mustache, but soon like old women plucking geese. Snow didn't bother him personally, but it made the wagon pull heavily. *If only some German or American tourist would come along*, he thought, *and give me a lift*. He had no prejudice against cars, but tourists were all snug in their hotels, enjoying their Christmas Eve suppers.

AT last, he paused by a stone wall and considered. On summer Sundays, he had often tramped out to the nearest hostel and back, but that had been in the afternoon, with no heavy wagon to pull through snow. Better he should hide the wagon behind this wall and come back for it in the morning, when ploughs had cleared the road. He rummaged out his food and then, sensibly, decided to carry some as fuel inside him, instead of as dead weight in his pockets. First, he had a bottle of beer, and then munched his good bacon and rye bread cheerfully, washing it down with a second bottle.

Bottles of beer were no more than cups of coffee to Old Carl—something to wash off the world when it grew drab. But now some odd chemistry in him responded

awry. The snow flooding down closed him into a private, tiny universe, shut out Glocken, Herr Nasser, the machine, the landlord, even the highway a few yards off. He stood alone with his wagon, box and one bottle of beer, feeling as if he were in a lobby from which doors opened on all sides into different worlds.

Well, he thought, an ex-sergeant-major of ski troops could deal with any of them, and perhaps better than with this disjointed one, which was not a world for men any more, since fighting was done by machines—even children's toys! He thought of the great cavalcade of splendid figures that had tamed Earth, sea and sky, and battled it out, even among each other, with sword, lance and bow, in a tumult of proud emblems and galling finery. And he thought of the dispirited hordes in drab, gray and dead-green, who had not even anything left to fight for, except that the machines needed targets. It made him feel glum. He opened the third bottle.

"Here's to any other world!" he cried and drained it, knowing it would probably switch his mood, though he could not tell what the new mood would be—a new mood, a new world. *Prosit!*

FOR a moment, only the snow continued to swirl down in the gathering dusk, so even an old

ski-trooper had better push on to get under cover. And then he heard the motor noise. A tourist after all? But it grew louder till the air seemed to throb, something loomed out of the smother and he stepped back against the wall as a plane on skis slid toward him on the broad shoulder of the road. Was it a trick of the eye that it seemed tiny at first—you surely couldn't see far in *this*—and spread to a mighty size as it stopped ten meters away?

Three men jumped out, stood at attention and saluted smartly. The one in front wore a military great-coat with cape and a shako with a paint brush plume—West Point Cadet, Winter Parade Order. The other two were RCAF pilots. The cadet snapped out of his salute and said, “Carl Ruger, *Freiherr von, zu und ringsherum* Glocken, may I intrude on your valued time for a moment?”

“Well,” said Old Carl, shrugging, “all that isn't my name—just Carl Ruger, Sergeant if you like. But if that's all right, I'm at your command.”

“Roger! I am Captain Peter Gingerly, Aide-de-camp to His Metallic Majesty, Leadward the Tenth, of Younger and Older Spielzimmer. His Majesty has dispatched me most respectfully to beg your advice in a great crisis. *If you can spare the time!*”

Old Carl stroked his chin.

“Well, I'm not busy with anything that won't keep. But see here now, hadn't I better talk this over with His Majesty in person?”

“Great!” The Captain's pink, boyish face lit up. “Would you really do that, sir?”

“It might be better than Geneva,” said Old Carl shrewdly. “How do I get there?”

The Captain gestured to the plane and, without more ado, Old Carl, wagon and all, was ushered inside.

The plane was fitted out with an eye to masculine luxury. Old Carl supplemented his supper with venison pastry, *liebfraumilch* and *marzipan*, while they winged through the night.

CAPTAIN Gingerly explained matters. “Of course I'm not much on math or magic or that sort of thing, sir. But, you see, when people in your world, especially children—and artists like you, sir—imagine things *seriously*, those things happen in our world. Or else, when things happen in our world, people imagine them in yours. I'm not quite sure which. And what *we* imagine happens in *your* world.”

“Professors and fairy tale writers.” Old Carl grunted, stuffing his pipe with royal tobacco. “But since now, as I suppose, I am in *your* world, when did I stop being imagined by you or you by me,

so that we got into the same platoon?"

"Well, you see, sir, at Yule, imagination gets so revved up in both worlds, the whatchamacallit gets through the hootnanny, if you know what I mean."

"Here's another thing that might keep me awake thinking about it—I am I as small as you are, or are you as big as I am?"

"The only thing I learned in symbolic thaumaturgy, sir, was to say, 'The question is meaningless.' Like this—if a kid's playing with toy soldiers, he's got no size of any kind, unless he decides he's going to be the general or the hero, and then he *is* them, if you see what I mean. So, when His Majesty imagined you, and you started to imagine us, *zowie!* I guess it made things kind of easy when we only had a bit of snow and wall and your wagon to imagine about, Roger?"

"That's sensible. *So!*" And he finished his pipe and turned in without further comment. But, as he fell asleep, he chuckled. These rascals had all along intended him to come. But *he'd* taken command. Fancy, a mere captain trying to outsmart a sergeant-major!

HE woke to find the flight over. When he had dressed and breakfasted on board, he was whisked in a staff car toward a magnificent fortress on a near-by

hill—Blockenberg Castle, the temporary capital, Captain Gingerly informed him. The royal banner, a teddy bear proper rampant, floated proudly from the highest pinnacle. But Old Carl noted that, on closer inspection, everything appeared neglected.

The guard of honor, drawn up in the courtyard to receive him, was composed of authentic guardsmen, but of so many different regiments and even armies, that the sergeant part of his soul was bothered, in spite of the honor.

To respectful inquiries by the staff officers—of five armies—who received him, he declared that he would never be more ready for action, and was conducted at once to the presence of King Leadward. Instead of throne room, crown, ermine and resplendent flunkies, he found King Leadward in the castle garden.

The king was a soldierly fellow, much like a model of Sir Walter Raleigh that Old Carl had once made for a tourist, with deep maroon jerkin and hose, a ruff at his throat, a rapier at his side and a close pointed beard.

He and his dazzling staff greeted Old Carl with profound respect—but, after brief, military courtesies, the king came at once to the point. "'Tis great presumption thus to discommode Your Lordship. But to whom else could we turn in our grievous trouble? In brief, dis-

astrous war ravages this once fair and happy realm."

"Well," said Old Carl, "wars should be sausage for you." He decided to disregard the lofty titles they insisted on giving him.

"Nay, sir! You of all men should know better than that. The true soldier loveth not war. For he must fight it—to the loss of manly sport and adventure."

"Well," said Old Carl, "who the mischief would attack a nation of soldiers?"

KING Leadward shook his head: "Haply so, My Lord. But this is a broil civil, the most ruthless of all wars. Nor does it go well for us. It happened thus—our people have ever been jealous of their own self-command. Of necessity, obeying orders on duty, off duty each sought change and adventure. But, of late, our newcomers have shown a strange sameness, as if cast from one mold even in their thinking."

"I see," said Old Carl, and he really did.

"On duty or off, they find pleasure only in what their fellows are doing also. In truth, they demand a dictator, some scurvy fellow who should save them even the trouble of deciding what they should do all together. This suited our stomachs but little."

An angry growl ran around the staff.

The king continued, "First, then, we secluded them in a remote province. But soon their numbers were such as to defy authority. Then too, they were better furnished with engines of war—save in the air force—and we have devoted our last remaining fuel to bring you hither and to take you back."

"In fact, they went into war as an industry, not a sport," Old Carl said.

"Truly so! Defeating them in battle after battle was like defeating locusts. Nor did they reck for grievous losses, since they still had the same as what they had lost. Whereas, even when victorious, we said farewell to valued comrades that no others could replace. Thus, today the rebels hold three-fourths of this land and press us sorely even in this mountainous remnant. In sad truth, My Lord, if you cannot advise us, you shall witness how we perish, sword in hand."

As the king talked, Old Carl's heart swelled with the triumph of a chance to hit back at last. "See now—who's imagining me in this world of yours?"

"Why, who but yourself, My Lord, with my own poor aid?"

"Good. Then, my own fancy still makes things happen here?"

"Even so—but only, alas, within limits. Deeds you may imagine, but not their outcome. The stubbornness of destiny rough-hews

your ends, shape em as you will.”

“That’s all gingerbread. The rough-hewing suits me fine. Have you prisoners?”

“Thousands, once. But, in his last onset, the enemy released them all. Nor, in truth, had we where to keep them any longer.”

Old Carl glanced around the gloomy staff, and his eye flashed. “Capture me a hundred or two of these lads. Maybe my art can make men of them. And, if so, with each victory, you will gain force, not lose it, *hein?*”

The king clapped hand on hilt. “My Lord,” he exclaimed, “you have saved us! We shall bring you these knaves no later than tomorrow. In a recent raid, we captured a box of matches. We have no solder to mend the hundreds of brave men who have lost their heads and are useless in battle, and this our foeman knows. But, with matches, we can spike heads on ’em and, thus reinforced, sorely astonish the enemy corps at Dollhausen. To work, gentlemen, and plan this attack!”

NEXT morning, Old Carl stood beside the king on a balcony, while the castle garrison marched out to join the rest of the loyalist army in the assault on Dollhausen. They were indeed a motley remnant. The Graustark Light Infantry, for example, comprised Greek evzones, Prussians, Mexicans, Boer

Cavalry (dismounted), Confederate riflemen and Uhlans. In the reheaded regiment, commanded by Captain Gingerly, promoted for his exploit in fetching Old Carl, many had not even correct replacements. But Gingerly brandished his sword, and all heads cheered. A quorum of the Egyptian Camel-corps marched on foot behind a pipe-band pieced out from the four Highland regiments and was playing ‘The Camels Are Coming.’

Presently, along the horizon, could be heard the deep boom of ten-ounce guns and the prickle of rifle fire. Old Carl and the king, on the highest turret of Blockenberg, stared intently toward Dollhausen for any clue as to how the battle was turning. The king, in breastplate and morion, gnawed his mustache, torn between a fury to be at the head of his men and the imperative need to see the outcome of Old Carl’s experiment.

Suddenly, the tower trembled slightly, and the two watchers turned to see a vast man in cook’s uniform drop seismically on one knee, gasping, “Treason, Sire! We are betrayed.”

“Treason, *ha?*” the king exclaimed. “Where? Speak *out*, man!”

“Two kitchen helpers, Sire. Enemy agents. They looked natural in the scullery. I caught one climbing out the pantry window.

The other got away and swam the moat. He will tell about the big attack."

"Of that, the enemy already has tidings," said the king cavalierly.

"Yes, Your Majesty," said Old Carl, "but did he know we have practically no men left here? Has he troops—not engaged at Dollhausen—he could use to attack the castle?"

The king slapped his thigh. "'Tis well seen you are versed in the art of war, My Lord. Cook, how many able-bodied men have you in the kitchens?"

It turned out that the castle was garrisoned by twelve cooks, five gardeners, two Zulu warriors and six Apache Indians, who had been scouting all night.

Old Carl thought fast. "Where would the enemy likely attack? The east curtain? Good! Get those Indians busy mixing paints, anything they can scratch up. I want the Zulus with me. Your Majesty will know how best to dispose of the rest."

ARRANGEMENTS had hardly been completed when one Indian, who had been sent as lookout, came galloping up, waving his arm as the gates clanged shut and said, "Ugh! They come thataway."

Ten minutes later, a column of infantry lipped over the opposite hill and poured across the valley toward Blockenberg. Old Carl de-

scended to his post in the courtyard, where he planned to carry out his brush with the enemy.

He had no need to watch, to follow the planting of scaling-ladders, the arrival of the first assailant at the top, the furious mêlée as King Leadward led his doughty Household Troops in the defense. Apparently cleavers, carving knives, can openers, shears, and pruning hooks were proving effective. Crash followed crash as ladders were toppled by brooms and rakes. As Old Carl had anticipated, the enemy simply kept coming with ponderous discipline, relying on sheer weight of numbers, with no thought of trying less stoutly defended sectors. Soon, however, they were in such a tangle of capsized ladders that the defenders had time to heave down prisoners, which the two Zulus caught in a blanket and pinioned.

Old Carl went to work. The first he gave an effeminate mustache, flossy hairs springing up as his brush flicked across the lip, a monocle over a devil-may-care eye and a dueling scar. Then he stepped back, motioning his helpers to release the man, and rasped in his most formidable sergeant-major voice, "Well, and what the *Himmel-Donner-und-Blitzen* have you to say for yourself, Lieutenant?"

The fellow looked bewildered. "Why—uh—I really don't seem to

have been *myself* at all, you know." His Austrian accent now matched his uniform.

"Then who the devil *were* you?"

"Well—where I just came from, everybody seemed to be somebody else."

"So, if you were *all* somebody else, no one was anybody, *hein?*"

The fellow broke into a disarming grin. "There you have right! And a man can't be blamed for what nobody did, eh, Sergeant?"

Old Carl appreciated the man's wit, but growled, "Depends on what the man *does*."

"Looks like plenty of work up on the wall, undoing what nobody did."

"Good! *Famous!*" Old Carl clapped him on the back, his heart full of glee.

He transformed two more before the next assault.

Still, even with their help, the next onset was nip-and-tuck. The defenders were getting badly chipped. One cook lost his head, but they stuck it on with a peg hewn from a ladder. Old Carl began to fear his reinforcements might not keep up with casualties.

"*Prisoners!*" he roared. "Fast as you can, sling 'em. *I'll* fix the factory-made morons!"

Enemy uniforms, filled with a nightmare succession of identical tenants, tumbled from the wall. The Zulus, with joyous, dentifrice

grins, slung them down the barrel-chute into the wine-cellar—almost fifty were thus disposed of before the next lull. Then, Old Carl began working furiously on the few he could hope to transmogrify in the breathing spell. But he had reformed only five more when the battle took a desperate turn—a violent whamming began to shake the gate.

OLD Carl worked as if he had six arms, ordering each recruit to join his Indians in a slender cordon inside the gate. Then, as the iron-studded oak began to sag, he plunged his biggest brush in pink paint, swung to his Zulus with a muttered order and strode into the fray. With a "*Yassah, baas!*" the Zulus darted into the castle—and Old Carl met his foes face to face at last, if you could call what the others had faces.

They forged straight ahead, ten abreast over their own fallen. Each one that confronted him, Old Carl swiped with his brush, obliterating those behind. But the brush ran dry, the paint was upset, most of Old Carl's troop were beheaded or otherwise broken—even the Indians whose necks were reinforced with feather trains—and he was forced back onto the steps, overwhelmed by a wave of blank or brutal faces. Evidently, they intended capturing him alive, to work on some nefarious project. He caught a

glimpse of King Leadward, half his breastplate chipped off, his sword a stump, among the last of his followers, their backs to a turret.

At that moment, a stomach-jolting howl halted everything like an oil painting. Two ebony giants took the steps in a leap, red fringes flying and knobkerries whirling, followed by a disheveled mob of madmen. The impact hurled the all-but-victorious foe back through the gate, across their makeshift bridge, into a rout that had nothing mechanical about it except its velocity.

Old Carl leaped upon the parapet of the gatehouse and roared in a voice that had made real men from squads of mice, "Prisoners, you rascals! No one gets back in here without a prisoner!"

King Leadward limped stiffly to his side and gazed after the hunt with a puzzled crease between his brows. At length he said, "I fathom it not, My Lord. Yon knaves you cast into the cellar . . ."

Old Carl's eye-corners crinkled. "It was the *wine* cellar, Your Majesty. And my spare paints and brushes were stored there. It needed only a little Dutch courage for any soldier—even a machine-made dummy—to seize the chance of painting himself as a hero. They did themselves prouder than I could have done."

A thought darkened his triumph like a blizzard swooping from

mountain crags — and so they wouldn't need him any longer either. One of his brushes and a keg of beer could replace him. And he had never stayed where he didn't earn his keep. So, back to long roads and ugly machines, garrets and IOUs.

WHEN the main body marched back from Dollhausen, with droves of sullen prisoners, all in a heroic sunset like red and gold celestial uniforms, they were astounded to find two hundred men drawn up before the castle, banners flying, a hastily improvised band playing and wet paint signs discreetly displayed. And, that evening, the great court was a scene of colorful revelry. Rich wines and lemonades flowed like water and, over bonfires, animal crackers were roasted whole. Wagons rumbled out, with cheer for the front-line troops and hundreds of little paint pots with propaganda labels, to be scattered among the enemy.

From a balcony, Old Carl and the king looked on. Both seemed aloof from the general optimism. At length, His Majesty, tugging the point of his beard, exclaimed, "Well! In a month or two, we shall drive the last of the malcontents through Rocking Horse Pass and reclaim 'em or break 'em up for scrap. But . . ."

"I knew very well there was a but," said Old Carl somberly.

"A general once said truly, 'Tis well war has its fearsome aspects, else might we grow overfond of it.' In sooth, this campaign, with its peril of defeat in sad earnest, makes sham fights and hunting but savorless in prospect."

"See now, Your Majesty," said Old Carl with soldierly bluntness, "soldiers are good fellows, but one thing I will say they lack, and that is imagination. My notion is, life can't be just an endless game of king-o'-the-castle. Men must go forward!"

"Did any man move ever forward, the world were soon o'errun, My Lord."

Like a sudden vagary of Alpine weather, Old Carl's wit, that had never failed him yet—given the material—burst through the black future. He fitted pieces together and soldered them with common sense. "The *world*, *hein*? Your Majesty should study toyshop windows."

"In sooth? And what might I learn from such, My Lord?"

"On one little world, what can fighting men fight but each other—to the great inconvenience of civilians too. And now the *verdammte* machines have gotten hold of it. But where I come from, even small children imagine splendid deeds without end for brave fellows like yours—to conquer the moon, the planets, the stars. Right now, they are probably imagining that I

change your boys into star-sailors. *That's* a future, now, for men who need peril in the open and don't fancy blasting houses and kindergartens with bombs. Let them fight the perils of the great *wunderbar* sky, ride fiery steeds and battle hordes of gremlins."

"Methought you looked but greenly upon such mechanical cantrips, My Lord."

"*Quatsch*, not I! They're bad business if they get control of things. But, if we use 'em as the pioneers used their axes and muskets, or the fly-boys their buses, and we get the glory, they're fine by me."

The king's voice sprang up with incredulous delight. "And so you *would* abide with us, My Lord?"

"Why not then? I can imagine it. And I can manage things better from here. Only, first, I'll have to go back and settle an IOU I left my landlord."

THE king's teeth flashed gaily in his beard. "Nay, not so, My Lord. My nephew, a drummer-boy in the Continental Army, plays tirelessly with real civilians. Let him now but fancy your knavish host sues your rascally employer for quittance and bests him by some lawyers' jargon—and it will come to pass in very fact."

Old Carl grinned till his mustaches bristled. "By me, that passes fine!" Then a wicked glint lit his

eye. "Real civilians, *hein?* Now, since I am both here and imagining myself here, why couldn't I deal with them, too?"

"No reason whatsoever, were there need," said the king, mystified.

"Look once!" said Old Carl. "It isn't such a bad world, yonder. Leastways, it has kids in it, and they shouldn't all grow up respectable fools. Something should be done for them, especially now their toys are being made by machines."

"Naught could be truer, My Lord."

"*Thus!* I can't do two jobs at once, painting toy soldiers and real civilians. But if I do some of the latter, at least a *few* lads and *mädels* will grow up as gay dare-devils. Can be, most humans would rather be neat clockwork. But there'll always be a few live ones as long as I'm in charge. And, maybe, we can start a virtuous circle. They imagine us, we imagine them, *hein?* Let's see how the boys like the smack of our idea."

The king raised his hand and shouted in a trumpet like voice, "*Soldiers!*" When the uproar had faded out, he went on, "Soldiers, let us make an end to this war briskly. For, our most noble Lord Counselor has imagined a venture as much worthier of our metal as the most famous of stricken fields is beyond a game of football!"

Then he announced the half of

Old Carl's plan that concerned them, ending, "Thus, to the realms of Perrault, Grimm, Anderson and Baum, we shall add those of Verne, Wells, Eddison and Merritt and all the host of modern explorers. And our Lord Counselor shall hold all under his suzerainty as Admiral of the Ocean Space."

A cheer rose and swelled till some of the battlements trembled.

Old Carl stood, sinewy arms akimbo, cheeks pursed up till his mustaches almost touched his eyebrows, and wagged his head. Like all crowds, his admirers enjoyed yelling for him much more than listening to him. But suddenly he roared, "*Achtung!*" The part of the wall weakened by assault fell flat and troopers said, afterward, that their own voices had been halted at their teeth. "*Nix!*" said Old Carl. "It's very agreeable of Your Majesty. But what *I* want is the biggest garret in your castle, plenty of paint and the boys to visit me when they come back from adventuring. That way, I can do a competent job of imagining tales and bold rascals *nobody* has imagined yet for both worlds. That's *my* character whatever world I'm in.

"And," he added, "if you really want to do me a pleasure, just call me Sarge."

H. Chandler Elliott