

Dreamhaven

by [J. Barrie Shepherd](#) in the [June 28, 2011](#) issue

Even before D Day
and the great emptying out
of England's fields and hedgerows
—one vast and camouflaged parking lot—
onto the harrowed beaches of the French,
even before those daily tidal waves of bombers
bearing east about sunset to deliver our turn,
even after the buzz-bombs, doodlebugs—
names to tame them into toys they never were—
came skittering across our skies in random hate,
cigar ends glowing frightful in the dark,
Mum and Dad decided that the cold and earthy damp
of our backyard Anderson shelter posed more risk
than the odd incendiary bomb. When the warning
sounded from the factory roof they would bed us down
beneath the tough oak table round which we ate our meals,
wrote letters, diaries, drew and painted, did the homework
we brought back from school—still sandbagged from
the big one landing in the lower playground.
It was the closest Dick and I came
to a camping trip those confined cautionary years
and whatever fears still lingered lay concealed beneath
the tangled maze of bedclothes, pillows, table legs.
"Is that the all-clear, Daddy?" we would ask
of that second wailing siren, far later in the night,
reassured and yet reluctant, somehow,
to forsake the secret shelter of our cozy bivouac.
Then back upstairs to bed,
dread now, if not dissolved, deferred at least
until some deeper, even darker night to come.