

The Aardvark Is Ready for War

Jay Blinn

Day Seven

I'm eating a pot pie and CNN's on the tube.

It's almost dark. I got my binoculars at the ready.

More missiles slam Tel Aviv. No gas. At least that's what they claim. But there's gas, all right. Aardvark gas. Changing everyone into aardvarks.

Tape of the CNN guy giving his report when the sirens go off. Man, he drops that mike and yanks on that aardvark mask like nobody's business. Cut to the Jerusalem bureau--whole room full of aardvarks and some woman talking head (talking AARDVARK head) yells into the mike, practically goes ballistic. What a hoot! I spit out a pea when I see THAT.

I fetch a brew. I leave the kitchen dark so the babe across the way can't see me clear. I'm just a shadow. Less than a shadow. She'd have to look hard to spot me.

Her place is all lit up real nice. I can see red lights on her stereo, a-blinking and a-flashing. I know she's home. But there's no action. Not yet. Must be around back. Hiding from me.

Another war expert. These guys bust my gut. Half the time they can't tell an F-18 from an F-16 from an M-16. They think Hawkeyes and AWACs are the same birds just because they both have flying saucers. What a moron. This guy's telling me about some bombed-out comm center but it doesn't have a single goddam antenna on it and could just as well be some raghat sheep-banger 7-Eleven for all anybody knows.

She's doing her bit now. It's MTV since she moved in. Thinks she's safe behind those bamboo shades. Thinks my eyes can't touch her in her taped-up room. Behind those shades. But they're transparent at night. Leak like a screen door. Radiate like a CRT.

She cranks that stereo and jams around all hot and sexy. Thinks

she's Madonna or something. Pretty good good bod. Ass be a little gangly but fairly humongous boobs. No '55 Buick, mind you, but not droopy AT ALL. Hard as rubber. Hard as bullets.

I'm going over her totally with the trusty Bushnells. It's funny. I mean I'm crouching here in my kitchen spying on this obviously hot babe and I'm not even all turned on or anything. Like I don't even think about porking her or anything. I just get off on surveilling her.

Every night it's like this. Me all hiding out in this dark kitchen, peeping with my binocs, scoping out this moderately awesome babe, just surveilling the living shit out of her, and I don't even get hot over it. At least not *that* way.

Day Six

When I get home from the base I got a sixer and five Duget Gourmets and my aardvark mask over my shoulder. There's the fat chick from downstairs at the mailbox. She's some kind of artsy thing--always dresses in black and has this unreal black hair that's all whacked off on one side like she does her doo in a paper cutter. Says she hears I'm shipping out.

I just say, Yup.

Her eyes kind of flick to the mask all nervous-like. You can't tell what it is--just says *Mark I Mod O* on the canvas bag. It doesn't like broadcast, *hey I'm a fucking gas mask yubba-dubba-do!*

Says I should take care of myself over there. Even though she says it nicely I can tell she's trying for an opening. Wants to dazzle me with her impressive war thoughts that fly so good down at the leather bar. I don't want to hear it. I just say, You bet, and walk upstairs pretending to sort my junk mail.

Plug the Budget Gourmet in to zap. Then I undo the computer and move it to the living room. I set the monitor up on the blue director's chair next to the TV and run the keyboard over to the coffee table. The cord's too short so I push the table up close. I stack up the disks I smuggled out of the shop today. Each one has SECRET stamped in red at the top and the CMC inventory code felt-tipped underneath. I'd get hammered if I got caught with these. But the chief says anybody that doesn't ace the tac-bombing test is up for a seabag inspection. That guy's so ate up.

Dumping the tac-training program on the hard disk. It's four full disks but that's okay. I got forty megs.

We HAVE the technology.

The zapper beeps and I fetch my dinner, Chicken Cordon Bleu in

a plastic tray. Glazed carrots and apple wedges. Like hot dang.

I pop a brew and cop a shot at the babe's window. Catch a little action behind the blinds. She's there but it's still too light to see. She's just smoke. No detail. No depth. Not a person yet.

I get the mirror off the door to the head. I prop it on the kitchen stool, angle it so it reflects out the window to the living room. HER window in MY room. I have to go sit on the sofa twice before I get it all set up just right. Early warning.

Then I clear off the coffee table and arrange everything just so: the taste-tempting frozen dinner, my brew, computer keyboard in front of that, the mouse run out to its black neoprene pad, TV remote on the right, binoculars on the left. Then I snap on the web belt the aardvark mask hangs from.

I punch in *TACPRO*. When the menu pops up I run the cursor down to *MK 82 Bomb Run*. While that's loading I punch the channel flipper to CNN. It's a story about Israeli kids painting up their gas masks and decorating them with finger paints--flags and missiles and jets. I check the mirror on the stool. All's quiet on the awesome-babe front. I'm all set. Shit. Forgot my fork. Gotta have a fork. A farking fork. A fork.

Day Five

Jackpot! There she goes. She's gonna do it. I knew if I waited. . . . Yes! Fingers sweaty on the focus knob. But I'm steady. Elbows tucked tight. (that oily green rubber sucked snug to my face, sucking at my eyeballs with each breath, tugging at my sinuses like there's hooks in 'em) Refine. That's the ticket. Yeah. Focus fine as a cunthair, finer than froghair. And . . . Off . . . It . . . Comes! RIGHT over her head. FULL frontal exposure. Look at her shake 'em. She likes that. Yes. (the straps dig in behind my ears) YES! (my breath wheezing through the filter, through the diaphragm, loud, like I'm on a respirator, like I'm goddam Darth Vader for Chrissake, like *Aardvark Vader*--gotta like that!) And those awesome tits, those awesome, awesome titties. (yes.)

Lights out.

End of show.

I should get me one of those night scopes--like the helo guys have.

Day Four

The camcorder's got a ten-to-one zoom so I ace right in on her window, pierce her defenses. I crack the shade just enough for the lens to poke out and make contact. I go out and check. You can't tell what it is.

I set up the new monitor on a stack of magazines by the other monitor and the TV, all three in a row. Looks like a network control room in here. A network of control in my room.

The target's a hardened ammo bunker. We're at transit altitude, busters at four hundred knots. I bring up the radar and pick up the bloop-bloop of the target, pass a vector of three-two-zero at forty. Throttles max. Drop to angels two. I punch in two weapons fly-to-points on top the radar fixes then transfer downrange-travel circles up front. We're a little off the vector so I give the pilot an easy left, than an easy right--on the nose twenty miles. (Larry King's talking all heavy-handed blah-blah-blah about fuel-air explosives. They implode your eyeballs, pop your eardrums. Do they have them? Do we have them? Does *she* have them?)

I bring up the radar again and give it two sweeps--superimpose the tactical plot, all the glowing symbols: x's; circles with numbers inside; vectors with range counters ticking down; the airplane bug jittering and scooting. An Egyptian Nintendo game. FTPs are still good. I'm-a gonna JAM these suckers right down that guy's throat. ESM picks up two emitters--both air friendlies. I inhibit them so they don't clutter the scope.

On the nose for ten.

Drop to angels one.

(She enters the bedroom. She's wearing a short, silk bathrobe. Looks blue on the monitor. Poses at the mirror. Screws with her hair. Walks out.) The downrange-travel circles shrink up like little assholes a-puckering.

I crank up the radar again for a final check. Under range-fifteen, radar's *verboden*. Emitter silence. You bet it's risky. But if the tacnav dumps, the whole run-in goes to shit. You shoot your wad on some dick-lick orphanage or something. (She's back. She messes with the stereo then goes back to the mirror. She looks this way then that, likes what she sees, makes a couple moves. Pulls a little something from the closet. Lays it on the bed. Walks out.)

I fix the targets one last time. Leave the radar in standby. On the nose for two. I double click the mouse and the pilot arms the weapons.

Standby for drop on my third *NOW*.

I keep downscaling and the downrange travel circles choke shit outta the fixes. (She's back. She's scoping her face in the mirror.) We're just about there. . . . I wait till the nose of the bug just nibbles at the fix.

Now. . . .

(She unties the belt of her robe. It falls open.)

Now. . . .

Ready to release. Two more clicks and the bug's there. Grease up them rug merchant butts!

(The robe drops down over her shoulders. A peek at a peak.)

Standby.

Standby . . . *a-a-a-and* . . .

Then, there it is just like a big dog--Emitter Alert. Abort! Abort! Abort! I do an auto-class and sure as shit it's an old Russkie SA-7. We do full evasive.

Kiss off the bomb run.

I just flop back on the sofa. The screen goes red and says:

Stinger Up The Tailpipe!
Drop Your Socks And Grab Your Cocks!

Those software guys. What a fucking sense of humor.

(Little Miss Madonna Babe drops her robe. Holds up the blouse and looks in the mirror. Drops the blouse. TOTALLY stark. Turns to the window, looking right at the lens, right through it and right at me. Like she sees it, sees ME. But she can't see through that bamboo shade. I know it. I know it. But she keeps standing there, firing that look my way, and I want to gawk at her boobs, g-get my load of that bodacious bod. Make some memories from those mammaries. But that look's got me pinned down.

I crawl over to the monitor--'bows and toes--looking for eyes. There's some light on her face and I'm looking for eyes. My nose against the cool glass. But no eyes, just dark holes, like peering down a shotgun's business end. And all I can do is gape into them holes and think how she's got me, she's got me balls down.

Then her face detonates in a fireball.

I jump back and slam into the table. I'm clawing at the bag till I get the thing out and I yank them straps over and a buckle about rips my ear off and it DOES tear out a glob of hair but I got the thing on and maybe I'm okay and maybe it's too late and for sure my heart's jumping out of my chest and my drawers are THOROUGHLY crapped.

I'm sitting there all shaking and I'm afraid to look but I do and I see it's just a cigarette. She's puffing on a goddam cigarette.)

Larry King's at the phones. *Hello, America!*

Day Three

After work me and Rudy hit the Forty-Niner Club and Rudy buys

a pitcher. There's this shanky old stripper, waist is thicker than her hips. Rudy's about creaming his jeans. He says, "How'd you like to get a little of them sweetcakes?" I say, "I wouldn't touch that clapdog with YOUR dick."

We down a couple more pitchers and shoot the shit about everything except the only thing we're REALLY thinking about.

There's a table full of jarheads all dressed up like bushes and they're getting real loud. One of them catches this big old cockroach and stands on the table and yells out that he'll eat the thing for twenty bucks. A hat goes around and we all throw in. This zitty little guy says the roach has to be chewed and not just swallowed whole. The jarhead on the table agrees. He's got the roach crawling from hand to hand so we can all see how big it is. He says he's gonna call it Esther after his mother.

We're all cluster-fucked around the table. Even the stripper stops dancing and comes over to watch, leaning over the edge of the stage so her big belly dangles like a third tit. The jarheads start chanting, ooh-RAH! ooh-RAH!

He pinches the roach, holding it high above his mouth. From over Rudy's shoulder I see the thing squirming. Rudy joins in on the ooh-RAH chant. So does the stripper, shaking her G-stringed butt with each ooh and RAH.

"Say goodbye, Esther!"

He pops that goddamned thing in like it was a Cheeto and he makes like he's chewing but you can't really be sure because his mouth is closed. He's got this big yum-yum grin on his face and his jaw's pumping away. The skanky stripper says, "Let's see! Let's see you really eat that bug!" The jarhead looks over at her and his whole expression slumps into something different and ugly. He opens up and slides out that tongue all covered with legs and mashed-up wings and shell and this white goo. The stripper about gags but she keeps looking. The jarhead rolls back his tongue and leans into her face. You can tell she's about sick with it but she doesn't flinch or turn away. The jarhead gets his face right into hers and blows that junk all over her. Just fires on her. Hoses her with spit and roach parts.

It's about the meanest shit I have EVER seen go down.

She lets out a howl like a banshee. Two bouncers show up and start pounding on the jarhead. Somebody flings a pitcher and a bouncer catches it in his ear. There's blood everywhere. Then the jarhead's buds jump in and the whole place erupts.

We beat feet out of there. *Warp* drive. In the parking lot I'm

blinded for a minute and that shit back inside's pounding around in my head. We both got a good buzz on and Rudy's got his big old arm around me and calling me his buddy. He invites me over for dinner--says his old lady makes this killer lasagna. I figure, why not?

I'm following behind Rudy's Blazer--he's doing okay. A little weary, maybe, but no major bust. We stop at a light and I see this dynamite babe in a Jap ragtop. She's wearing these thick-framed Ray Bans. I put on my own shades and keep watching her. She's got some tremendous fat red lips and I think about kissing her and I especially think of the clicky sound our sunglasses make while we're kissing. In fact maybe I don't kiss her at all. Maybe we're just rubbing lenses. That's what does it for me, the sound of our shades bumping and grinding. I would never let her take them off.

We down a bottle of chianti with the lasagna. Rudy's wife, Anita, puts it away pretty good. She's a partier. I'm surprised how pretty she is, I mean, considering what an ape Rudy is. I can tell she kind of likes me since every time Rudy says something stupid she gives me this *what-a-dink* look.

Rudy bought the dining table in the Philippines. It's made of that monkey pod wood and under a glass top are all these demon masks. So every time you take a bite of food this crazy face that's all teeth and feathers is gawking at you. I keep seeing that jarhead's face right before he creamed the stripper. Finally I have to lay my napkin over it.

Anita puts away the dishes and Rudy cracks open a bottle of this Mexican brandy. When Anita takes my plate I get a little cleavage shot down her blouse. I look up and she gives me a grin and I don't know if it means *bad boy!* or if it means *Merry Christmas!*

Rudy says, "Hope you got your fill."

I say, "What?"

"You ain't gonna get nothing like that when we're haze-grey and underway."

I think of this big ape pounding my dick into the dirt and I just say, Nope, real cautious like.

Then he says, "Shit's got three different cheeses in it. I got a lactose intolerance, makes me squirt like a motherfucker. But I don't care. I'll put that shit away till doomsday."

He pours me a brandy in this little mug that says *Hang Loose* on it. Anita comes back and says she isn't gonna drink out of some stupid souvenir and pours hers into a wine glass. We shoot the shit for a while then Rudy starts telling about his first fuck. Anita gives me one of her

looks. Rudy goes on with this typical gross Rudy-story about this whore he hooks up with in TJ and how he smears toothpaste all over her chest because he wants to tit-fuck her and how the spearmint or whatever burns his dick so he dumps a Coke all over both of them to get the toothpaste off and she gets pissed and stuff and it's all going round and round in my head and I look over at Anita; she's just staring real bored like she's heard it about a million times, only moving to hit off the brandy which she is like PUTTING away.

So it's my turn. I tell about getting it with my cousin in the carport lockers and how when I'm fumbling around trying to get it in she says, "If the goal here is buttfucking you're doing great." They both get a big hoot out of that so I pour it on thick. I say when I finally found the right place it was like jamming a marshmallow into a piggybank. Well that about puts Anita on the floor. Rudy thinks it's funny but not *that* funny. Anita's holding her gut and saying over and over, "marshmallow in a piggybank!"

I say, "Okay, Anita. Your turn."

Through her gagging she says, "My turn what?"

"First sex story. Gotta pay to play. No peso, no *beso*."

"Oh Jeez. Do I have to?" But that was for Rudy's benefit. You could tell there was no keeping her back.

I give Rudy a quick one but he's busy pouring more brandy. He skips Anita.

When Anita stops laughing she grabs for the bottle but Rudy stops her. She shakes him off and says, "Screw off, Hon. I need some fortification for this."

"You look pretty fortified," Rudy says, and I see Rudy's big face carved into the tabletop. I'm surprised how natural he looks in feathers. Or maybe I'm not.

Anita ignores Rudy and starts telling her story which, it turns out, is about her first old man. It's all this sentimental stuff about champagne on the beach and a roaring fire and sleeping bags zipped together and *tender* this and *sweetly* that--but I can see she's really into it so I slap on my sincere face like when the chief's babbling on. About halfway through she does this weird thing. She reaches over and touches my hand. Just taps it like you do when you're making a point. And it's so warm it shocks me. There's my hand laying there like a clam and she touches me and it's like a sonofabitching soldering iron. I think I flinched.

I'm pouring brandy like it's going out of style and she's going on and on and I pretty much forget Rudy is even there till he gets up and

walks out. Anita just shakes her head like *don't worry about him* and goes on with the story. I just figure he's off to the shitter until I hear the TV.

Anita checks on him. When she comes back she says I should go. I ask why. She says not to worry, that Rudy'll be okay in the morning. I figure the night's over and I'll just say goodbye to Rudy. But Anita says, no, just GO. There's this edge to her voice and I'm not sure if she's mad at me or if Rudy's mad at her or what. While I'm trying to figure it out, Rudy comes storming in bellowing, GET THE FUCK OUT! YOU JIVE SHITHEAD! GET OUT!

The next thing I'm cold-cocked--on the deck flailing around, trying to get untangled from the chair, still holding that damned Hang Loose mug, flubbering around trying to get out some words. Anita's all screaming bloody murder and old Rudy snatches me up and I'm out the door and bouncing my head off his concrete drive.

Driving home freezing off my gonads for having the window down so I can spit out the blood, I'm trying not to fall asleep or be a bust so I'm concentrating real hard on what Anita was yelling. I think it was, *I'm glad you're going.*

Day Two

Spent the whole day running my ass off. Putting my shit in storage, haggling with the manager over my security deposit--last minute stuff. Now I'm lying on the floor biting hunks of dead skin from inside my cheek and spitting them at the ceiling. My whole jaw is yellow and swollen on that side and there's a chipped tooth I can't keep my tongue away from. Maybe I should go see dental.

I get another three aspirins and a beer to chase them. The lights are out across the way. Maybe she's sitting in her dark room watching. For a second I think she knows and she's laughing. But that's stupid. But just in case I flip her the finger.

Just then the lights come on. I take a step back. There's my Madonna. But she's not alone. Some longhair guy is with her. I touch my cheek. Still tender.

I go in the bathroom and run water in the sink. I think of washing my hands but I don't. Instead I stare at the mirror, at my fat yellow jaw and cracked lip. I need a hit off my beer--hell, maybe I want to pour the whole thing over my damn head. But I left it back in the kitchen.

She's doing her act for him. He's out of the picture--on the floor or the bed or I don't know. I roll the cold bottle across my forehead. When she gets to her panties, she rolls them down her legs then twirls

them over her head and flings them across the room. The guy stands up and nuzzles in between her jugs. My awesome titties. She holds him tight then looks right at me. I reach over and drop my shades. I just can't take that shit.

I finish packing my seabag and put it by the door with my aardvark mask. Liberty won't expire until 0600 but I'm thinking maybe I'll just spend the night on board. Why put it off? I mean let's face it. I'm ready for war.