

# THE DAY THEY LANDED

By Paul Chadwick

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Those other-world invaders should have picked some place besides the park in Eastboro to land their Flying Perisphere Thirty-seven R. Because the Selectmen of Eastboro would never stand for that kind of funny business.....

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**THE FIRST** car went by Sam Holt's backwoods filling station at three o'clock. Sam figured the time afterwards because he had just pulled up the sleeve of his coveralls to see when the heck Ed Dennis was coming to spell him. Ed was supposed to have been there at two.

Sam was down in the grease pit giving his own jalopy a going over because business was slack and because there wasn't anything much else to do. When he stuck his long, horsey face out to look for his socket wrench, he saw the car go by.

It was speeding like one of those crazy whippet dogs over at the Eastboro track. A big, dirt-colored sedan, its tires made a whimpering sound as it whizzed along doing at least seventy, barely holding the road.

Sam saw the set face of the driver. Back of him was a bunch of old ladies hanging onto each other and trying to keep their hats from falling over their eyes.

"Whoa!" yelled Sam. But the car was already out of sight, churning on towards Higginsville.

"Must be a fire some place," Sam decided.

He felt sure of it a minute later when three more cars came whooshing up the road. They were all going in the same direction and all were crowding the speed limit.

Sam climbed out of the pit, went down in front of the gas pumps and watched as they passed.

One driver made a queer face at him through a side window. The folks in all three cars looked scared about something.

Scratching his left ear wonderingly, Sam stared down the highway at the rear ends of the speeding autos. They didn't tell him a thing, but he had a queasy feeling in his stomach. Looking the other way, he started whistling through his teeth.

Another bunch of cars was already in sight, lurching and crowding, trying to pass each other. Sam gaped as they sped by with motors roaring, horns screeching and tires whining.

The queasy feeling in his stomach got worse. Walking back to the station, he went inside and pulled the phone off the hook. He tried to reach his friend, Bill Tweeks, in Eastboro, but there wasn't even a line hum. Muttering, he went over to his little plastic radio that never failed him, switched it on and listened. That was dead, too.

Sam said, "Gol dang it!" and spat.

He slouched down to the road again, planted himself in the middle of it, feet wide apart, and waited. When the next car showed up he began flapping his arms and cap.

It was coming fast like the other-ers[sic]. The driver started hooting for Sam to get out of the way, but Sam wouldn't. The driver lost his nerve at the very last second and screeched to a stop with his bumper against Sam's knee.

"Don't like to pester you," Sam said apologetically, "but what's the ruckus about?"

The driver, a paunchy, well-dressed man of fifty, a salesman Sam guessed, stared at him with a doughy face.

"Where've you been, son? Don't you know they've landed?"

He jerked a thumb back toward Eastboro. Then, before Sam could ask him another question, he stepped on the gas and sped off.

**SAM WAS** excited now, though his lean Yankee face didn't show it. It showed no more emotion than his grandfather's face had that day at Gettysburg; no more either than his Great-great-great-Uncle Asa's had when the Redcoats swarmed up Breed's Hill.

Sam got his car off the grease pit track, backed around and turned in to the highway. He headed straight for Eastboro.

Other folks might be going south but Sam Holt was going north. If something or somebody had landed in Eastboro he wanted to know about it. His kinsmen had always been a curious sort, liking to keep sharp tabs on things.

A lot more cars came whizzing along the road ahead of him and Sam had to jounce down into the ditch a couple of times to keep from being hit.

"I'll tell the constable about it," he thought. "He'll make it hot fer these fellers."

One car finally stopped ahead of him and a man thrust a perspiring face through the window.

"Turn around, young feller. You're going the wrong way."

"Why?" demanded Sam.

"Cause they've landed. That's why. You don't want to be jailed or shot dead, do you?"

"Who's landed?" asked Sam.

"The Greenies. They came right down in Eastboro like they said they would. They're roundin' up folks right now."

"Who in heck's the Greenies?" Sam wanted to know.

"Don't you listen to the radio, young feller? That broadcast wasn't no soap opera like people thought. The Greenies are smack dab in Eastboro right this minute."

"I was down in the grease pit," explained Sam. "Been there two hours. I didn't hear nothin'. Who's these Greenies?"

The driver of the other car muttered something profane, shook his head reproachfully and threw in the clutch.

Sam drove on too. He had a hard time getting into Eastboro, hard, that is, till he had crossed the bridge over Catfish Creek and was close to the head of Main Street. Then all traffic thinned out. There was nobody in sight anywhere. It was just like being in town Sunday afternoon when there was a big church picnic in Gellert's woods. Sam rattled on till he came to the park.

He slammed on the brakes and gawped when he saw the big, funny looking machine that rested on the grass. It must be a flying machine he guessed, for it didn't have any wheels and he didn't see how else it could have got there except by flying. It was just a big, smooth globe of shiny metal with short fins sticking out. There was a round door close to the ground on the side, sort of like the ash clean-out in a furnace.

Sam's gawking was interrupted by the arrival of two short, squat men in queer green uniforms. They came right up to his jalopy and stuck their heads through the open side windows. Their faces had a greenish cast, too. They had round features like soft biscuit dough with little black raisins for eyes.

"Halt!" said one of them. He had a silver tube in his hand no bigger than a lead pencil and he pointed this at Sam's head.

"Am halted," said Sam. "You fellers from a circus?"

They looked straight at him blankly, their little raisin eyes expressionless.

"What's Circus?" asked one in an odd kind of English that Sam had never heard before. The accent wasn't Polish or Finnish, German, Russian or Italian. The chap didn't look like a Swede either and he wasn't any Jap. He didn't look like much of anything that Sam had ever seen.

"I thought everybody knew what a circus was," Sam said. "Thought all kids went to 'em."

"We do not have it," said the man on the right. He jabbed the silver tube closer to Sam. "You will come see the leader."

"Sure," said Sam. "Mighty glad to talk to him."

He unwound his long legs, climbed down out of his jalopy and walked between the two green men toward the Eastboro postoffice.

**WHEN HE** got close he saw a group of subdued looking people in front of it being guarded by other green men with funny little tubes. Bert Willis, the grocer was there. So was Jim Howe, who owned the feed store, George Mills, cashier in the People's Savings Bank, and old Mrs. Cora Fink who ran the New Eureka Bakery. They seemed too scared to notice him. Sam took another long look at the big, globe-like flying machine there in the park.

"What'll they think of next!" he thought.

He was taken inside the postoffice and led back behind the racks of letter boxes. A Greenie with especially dull black eyes and some sort of fancy doodab on his uniform sat at the desk where old Hiram Crawford, the postmaster, usually sat. Hiram wasn't anywhere in sight.

The Greenie raised his round face and stared at Sam.

"Who you call you?" he said. "Where you come from? All people are supposed accounted for."

Sam shook his head.

"I heard the Greenies had landed. I just came to see what they was like."

"You did? So!" The leader lowered his small heavy lids craftily. "You afraid of us, are not?"

"Ain't seen nothin' yet to be afraid of," said Sam.

"Oh, so? If out back of this building you care to look you will perhaps have a change of mind. People of this town they were. Some liquidation there had to be."

"You mean you've been killin' folks?" said Sam aghast.

"A few for whom quieting was essential," said the Greenie leader.

Sam lifted his grease-smearred finger and shook it fiercely under the Greenie's nose.

"We don't cotton to lawlessness in Eastboro, mister!"

"Lawlessness!" A smile played around the Greenie's puffy lips. "Lawlessness this is not, my fellow so smart. We are the law--the new law. Everyone to obey it have got."

"There *ain't* no new law," said Sam. "Law's same as always, unless the Selectman change it. Even then it has to go through town meetin' an' be put to a vote. Fellers have give their lives here in New England ever since the time of George Washington to see that the law's kept simple an' straight. Did you git a permit to land in the park with that contraption?"

The Greenie gave a visible start and looked at Sam fixedly.

"To liquidate you I am disconsolate to require," he said. "Necessity of new regime demand extirpation of malcontents."

"I ain't no malcontent," said Sam. "I'm satisfied with the U.S.A. and with this here town. Us Yanks don't like to pay taxes, but we do it just the same--like we obey the law even if we do grumble. It won't do no good to kill me, mister. There's a lot more fellers like me back in these woods. They won't stand fer this kind of ruckus. Neither will the Selectmen. They like it nice an' quiet 'round here."

The Greenie leader leaned forward and his odd voice sounded almost distressed.

"Earth creature please note," he said. "You do not understand. Not merely Eastboro, not just this county, state or country--the whole world, it is ours. This is the New Regime. Advance Unit Four Twenty, we are called. All habitable of the planets soon to be taken over and run by us."

"Nuts!" said Sam. "You talk big, mister, too big for your britches. Wait till the folks in Higginsville hear about this. There'll be a gang come here after you."

"That will be impossible," said the Greenie leader sharply. "Ten miles around this village there is impassable mesotronic neutralizer now created. To get through it nothing can. Military tanks, not even. High-explosive shells, no better. Atomic bombs, futile."

"Golly!" said Sam. He scratched his ear. "What in thunder did that?"

"We did it, so. Flying Perisphere Thirty-seven R. Inverse turbos steadily rotating to cut gravitational lines, create electric field and disturb mesotronic catalysis in orbit of atom. Science of Earth infantile against us. To obey us all must."

"I don't like it," said Sam. "What's more, I don't aim to stand for it."

The Greenie drew his brows together and gave a quick command to one of his men in a strange language formed by chattering monosyllables[sic]. The guard, clutching his little silver tube, pulled Sam gently by the arm.

"You will please to come with me a moment, Earth Creature."

Sam allowed himself to be drawn toward the back of the post office till he got opposite the side door where they sometimes took in the mail during the Christmas rush. There he suddenly raised his knee, hit the Greenie guard in the stomach and bolted as the man fell over.

**THERE WAS** a *zut* sound in the air beside him as he reached the door. The door frame disintegrated in a puff of vapor by his shoulder and a hole a foot round appeared. It was as neat as if Carpenter Bert Forkins had made it with his compass saw.

"Golly!" San muttered again as he dashed across the street.

There was another *zut* just then. A hickory tree fourteen inches in diameter melted in its middle and tipped over sidewise with a *swish*. It almost squashed Sam like a bug.

"Judas!" he yelled.

He ducked behind the fallen tree and ran for it then, going right by the big metal flying machine.

The loudest and final *zut* really scared him. It burned one of his trouser legs off at the cuff and cut through the marble column on which the statue of Daniel Webster stood with his hand upraised. Webster took a header into a tulip bed and stayed there with his feet sticking into the air.

Sam got out of sight behind the People's Bank Building, scooted out of town and kept running till he was exhausted.

As soon as he got his breath he was mad at himself for running, but he was even madder at the Greenies. The trousers that had been burned were a new pair of summer tweeds that he had bought at the Broadway Bargain Store in Higginsville a week before. They had set him back six dollars and ninety-eight cents.

He found a hiding spot in a clump of bayberry bushes in the hills on the west side of town and he lay there thinking. Looking over into Eastboro he could just make out the top of the Greenies' flying machine. It looked shiny and pretty with the afternoon sun gleaming on it. But the sight of it kept Sam feeling mad as all get out.

It was then that he remembered the granite quarry that had belonged to old Albert Smith and that Smith had left to his no-good son, Freem, who was too lazy to work at it. There just might be something useful in that quarry.

San got up and went scuffling on through the bayberry bushes and into the pines. Ten minutes' walk and he was on top of a hill, staring down into a hole in the ground where granite slabs had been taken out.

There was some greenish water in the bottom of it and a half dozen fat bullfrogs squatting around on the rocks, sunning themselves.

Mad as he was, Sam couldn't resist the temptation to shy a stone down at them. He grinned to see the way they dived under. It was just one of his weaknesses. He'd never been able to see a fat old bullfrog sitting all comfortable-like without wanting to make him jump.

He walked down a rough road into the quarry and reached a tar-paper shack. There was a rusty padlock on it and Sam looked around for something to bust it open with. He found an old iron spike and a hunk of granite.

**WHEN HE** reached the door, though, he saw that someone had got there ahead of him. The padlock was split in two like a nutshell.

Sam pulled the door open, looked inside and grinned.

Eddie Whittles, the town idiot, who worked for Mrs. Fink at the bakery, pulling a little cart around, was sitting in the gloomy interior, perched on a red box, shivering. When he saw Sam he raised his arm and pointed toward Eastboro.

"Zoo-o-oo-zut!" he said.

His under lips sagged. He rolled his eyes, rested his hands against his stubbly face and rocked gently back and forth like a homesick ape.

"Don't go tippin' over that dynamite!" Sam cautioned. "Get up an' let me look at it. Maybe the mice have ate it up."

Whittles got up obediently and shambled away.

Sam paid no attention to him while he raised the lid and looked the dynamite over. There were a dozen sticks left, wrapped in stained wax paper. He found some percussion caps, too. There was an old detonator and a coil of wire over in a corner of the shack. Sam tested the detonator to make sure it still worked. Whittles watched him, rolling his head and shivering.

"Don't let 'em get you down," said Sam. "How would you like to help me, Eddie?"

"Zoo-o-oo-oot!" said Eddie.

"Sit down," said Sam "Let's rest a while an' talk this thing over. You got your idees[sic] an' I got mine."

He pulled Eddie Whittles down beside him on the dynamite box and they discussed the matter while the afternoon shadows lengthened. Sam kept staring at his burned trouser leg while Eddie said:



"Zoo-oo-zut!"

By the time darkness came Sam had it all figured out. Every man, he guessed, even one who wasn't quite all there, had some particular thing he could do better than other folks. He knew what Eddie Whittles could do better than anybody in Eastboro and he thought he could work it in fine.

"We're goin' into town," Sam said. "We'll set off a few big firecrackers where they'll do the most good. Those Greenies didn't get any permit to land their machine. We can't let 'em stay there. It wouldn't be right. Selectmen wouldn't like it. When I pinch you, Eddie, you do that trick of yours like you sometimes do when you're runnin' fast with your little wagon. Understand?"

Eddie rocked his head forward and backward to show that he did. He made motions in the air and a buzzing noise with his lips.

They walked down out of the pine woods, Sam carrying the dynamite, the caps and the detonator while Eddie trailed after him with the wire and a big sack of dry pine cones that Sam had had him collect. Eddie began shivering again when they got close to the outskirts of Eastboro, but he followed Sam like a faithful shadow.

Sam crept in between the buildings, heading for the green. At the last he got down on his hands and knees and crawled between flowerbeds and bushes, right up to the big gleaming globe of metal in the center of the park. He picked the darkest side, away from the door, and he worked silently under the rounded belly of the machine while two Greenie guards on the opposite side carried on a low-voiced conversation in their strange tongue. To Sam it sounded just about the same as the language Eddie Whittles used.

**ABOVE HIS** head Sam could hear the steady hum of the turbos that were somehow making a defensive wall all around Eastboro so that no help could get in.

When he got his dynamite placed where he wanted it and his caps on, he trailed the wire back across the park through the shadows and fastened the ends to his detonator that was hidden in a big juniper bush. Eddie crawled faithfully along beside him and crouched at his elbow, peering out at the town.

Only Greenies were in sight now. They were patrolling the streets with their funny little tubes in their hands. There were about a dozen of them altogether, Sam figured. Over in the post office the lights were on and he could see the head of the leader. Sam spat and wiped his mouth on his shirtsleeve. Then he nodded to himself.

"Wait here a minute, Eddie," he whispered. "When I come back an' pinch you--like this--you do your stuff."

Eddie bobbed his head again. He was smiling now, pleased that someone at last appreciated his one accomplishment.

Sam crawled back to the flying machine, struck a match and tossed it into the sack of pine cones. He scrambled back to the juniper bush as fast as he could.

By the time he got there flames were beginning to lick up out of the cones, plastering resinous smoke against the underside of the flying machine. Sam waited till they attracted the attention of the Greenie patrol over across the street. He saw the guards start for the park. Then Sam reached out and pinched Eddie Whittles in the seat of his pants.

Eddie raised his head and opened his mouth. His face took on the ecstatic look of a virtuoso about to perform and conscious that he has a sympathetic audience.

A wailing sound came from his lips, faint at first, rising by slow degrees into a shivering, ear-splitting shriek. It held the high peak of its tremolo in perfect imitation of the siren on the Eastboro Fire Department's red truck. This was the golden nugget of Eddie Whittle's particular genius. It was the trick he used to make folks jump and scamper out of his way when he was pulling his own little cart.

Greenies came running from all over town. The patrols broke up and swarmed toward the park. The door of the post office opened, the leader thrust his head out, saw the burning cones, heard the siren and came running, too.

Sam waited till they were all close to the flying machine, in under its belly, kicking and beating the flaming cones, while others went inside through the metal door. Then he plunged down on the handle of the detonator.

There was a huge explosion out in the park; a deafening roar, a vast sheet of orange flame. It knocked both Sam and Eddie over, sending them headlong in amongst the juniper pricklers and making their ears ring.

The big metal globe rose up a few feet, split apart like an over-ripe squash, then disintegrated into flying shards of metal that scattered in all directions. One of them draped itself in the branches of the fallen hickory that had nearly hit Sam.

When it was over and the flame and the noise had quieted down there wasn't a moving Greenie in sight. There was only the joyful, excited murmur of the townspeople, moving out into the street, free men and women again. It would be a mighty long time before the Greenies tried another invasion, when they never again heard from this advance unit.

Sam sat up, wiped the juniper pricklers from his face and got his breath. Eddie Whittles rose mumbling at his side.

"Hated to do it," Sam muttered, looking apologetically down at the detonator that had fallen over. "But we couldn't have that kind of funny business in Eastboro, Eddie. The Selectmen wouldn't stand for it a minute."

