

INTRODUCTION  
TO  
“WHEN THE  
MUSIC’S OVER”  
BY LEWIS SHINER

As I write this I’m 38 years old. I was born in 1950, graduated high school in 1968, and was in college during the Cambodian incursion of 1970 and the resultant killings at Jackson State and Kent State.

I may never know how many of my deepest beliefs are simply the result of my being a middleclass suburban white kid who grew up in the fifties and sixties. Jim Blaylock once told me that all of us of that age were just products of Bob Dylan and *Mad* magazine, as good a generalization as I’ve ever heard.

I dropped out of college after my sophomore year. I was unhappy about Vietnam and political repression at home. I’d never wanted to go to college in the first place, and the rigid course requirements of the time seemed irrelevant at best. Besides, I was going on tour with my rock-and-roll band.

It turned out the band had already replaced me without bothering to tell me. I had no job, no prospects, no desire to go home to my parents, and a draft lottery number of 3.

At the time my father believed Richard Nixon could do no wrong; he’d voted for Nixon in 1960 and helped elect him in 1968. If we were in Vietnam, it had to be for a good reason. I remember once when he caught me wearing love beads under my shirt—a girl at college had given them to me. He jerked them off my neck, breaking the string and spilling them all over the floor. He yelled something—the exact words escape me—but it summed up the logic of the time: beads equals hippy equals protest equals traitor.

It was winter in Dallas the day I took my physical; gray, cold, and windy. I hadn’t had anything to eat in a couple of days, and I hadn’t drunk anything since the night before. I was six feet tall and weighed 122 pounds. I couldn’t even manage a urine specimen. I remember coming out of the Selective Service office and calling my father and telling him I was underweight, that I’d flunked the physical. I didn’t know but what he might be angry. Instead he was happy, and almost ... proud. He said, “This is not a war I want to send you to.”

I remember getting on the bus, feeling lightheaded, ecstatic. Part of it was just starvation, of course. Part of it, though, was the sense of limitless possibility. I would not go to Vietnam to die or be crippled. My life was my own again.

This is a book about possibilities. Most of the writers are my age. This may simply be a result of the way the project grew out along my networks of friends. Or it may have to do with values that are so closely identified with this generation: idealism, nonviolence, environmental awareness, spirituality. In twenty years the idea of this book may seem laughable. Can one book, a handful of writers, actually change anything?

The answer, of course, is that we can try. I asked each of them to write a story in which conflict—any kind of conflict—was resolved without violence. Without a “good guy” beating up or shooting a “bad guy.” I see this not as a limitation, but as an invitation to new possibilities, a chance to open our fiction, as well as our minds, to new ways of thinking.

The time has clearly come for this sort of book. Military fiction—especially military science fiction—has become a major marketing trend. Jerry Pournelle edits a series of anthologies titled *There Will Be War* with volume numbers into double digits. There are many of us who find this a self-fulfilling prophecy. Until we are willing to believe that war is not a necessity, until we turn our hearts and minds and creativity to finding other solutions, then history will continue to repeat itself.

When I contacted Ian Watson (who unfortunately could not manage an original story for me) he mentioned trying a similar proposal, with no success, five years ago. Now we have not only the present book, but an anthology edited by Harry Harrison and Bruce McAllister with the working title *There Need Be No War*. (In the spirit of the books, we’ve kept in touch with each other, sharing information and authors, somewhat to our publishers’ horror.)

I believe this book *will* change things. If nothing else, the editor’s share of all its earnings is going to Greenpeace, an organization whose members put their lives on the line day after day, without violence, for the good of us all. And I believe the stories will change things too. They don’t preach, they don’t offer easy answers. They offer real people facing hard choices who try to do the best they can.

I would like to see them spawn more stories like themselves. I would like them to cast at least small shadows over Rambo and Dirty Harry and the other gun-toting icons of our time. I would like the people who read this book to stop for a second and see the world through somebody else’s eyes.

That would be enough.