

BOB'S STORY

By Bob Lambrecht

The long war was over and the countryside rested.

After the long war had been over for a while the countryside began to grow again.

The people who lived in the countryside had been at war for so long that after the war was over, they didn't realize it was over for a while.

But after all the noise had stopped and the countryside began to come back, they began to wonder if the war wasn't really over.

Pretty soon they decided it was over whether the war liked it or not. That pretty much ended it.

They began to come out of their caves and look around.

The first people to come out felt like a person from a large and noisy family might feel if they are the first one out of bed in the morning. They walked around on tip-toe so as not to wake anyone who might disturb the peace.

Pretty soon, other sleepers awoke, but they did not disturb the peace.

Very early in the war people had decided that trees were enemies. Warriors hid behind them and that made the warriors difficult to get at. So, the people went to work and knocked down all the trees that protected the warriors.

Soon the warriors built fake trees out of brick to hide behind. But the people knocked most them down, too. Will all that knocking down going on, there were no trees to be found anywhere, for most of the long war.

After the long war was over, the trees began to come back. The people treated them like special friends who had been away on vacation too long.

After a while the people began to talk among themselves. This had led to trouble before so they talked quietly and tried to listen to what the other person was saying. It was difficult at first but they soon got the hang of it. Often they talked in the shade of the new trees.

The thing they talked about most often was how hungry they were. Since the countryside was just recovering from the ruin of war it was difficult for the people to grow anything to eat. They were very thin and rather shabby.

Whenever anyone tried to talk about the long war, recently ended, they were politely asked to go sit under a different tree. Everyone hated the idea of war and no one wanted to talk about it.

Pretty soon it was noticed that there were some people who never talked to some other people. It was further noticed that the some people and the some other people had fought on different sides during the long war. It was decided that this would not be tolerated since it had led to trouble in the past. This led to the decision that it was time to talk about the war. Quite a few people thought that one way to keep the peace might be to talk about the troubles that had started the war.

Munich was on everyone's mind, and after that they remembered the Alamo. Munich was the place where the two sides who were strong before the war met to talk about ways to avoid going to war. Even before the war, no one had wanted war but it was a time when most people believed there were some things more important than peace, like castles and islands.

Munich was a nice little town which sat on the banks of "The Great River". Everyone liked Munich, it was a fun place.

The sides had many problems between them but when they met at Munich they all seemed to boil down to one. To which side did a little island, in the middle of the Great River, whose only claim to fame was that it was the home of a large castle called "The Alamo", belong to?

The Alamo had changed sides many times in many wars, but the talk at Munich was to decide the fate of the Alamo forever. It didn't work very well. That is to say, the talk at Munich didn't work very well, the Alamo worked just fine.

The Guardian of Freedom, the leader of the one faction came across the Great River to talk to the leader of the other side, Chairman Ho. It's quite a deal when one leader crossed the Great River to talk to another leader and everyone made a big to-do.

The two leaders talked about the Alamo long and hard. They had salty words for one another. They got angry. Finally they calmed down and made a decision which made no one happy.

It was called the "Alamo Compromise". It took up a lot of paper to say a few simple things very poorly.

The problem with the island that the Alamo rested on was that over a long period of time, people from both sides had settled on it. It couldn't be helped. Almost everyone

on both sides had boats and it was a very pretty island. People liked to camp there.

Since the people from the two sides were different from each other, they naturally developed a strong-rooted and mild form of loathing for one another. Lots of people from both sides living together on a small island, in the middle of the Great River, made even the little things they didn't like about each other seem bent out of proportion. There were lots of problems.

Since the Alamo's island had changed hands many times in many wars, no one ever really knew who was in charge at any given time. The Alamo Compromise was supposed to fix all that. It didn't work and that more or less caused the last, great long war.

What the Alamo Compromise said, is that, since the Castle Alamo was at that time, held by the garrison of the Guardian of Freedom, they, the army, would be in charge for ten years. At the end of the decade, elections would be held on the island, and whoever won the elections could keep the island permanently.

Of course, Chairman Ho's people on the island hated that idea because they didn't want to live ten years with the enemy's army in charge. They complained loudly. Chairman Ho told them he was sorry, but a deal's a deal.

He figured he could wait ten years. He had twice as many people on the island as the other side did. So, he couldn't possibly lose a referendum where everyone was granted a vote. He would be patient and make sure everyone voted when the time came.

This ten years turned out to be the most peaceful period the island ever knew. Usually, as soon as a decision is made, people forget there was ever a problem. This case was no exception. The Army stayed in the Castle Alamo and the people stayed out of it. Everything ran smoothly. The Alamo Compromise worked for ten years because there was nothing for it to do.

When the ten years was up, Ho called on the Guardian of Freedom to get the fair and free elections going. Ho thought that since the elections had been the Guardian's idea in the first place, he should start cranking the engine.

The Guardian had long since realized that it was going to be hard to win an election when the other side outnumbered him two to one. He decided to stall. Maybe, if he killed enough time, he could think of a new plan.

He said, "The Alamo Compromise says that at the end of ten years, we start *planning* elections, to be held at a later date." The Guardian knew of times when elections had

been stalled for years in the planning stage. Ho knew this too.

Ho said, "No, the Alamo Compromise says that at the end of ten years, we will have elections. Ten years to the date!"

The Alamo Compromise actually stated neither of these things. It was so poorly worded that it didn't say much of anything at all, despite being couched in the most florid and dignified Jeffersonian prose. The arguing over the date the elections were to be held got louder and angrier. People began to hate the Alamo Compromise, and refer to it as a treacherous rag. People began to hate Munich. People began to hate talking about Munich. People began to grumble strong oaths regarding war.

All this time the Guardian of Freedom drug his feet on the coming elections. He figured he had plenty of time. He thought Ho and his constituents were blustering about war. He figured if he kept the narrative purely focused on imminent elections for long enough, repeated his solemn oaths often enough, that events on the ground would remain manageably placid, and people would forget all about their rights to self-determination. As the end of ten years grew nearer and nearer, the Guardian talked more and more. Ho waited.

At midnight on the last day of the ten years, Ho's army crossed the Great River and attacked the Alamo. The army of the Guardian of Freedom, walled inside the doughty and stalwart defenses of the castle, fought stoutly for several days. But they were badly outnumbered and Ho's army soon overcame the hold-outs and occupied the castle.

The Guardian was apoplectic with rage. He ranted and raved and howled at the moon. He told his people: "The peaceful people of our side were preparing for fair and free elections. The talks at Munich made this clear. Elections are the only way to decide these matters. It is now abundantly clear that at Munich we were duped by barbarous curs. We will never forget that Chairman Ho villainously snowed us at the Munich talks. We will: REMEMBER THE ALAMO!"

The Guardian of Freedom forthwith declared war on Chairman Ho and his people. Both sides conscripted green and hungry armies and commenced hostilities on either side of the Great River for a long many years. Generations of men and boys were slaughtered in terrible battles. Many cities were razed, and refugees displaced, and forgotten in inhuman wilderness.

Many died and never did the end even seem close. After a couple of years, Chairman Ho died of heart failure.

His heart just failed, after turning as grey as the spindly hairs at his temples. The Guardian of Freedom thought that Ho's people would stop fighting after Ho had died, but they fought the harder under his fallen banner.

They thought Ho a great and dear leader, so they wanted to win for his memory. Not long after Ho died, the war was going very badly for the army of the Guardian of Freedom, and he was badly in need of a secret weapon to reverse the tides, and renew his side's fortunes. So he paid a lot of money to a foolish mage named Einstein who was enlisted to transform the Guardian into the greatest warrior who ever lived. Einstein botched the experiment and turned the Guardian into something that most closely resembled a monster. He was dangerous all right. But, when angry, he lost his temper and was as likely to destroy his own army as his enemy's.

Everyone began to fear him.

Throughout the long war, each side charged into battle shouting, "Remember the Alamo!" Both sides though they had good reason to remember. Ho's army because it was their first victory, and the Guardian's because it was their first defeat, and many heroes had fallen there as a result of Ho's treasonous betrayal.

As a result of Einstein's ill-fated project, the Guardian of Freedom cum monster became more and more dangerous. Soon, the armies on both sides began to fear him even more than defeat on the battlefields. One night, while he was asleep, hiding in a cave, the Guardian's army chained him to the wall. When Ho's army heard of this they swarmed the Guardian's army, sans leader, thinking this was the advantage they needed. But the Guardian's army fought the harder for the memory of their indisposed champion, because they remembered him when he was brave and wise, before he had become too dangerous. Thus, the last great battle was waged and fought to a stalemate.

Both armies were decimated that day. There were barely enough soldiers remaining to guard the caves where the civilians hid. The soldiers on both sides soon went to live in those same caves, promising to defend them to the death if attacked. There was precious little combat after that.

After the long war was spent, and the people had since begun to leave their caves, and warily converse with one another again, they remembered the Guardian of Freedom and wondered what had become of him. They talked among themselves and soon they found an old soldier, maybe even

the last one, who remembered which cave it was that they'd chained the Guardian of Freedom up in.

All of the people, friends and enemies alike, went to the cave and stood in front of its opening and tried to screw up the courage to holler at him to come out. But, from deep inside the cave they could hear a terrible mumbling and grumbling and they ran away frightened. However, they came back the next day to try again. Think of it, the poor old Guardian of Freedom chained in his cave while even his old enemies are standing at the door hollering at him to cease and desist his mumbling and grumbling.

"Stop, you old rattling bone-demon, you're scaring everyone out of their wits. We are all old now, and tired of conflict. Leave it alone and come out and be welcomed," they hollered into the cave's echoing maw.

"No," snapped the old monster. "Remember Munich? No more talk. Remember Ho, the wily cheat? I will sup on his entrails, though they are deadly toxins, and anathemic to my liberty-loving digestion."

"Ho Ho Ho," he laughed quietly to himself, like a demented Santa Claus, "I wish I had that little red chigger here before me. The free world needs me chained in this cave. Remember the Alamo!"

Everyone was quiet for a spell, deep in their respective ruminations. Then from inside the cave, "Say did anyone remember to bring a file with them?"

Silence.

"I thought not," grumbled the monster. Finally a file was found and thrown into the cave. It clanged on the ground and fell silent in the thick gloom.

"Well?" hollered his old enemies impatiently.

"Wait a minute," said the monster. "How do I know this isn't a trick? Another Munich? How do I know the war is really over? How do I know this isn't another one of Ho's perfidious gambits? Bolshevik chigger, wily red ant. He has stung me hard before! Remember the Alamo!" he shouted.

Silence.

"Say, how do you work this file anyway?" cried the old monster.

About this time some of the monster's friends showed up and one of them went into the cave and showed him how to work the file. Filing filing filing, and with occasional tugs and pulls and grunts, groans, and other assorted expressions of exertion, soon the monster was free.

But he was not yet willing to come out.

All of the people gathered outside the cave, friends and enemies alike—and began to holler at him. "Come out and talk, you old fool, the sun is shining. Everyone has left their caves. Come out, and breathe the clear air."

With much mumbling and grumbling and a final cry of "Remember the Alamo!", the last old monster came rumbling out of the cave.

"Something's different here," was the first thing he said. It had taken a very long time for his eyes to adjust to the brilliant tones of daylight, after the years of darkness in the cave. But now that he was out, in all his pale glory, and looking around bulgingly and limpidly, he again gave utterance to his refrain, a touch on the nose: "Something very different here." More to himself than anyone else.

He noticed the grass was greener, the air, cleaner, and the trees, he'd really forgotten them, had all grown back. And that his friends and enemies alike were all old now, and thinner and shabbier than he remembered them, even during the bleakest days of the long war.

His friends and enemies alike likewise noticed the Guardian's deterioration, and excessive wizened shabbiness and thinness. That his armor was dinged and edged with

rust. But somehow his sword still gleamed dangerously. It lay forgotten at his side.

"So the war is over," he said, again as an aside. He'd been chained up, alone, in his cave for so long that he'd done forgotten how to talk to other people.

Then he said quietly, "Nice trees, the war must really be over if the trees are coming back."

"Yes," said a very shabby man, nodding, "the war is over indeed, and it is time to talk about the truce."

"Oh," said the monster.

"Peace," said the very shabby man.

"Oh," uttered the monster again. Then the monster yelled "Remember the Alamo!" in truly monstrous fashion and started to crawl back to his cave, murmuring, "Peace can never be. For all we know beings from outer space are on their way right now to attack us, and use our women as incubators for their sand people offspring. I'd better go back into my cave and wait for them. You should all do the same, if you knew what was best for you!"

"If beings from outer space come, we won't fight," returned the very shabby man, who looked like a general the monster knew in a former life. "They can have anything they want, except for the thrill of battle, and the glory

of triumph. We'll all lie here like dead fish, we are through with war, it's too dangerous," he shouted.

The monster turned around in his cave and poked his head out the opening. "Won't fight? You'll fight. Would you dare forget the Alamo?" His sword gleamed angrily, but the monster looked very tired nonetheless. "The Alamo, always remember it!" he grumbled, then crawled deep into his cave to troubleshoot the alien invasion. His old enemies, and even his old friends, were disgusted by this pitiful display of entrenched perversity.

"The dope," they all said. "Peace is never easy for anyone, but the grass is green and the sun is shining, and he'd rather sit warlike in his cave with his sword for company, than talk in the sun with his fellow men."

After a while, the old shabby general spoke again.

"He's a strategic liability in there alone."

"For whom?" asked another curious shabby man.

"For us. He still has many cunning powers and devilish weapons hidden away in his cave," replied the general.

"He'll probably stay in there forever, like my Aunt Penny wasting away in the attic. Shit," said a man. "He won't, he'll get lonely and want to fight someone, or he'll

get hungry and want to have something to eat. No, he won't stay in there forever," said the general.

"He might be handy to have around if the beings from outer space come. Leave him there, just in case," said another especially prudent soul.

"Fool," echoed everyone.

Finally, (after much heeing and hawing), it was decided that the monster could be dealt with and they remembered that he was once a valiant and astute marshal and furthermore, decided that he'd fallen on hard times, and his mind gone to seed, softened by too many years living alone in a damp dark cave. It was resolved to deal with the monster on his own ground.

The very shabby man said, "I was once his strongest enemy. I will go down into his cave and talk some sense into him. He'll have to listen. I'll drag him out if needs be."

"Well, good luck," said all and sundry. "We wish you the best with that."

The very shabby general said goodbye to the daylight when he stepped into the gloom of the darkened cave. Soon the people outside thought they heard the monster shout, "What's this, another Munich?" but they couldn't be sure.

The very shabby man was in the cave so long that they nearly forgot about him, and his frayed epaulettes and pith helmet. "What is he doing in there?" some wondered.

"Maybe they're planning another war," some feared.

"If they are, they can have it all alone." All but one or two agreed. The very shabby man and the monster talked far and wide on a great many topics. It was slow going at first but after the very shabby man got used to the dark and the monster had dusted off his wits and gift of gab again, the talk seemed to get more interesting.

They remembered past glories and vivid glimpses of vermilion and hazel banners billowing in the wind and smoke, and brave friends now fertilizing the ground, iron-rich from blood. Castles and standard-bearers and battles, big and small, were played out on the shadow-draped cave walls. And always, cajolingly, the very shabby man tried to remind the monster that he was a brave and wise warrior gone to pot from too much war.

"All was ruined until we became too weary to fight, and retired to cower in our caves, and free to realize the shrill stupidity of so much insane carnage, and hide from its wasteful hellfire."

"I am not hiding!" shouted the monster. "I will defend this cave to the bitter end!"

Still, the talk continued. In all his years of loneliness, the monster had never realized that his old enemy was such an interesting fellow. His ideas were quaint and curious, but seemed sincere and somewhat intriguing. The monster was fresh out of ideas and was amused by many aspects of his opponent's position.

Many days and nights passed in parley, and after a while, the topic had strayed from war. One day the monster and his very shabby friend emerged from the cave together.

But the monster was still afraid of the daylight, and outside of the cave, the very shabby man seemed to be taller and not so thin. In fact, he looked a little threatening.

After all the years in the dark cave it was difficult for the monster to stand up straight, but he did his best, and laying his hand on his sword, he said, "Shouldn't we be preparing for battle? There is danger everywhere you turn."

"Yes," said the shabby man, "but if I were you, I'd first plant a garden. The great danger is that we'll grow thinner and thinner until we can't fight for beans."

The monster thought this over for quite a while and then said, "That's a very queer and interesting proposition." Then he took his gleaming sword and cut a

long line in the ground, then went off in search of seeds to bury in it.

The monster turned out to be a very good farmer and often when he finished in his own garden, he had time to help his friends and former enemies alike in their gardens. After many years of preparing for war in this fashion, the monster grew to be a prolific and green-thumbed rustican, and his very shabby friend grew a lot less shabby. One day the much less shabby man stopped off at the former monster's garden, and said, "How goes the battle?"

The former monster cum gardener replied, his gaze bent towards heaven like many a farmer who was consulting an almanac, "We can't fight for beans, but we're growing some very lovely roses."

"I like that one," said the man.

"So do I," said the gardener. "It's the best one yet, and long after it's gone, I'll remember its color and fragrance. I call it Alamo."

"Remember the Alamo," said the man.

"Yes indeed," said the gardener. "Remember the Alamo..."

And the womb-coveting sand people never came.

END!