

# fantastic

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## CONTENTS

<b>THE LETTER</b>	
By Doris E. Kaye.....	6
<b>MR. STEINWAY</b>	
By Robert Bloch.....	25
<b>THE YOUNG ONE</b>	
By Jerome Bixby.....	38
<b>ONE FOOT IN YESTERDAY</b>	
By William Lindsay Gresham.....	62
<b>BEWARE THE FURY</b>	
By Theodore Sturgeon.....	74
<b>THE MOON AND NONSENSE</b>	
By William P. McGivern.....	95
<b>ANYTHING TO DECLARE?</b>	
By Naille Wilde.....	116

## SPECIAL FEATURE

<b>A PORTFOLIO</b>	
By Louis Priscilla.....	70



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## ANYTHING TO DECLARE?

*Irish science-fiction has been written before — most of it sounding as though done by a Swede from Kansas City. But this one not only is a good story, it has the lilt of County Cork in every line!*

IT MIGHT well be that you've heard of Killalee, save the name. A small village in Kerry, so it is, but twenty or more years back Tiamas O'Sheehan left there to sail the seas and end up a garda in New York. And there he is with a big wife and seven children, banging his boots around the 23rd Precinct, whatever that may be. So if you're a Yank 'tis very likely you've met Tiamas and equally probable that you know about Killalee because he's sure to have told you, him being a real prince of a boy from that

part of the grand green Isle.

As you have heard, Killalee overlooks Roaringwater Bay and is not more than ten strong spits from Skibbereen where the railway steams twice a day. And by reason of the same it is much liked as a landing-place at dead of night for schooners and smacks wishful to unload various articles of merchandise from France and Spain. These activities are not esteemed by authorities up in Dublin because of the coincidence of all such imports being heavily dutiable, especially the stuff in

bottles, therefore they maintain a squad of interfering coastguards and revenuers one of whom is always sitting outside Cooney's shebeen in Killalee with his big ears stretched wide.

I'll tell you now: it happens that early one morning Willy Cafferty is perambulating on the beach and feeling broodier than a stale hen. This is because he is clothed and paid by the Inland Revenue Department which asks nothing in return save blood and sweat and tears. So all night long Willy has hung around the beach awaiting a consignment of cognac and liquers due to be dumped at 2.30. a.m., if gossip in a certain bar was to be believed. But no such load has turned up, reason being that while he was blowing through cold hands and reciting the calendar of saints the stuff was being dragged ashore near Waterville and right now being trucked through Cahirciveen.

This is not the first time Willy has been persuaded to cool his official behind on the wrong beach, nor by the grace of God will it be the last because there are good men in Kerry. To make matters worse, of late a small airyplane had developed the habit of zooming over Killalee at irregular and indecent hours, dipping low when it reached the hills and quickly disappearing out to sea. Rumor insisted that certain Corkmen knew about this, they having a

financial interest in the procedure, which was likely enough because no Corkman is going to be mulcted of a shilling by any Dubliners if it can be avoided by Corkish dexterity.

All these things combined to put Willy in a mulish mood. He thought of the missing boat and was minded that Fingal himself could not be in forty places at one and the same time. He thought of the airyplane and the dismal fact that a complete library of rules and regulations cannot enable a man to leap five thousand feet into the clouds. He scowled as he awaited his relief in the shape of one Patrick Michael Tulloch who'd been lying warm abed all night and could be relied upon to arrive not less than one hour late.

Therefore he was in no humor to convert himself into a one-man version of *Fogra Failte* — the Irish Welcome Committee — when a shiny thing whipped out of the dawn-lit sky and landed almost at his feet. It was an airyplane, of course. Any fool could see that. A mighty queer one too. As round as a meat plate, maybe thirty feet in diameter and twice the height of a man.

Probably a flying saucer. There were plenty of such around. The papers said so in clear print and the *Dublin Opinion* cartooned

them almost every issue. Any man with a mind fit for thought knew that said machines were being manufactured by somebody who saw no reason to talk. Perhaps the Yanks or the Rushins. Foreigners, anyway.

A small door opened in the top of this contraption and a man stuck his head out.

"God bless you and it's a beautiful morning," he said to Willy.

"The saints bring it along quick," said Willy, "because I've been waiting for it long enough, so I have. And where might you be from?"

"Gisalda," informed the other. He climbed out the door, slid across the polished top surface, reached the ground. It could be related in his favor that he was wearing a bright green suit.

"And that could be a far place?" Willy prompted.

"It's up there." The visitor pointed skyward, went on pleasantly, "My name is Flarti."

"There's a good ould Irish name," admitted Willy. "All the same, I'm thinking you don't have the true brogue because you're speaking it like a stage Englishman."

"You must excuse the accent," said Flarti, politely. "Some of us have managed to learn your commonest language by long study of your radio emissions. It was rather difficult."

"Twould have been easier here in Kerry where they speak it like singing birds," Willy pointed out.

"Of course, of course. But we did not wish to make contact until circumstances became propitious." He sighed in the manner of one who has been compelled to wait too long. "The time has now arrived, we believe."

That did not fill Willy's heart with sympathy. He had done a deal of futile waiting himself and the moment for the appearance of Patrick Michael Tulloch was overdue. Besides, to state that one has come out of the sky is merely to voice the self-evident. Every airplane comes out of the sky.

"What have you got to declare?" he asked, professionally planting the hard, cold eye.

"Quite a lot," said Flarti, singularly devoid of common shame. "It will shake the world. The question is when, where and to whom we had best declare it."

"Sure and you'll confess to no other than me," said Willy. "Me being standing here for that purpose."

Flarti looked doubtful. "And what happens then?"

"I'll assess the duty and you'll pay."

"Pay?" Flarti's eyebrows shot up to his hair. "Pay what? Why should we pay anything? Do you

seriously mean to say that when for the first time in your history you have —”

“Now let's be having no blarney,” interrupted Willy. “Me being too old to be moved by the same, young that I am.”

“I don't understand.”

“They never do, indeed they don't,” assured Willy. “Especially when they've a German camera hiding in a backside pocket.” He jerked a meaningful thumb at the ship. “You're caught red-handed and might as well own up to what you've got. We'll be searching that contraption anyway.”

“Searching it?” Flarti was aghast. “You can't do that!”

“For why?”

“We cannot permit it.”

“That's what you think,” said Willy. “This saucer of yours will be impounded until all dues are paid. Get awkward with me and I'll call the gardai. I know my duty and bad cess to the man who argues it.”

“In the name of the stars, why should we pay merely for arriving here?”

“Because it's the law.”

“But we know nothing of your laws.”

“You will,” promised Willy, darkly.

Flarti took a dim view of that. He gazed at the other with unconcealed incredulity then drew a deep breath.

“This is impossible. You do not appear to realize that we are not impromptu tourists from another country. We are an official deputation from a distant star.”

“And so you might be,” indorsed Willy with a touch of cynicism. “Particularly if you've been opening a few bottles on the way here. I am minded of the time the excise-cutter found the Moran boys laid out in a skiff off Clear Island like they'd been readied for their wake. And a right wonderful tale they told of how —”

“I am not at all interested in other individuals' predicaments,” said Flarti, showing a mite of impatience. “The issue is this: we have landed here because obviously we must land somewhere if we're coming at all.”

“That's right enough,” agreed Willy.

“And now we wish to make our declaration in the quarter where it will be the most effective.”

“This is worse than arguing with Mawhinney's Ghost, the saints give it peace,” said Willy. “I've told you until I'm sick of the noise, that assessment of duty is done by me and myself too.”

“You and who else?” asked Flarti, staring around.

“There you go again,” said Willy, raising his voice. “Is it a

half-wit you think I am? Do you open that contraption for lawful examination or do you not?"

"We are allowing nobody to inspect the ship," asserted Flarti. "The time is not yet for giving away secrets."

"Then I'll have to report you and the consequences be on your own head."

Strangely enough this did not bother Flarti. On the contrary he appeared to view the threat as a useful idea.

"To whom will we be reported?" he inquired, hopefully.

"To Tim Maguire in Skibbereen."

"And is he an important person?"

"That he is! He's area supervisor of Customs and Excise."

It baffled the other but sounded good. He said, "All right. You tell this Maguire."

"And so I will," said Willy. He turned, hurried along the beach, mounted a sandhill, entered the coastguard hut on top.

Picking up the telephone he waited a full ten minutes before a weary voice responded with, "Coastguard headquarters."

"This is Willy," he informed, lips close to the mouthpiece. "Switch me through to Customs and let it be fast."

"Wait now," ordered the voice. "As you are well aware, Mr. Cafferty, the Customs open at

ten, God save their souls. Bare on seven it is now and no more."

"Is it that you are telling me, Padraic O'Toole?" shouted Willy. "And me standing here with a watch in my pocket."

"Then in heaven's name how can I let you talk to an empty office? It mightn't be that you've been sampling a drop of the real stuff, would it now?"

"Put me through to Tim's house," said Willy, ignoring this suggestion.

"There's a right dirty trick to play on a good Christian," reproved Mr. O'Toole. "Calling him out at bare seven and no more."

"Listen to me!" bawled Willy, getting colorful in the face. "If you have it in mind to obstruct an officer in the execution of his duty —"

"Hold your breath a bit," advised Mr. O'Toole. "I am ringing Tim and can't hear a word for your ungodly howling."

Willy composed himself and shut up. He felt a touch at his back, turned his head, found Flarti standing there.

"H'm! A rather primitive mode of communication," offered Flarti, eyeing the telephone. "Have you reported us yet?"

"I have not," said Willy. "And for the reason that I am afflicted with an O'Toole at the other end, which same means that a man must wait to the crack of

doom before — ”

“The top of the morning to you, Mr. Maguire,” said Padriac’s voice suddenly. “ ‘Tis a bad hour to have Willy Cafferty on the line and moaning like a sick calf. Are you wishful for a fair word with him?”

“That I am not,” snapped Mr. Maguire. “But you had better put him through. What is it, Willy?”

“There’s a clut of strangers on the beach,” informed Willy. “With a saucer.”

“A what?”

“One of them flying saucer things. They declare nothing and refuse examination.”

“Tell them it’s impounded,” advised Mr. Maguire.

“Your contraption is confiscated,” Willy told Flarti.

“No it isn’t,” Flarti contradicted.

“And why might it not be?” roared Mr. Maguire who had overheard this defiance. His voice ricochetted around the small hut.

“Because,” said Flarti to the telephone, “we can take off when we please and nobody can stop us.”

“Where’s Tulloch?” shouted Maguire, seeking reinforcements.

“Now there’s a sweet mystery,” Willy gave back. “I am here by myself, so I am.”

“Let me speak to that clever feller I heard talking,” said Maguire.

Willy handed the phone to Flarti.

“Are you the boy with the saucer?” Maguire demanded.

“One of them,” Flarti conceded. “There are ten people on board.”

“Sure and it’s nothing to do with us if there are a hundred or a thousand. All we’re concerned with are forbidden imports and dutiable goods. Now why can’t you behave like decent citizens, let Willy look at what you’ve got, and pay what honest men should pay?”

“We do not intend to pay anything for anything,” said Flarti. “Neither do we see any reason why we should.”

“That means you’ve a right good dollop of contraband under the hatches,” observed Maguire, shrewdly. “Otherwise you’d have no fair cause to object. So you thought you were on the pig’s back — until you found Willy waiting for you.”

“He did, to,” put in Willy, fervently.

“The law is going to be enforced around here,” continued Maguire, sternly official, “until I drop dead, if it’s the last thing I do.”

“How?” inquired Flarti, displaying interest.

“What’s your name?” asked Maguire, avoiding this question pending an effective answer.

"Flarti."

"And a mighty fine name that is too. Now a man with a name like Flaherty wouldn't be after defying the law of his poor ould mother's country, would he? He wouldn't spit on the very sod from which his father came, would he?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," said Flarti, completely unmoved. "We do not consider ourselves subject to your laws. I have repeatedly told your man here that we come from a distant star."

"Saints preserve us!" said Maguire. "Can't you understand it doesn't matter if you come from the moon, daft as that may be. The trouble is where you've come to and what you've brought with you."

"We have brought recorded information of great value to your planet."

"Books?"

"You could call them that."

"Books are subject to censorship," Maguire informed. "Objectionable material is liable to seizure and destruction."

"You will seize nothing," said Flarti, becoming tough. "You will accept what we see fit to give you."

"There now, listen to the man! A real first-class hooley he is asking for this day!"

"Before you're tempted to make any trouble," advised

Flarti, coldly, "I suggest you consult your superiors lest it be grievous trouble for yourself."

"Are you threatening me?" demanded Maguire, boosting his blood-pressure through the line.

"We have not covered many light-years merely to distribute childish threats. We have come in peace and friendship believing that we would be made welcome."

"And so you are," said Maguire swiftly reacting to this appeal for hospitality. "No man called Flaherty could find a better place. But first you must conform to the law." He paused, torn between sentimental desire to make the wanderer at home and the legal requirement to skin him. "Put Willy on again."

To Willy he said, "I'm going to consult the higher ones in Cork about this. You keep those boys gossiping while I get dressed. Bedad, I'm here in my night-shirt with feet perishing cold."

Willy racked the phone moodily.

"Well, what's happening now?" asked Flarti.

"He's reporting you to the Cork office."

"High time," said Flarti. "If it gets results. How often do we have to be reported before we find someone qualified to deal with us?"

"That depends," said Willy.  
"On what?"

"On who's out of bed and who's willing to make a decision and accept responsibility for it."

"You seem to think nobody is likely to decide anything."

"Where did you say you came from?"

"Gisalda."

"And might it be that you have no civil servants there?"

"We have no servants of any sort. It is a free world."

"So's this one — within reasonable limits," Willy countered. "But if you can't understand the civil service no words of mine can make you: It is a fearsome subject around these parts."

They sat in silence awhile. Half a dozen men came out of the saucer, all clad in the same green. They strolled along the beach, examining shells and pebbles. The bell shrilled in the hut. Willy got up stiff-legged and answered.

"This is an evil day by the smell of it," greeted Maguire. "Terence Larkin and no less a man says that they can't evade customs inspection unless they hold documents of diplomatic immunity and the same holds good even if they've flown straight in from Rome. Now I don't suppose you thought to ask for such papers?"

"I will ask this moment." Willy put it to Flarti, turned back to the phone. "This Flaherty has what he calls an identification-plate. It's a bit of metal scratched with marks like broken match-sticks."

"No consular stamp thereon?"

"There is not."

"It won't do." A long period of ruminative quietness followed before he ventured, "Willy, they won't be a band of dressed-up tinkers trying to outwit the law?"

"Not at all at all," returned Willy, emphatically. "They have this flying thing and I can see it with my own two eyes. They wear green uniforms that'd be a credit to the I.R.A. And they're clean."

"I'll call Dublin," decided Maguire uneasily. "It is a hell of a thing when a man has to call Dublin before the milk is out of the cows."

He went off. Willy came back to his resting place, squatted on the sand and said, "Now they're reporting you to Dublin. A rare lot of trouble you're causing, so you are."

Flarti said nothing. He gloomed at the sea and seemed deep in thought. A figure tramped along the narrow path leading to the hut, came over the sandhills, stopped and gaped at the saucer.

"Here's a sweet time for a man to turn up," said Willy, ostentatiously consulting his watch.

"Why should I strain my legs and me with the rheumatics real bad?" retorted Patrick Michael Tulloch. "Moreover there is time enough. Nothing ever happens."

In view of the circumstances this last comment struck Willy

as remarkably inappropriate. Flarti's expression suggested that some secret thought had now found confirmation.

"Nothing happens to any man lucky enough to be stuck on day-shift," informed Willy with considerable sarcasm. "And if a sickly man like yourself had been on night-shift we'd have burned a pound of candles around you five years back."

Patrick flung down his cap. "You might care to kick that a yard, Mr. Cafferty, and for all the agony in my legs I'll show you who's best man."

"God in heaven forbid that I should break the skull of an invalid," said Willy with great piety.

"Kick that cap, you son of a Galway tinker," ordered Patrick.

"There now," said Willy, getting up and removing his jacket. "He's spit on my mother's grave, God bless the beautiful woman."

He squared up just as Patrick larruped him over the right ear. Startled by this sudden turn of affairs, Flarti drew a thin metal pencil from his breast pocket, pointed it, pressed the tip. Both combatants went rigid just as Willy was about to land a hay-maker.

For a moment both swayed as they strove in vain to let go at each other. Their faces purpled with effort. Flarti reclined at ease on the sand and watched them.

After a while, he said, "You can stay fixed that way until the crack of doom unless you're willing to behave."

The paralysis did not prevent them from speaking. They put in five minutes of mutual glowering with frequent swayings and strainings. Finally, Willy spoke.

"Lord have mercy and get me out of this."

"Me, too," contributed Patrick. "I am frozen inside my suit like the boys in Murphy's window."

Flarti aimed the pencil.

They relaxed, indulged a few underbreath mutterings, resumed caps and jackets. The bell sounded in the hut.

"That's for me," said Patrick, starting off.

"It is not," contradicted Willy, getting ahead fast and confronting him. "'Tis himself calling me and I'll thank you, Mr. Tulloch, to mind your own business."

"Unless the sun thinks it's the moon," said Patrick, "this is the day-shift and you're off duty."

"I would have you know, Mr. Tulloch, that I'm off when I say I'm off and on when I say I'm on."

The bell yelled impatiently.

"And since when were you given an office in Dublin to say when one man is off and another is on?" Patrick demanded.

"It's yourself that asks me

when you can't tell the time?"

"I am on when I get here the same as you're on when you get here."

The bell screamed bloody murder.

"And when I get here it's at the proper hour," informed Willy. "Your laying-out is the only thing you'll be early for by the way you're carrying on."

"I'll be laid out like a Christian, may it be a far day," asserted Patrick. "Whereas the Widow Cafferty, heaven save her, is going to have a pitiful time dis- guising a hairy-faced heathen."

"That will do me," said Willy, whipping off his cap.

Profiting from recent experience Flarti used the pencil again. Then he went to the hut and an- swered the phone.

"Is that you, Willy?" asked Maguire.

"This is Flarti."

"Is it now? And where might Willy have gone to?" The voice carried suspicion.

"He is outside maintaining an aggressive attitude. I will get him for you."

Returning to the statues, Flarti released them, said to Willy, "He wishes to speak to you."

"What did I tell you?" Bathing Patrick with scorn, he climbed to the hut, grabbed the phone. "What is it now?"

"A right devilish dressing-down

I brought upon myself from Dub- lin. A fellow there can quote books without so much as looking at them. It is not shortage of breath that will ever make him die and I'm telling you that myself."

"What has he told you then?"

"He says entrants pay dues un- less bearing certificates of exemp- tion issued only to the diplomatic services. He says entrants is a plain, straight word meaning any- one from anywhere, heaven or earth or the waters under the earth. And, bedad, that is that."

"All morning I've been telling them the same," said Willy, "but they won't take it."

"Is Tulloch there?"

"He is, bad cess to him."

"That makes two of you. We've six here. How many of these foreigners are there?"

"Eleven by the count. One out- side and ten around the saucer."

"Do you think they are likely to resist any attempt to seize that thing of theirs?"

"You can put all your money on that and lose it like you did the day of the Limerick races," as- sured Willy. "I'll tell you now: they've got weapons with them. Queer little things like wands. They've stiffened me twice al- ready."

"Stiffened you?"

"That I was. And fixed so tight you couldn't have bent my arm into my box. Patrick Tulloch was like a corpse at the salute, may

the angels want him soon."

"Illegal importation of weapons. Violation of national sovereignty by an armed craft. And twenty other hellings we can enter against them when we get down to it. That'll find them a few years behind stone."

"Providing they can be grabbed," added Willy, aware from sad experience that this was the first essential.

"We'll see to that. I'm coming out with the others and the gardai. About twenty of us. It will take half an hour or so."

"Then I'll keep them talking awhile," said Willy.

Now hold on a piece, will you, for I'm nearing the end of this affair but it isn't quite yet. Willy sat down and yapped to Flarti with a kind of convivial desperation while the six moochers continued to explore the beach and four more came out the saucer and squatted on its top looking bored. Patrick Michael Tulloch remained by the hut listening for the telephone and blinking at the sea which by this time was sparkling under the morning sun.

Half an hour crawled by and another as well without sign of Tim Maguire, the gardai or so much as a solitary trooper with a gun. Willy became tired of keeping up the gab and his throat ached for a long drink.

"You mean to say," inquired

Flarti, "that in this free world one cannot transport goods from one part to another without surrendering some of the value to those who have taken no part in the effort?"

"That is true enough," agreed Willy. "The law is the law despite all the scallywags."

"Also that a person cannot travel afar without documentary permission from both those he is leaving and those to whom he is going?"

"Well, you're at liberty to dance from here to Dublin, for instance, but not from country to country. You must have passports for that."

"Pardon me," said Flarti. "I must tell the others about this. It is of peculiar interest to them."

He got to his feet, brushed sand off his seat, walked to the saucer. The quartet sunning on its top went inside with Flarti. The wandering six came back and also went inside. The saucer lay there gleaming and silent. The beach looked very empty for sudden lack of people. Studying it, Willy developed a funny feeling like a man expecting a banshee out of a bog. He stood up, edged nearer the saucer.

Its top popped up and Flarti stuck his head out exactly as he'd done at the start.

"We have decided," he announced, "that we've been too precipitate. The time is not yet. Goodbye!"

The top went down with a loud clang. The saucer shivered.

"Now hold your horses," shouted Willy, breaking into a run. "That blamed thing is impounded and a real proper offence it is too —"

The saucer went up with such velocity that its suction lifted Willy's cap a hundred feet. The cap reached the peak of its trajectory and fell back. Willy retrieved it, rammed it on his pate, stared angrily into the sky. Nothing was to be seen; the saucer had gone as if it had never been.

He stood awhile clenching and unclenching his fingers like one seeking strength for the law's executive arm. It was bad enough for Kerry men to be up to such tricks twice a week but at least they'd give an honest Customs man a good long taste of what they'd sneaked by him. As for these fancy foreigners, they knew

less of convention than they knew of the law.

A motor-cycle put-putted up the lane, stopped where sand balked it. Young Sean Dolan, local reporter for the *Cork Examiner*, jumped from its saddle, came racing to the beach with a big box camera banging and bouncing on one hip.

"Where's this saucer?" he asked, a mite breathlessly. His eyes tried to look twenty ways at once.

"And who'd be telling you about such a thing?" demanded Willy.

"Padraic O'Toole it was. I came out of that bed like a hunted hare when he said you'd caught a saucer full of Martians."

"I would take it kindly if Mr. O'Toole would keep his big gob shut," said Willy.

"And him my brother-in-law? Me with his sister to keep, bless



"That surrealist stuff bores me."

her soul? Where have you put this saucer?"

"Where's Tim Maguire?" Willy countered.

"Sure and he's fastened to the Dublin line for the rest of his natural life, may he have many years. Every time he lets go someone calls and pins him again. Dublin, London, New York and even big places like Boston are fighting for a fair word with him, me having given out the news."

"So you've given out the news?" said Willy, frowning deep disapproval.

"That I have. The *Examiner* is setting up two-inch headlines and sweating on more of the story from me. They let a bit slip to the Dublin news service knowing I'd be here first by a long piece. The C.I.E. is running a special bus from Trinity College. Aer Lingus is loading a plane with scientific fellows in London. In God's name where's this saucer because I've got to get back fast?"

"It's gone."

Willy observed with displeasure an oncoming crowd that might well be the whole of Killalee. By the time it reached the beach, he decided, the advance-guard from Skibbereen would be in sight. At the same rate half Ireland would be staring glumly at Roaringwater Bay before midday.

"Gone?" echoed Sean Dolan, getting a wild look into his face. "Gone where?"

"That," Willy pointed out with clear, unimpeachable authority, "is the concern of Customs at the other end."

Sean stared tragically like one denied salvation. He unhitched his camera, dumped it on the ground, ran to the top of a sand-hill. He had a long look around, came down.

In tones of considerable strain, he said, "A long, lonely night you've had, Mr. Cafferty, but shame on you for getting the world to hold your hand with a dirty story."

"Is it a liar you are calling me?" inquired Willy.

"That I am," said Sean. "And more too."

Glancing at the mob yet four hundred yards away, Willy said with cold pleasantness, "Then I'm thinking they're not coming for nothing. I'm thinking they're going to see the power of The Law." He took off his jacket, laid it down. "You will kindly show what you mean, Mr. Dolan."

Mr. Dolan ceremoniously wiped his feet on the jacket. Both rolled up their sleeves and faced each other. Patrick Michael Tulloch rocketed out of the hut as the crowd gave a hoot and broke into a run, everyone trying to reach the ringside first.

The Law triumphed in what would have been the eleventh round had there been any rounds.