



## Patrol

By Matt Printer

Sometimes I realize it, catch myself, always when I'm alone. No one in the house except the dog. The clock ticks the seconds away softly in the background. It's hypnotic—the quiet and muffled 'tick, tick'—almost like a heartbeat—every gentle patter lulling me, calming me. My mind floats as if suspended in its own bliss, though only for the short moments in between the light tap of seconds.

The quiet surrounds me. I hear the air move with each breath my dog takes and the sounds of tire on pavement as the occasional car drives down the road. The soft patter of seconds continues ticking, consumes me, transports me.

The tapping changes now, the same methodical rhythmic tempo as before, but I hear the crunch of gravel under foot. The confident heal-toe step of a boot as it makes contact with the earth. Foot fall after foot fall the boots are heard as my eyes see the dirt covered road I walk down. My arms—they feel heavy—the weight of the rifle. My neck aches, a deep ache from my shoulders right up my spine. I feel the straps of my flak bite into my skin under the weight of my Sappi's, magazines, and radio.

Black smoke drifts slowly upwards in the direction I walk. The crunch, crunch, crunch of earth is felt in my feet, in my bones, heard in my mind. The sun is setting, hanging low over the date trees that rise like giants from the sand. Blades of light slice through the palms, I stop and stare. A breeze makes the light and the palms dance before my eyes.

I hear the patter, the soft patter of seconds ticking away. A car drives by the house. I glance at the clock. It's 1:38, almost time to pick the boys up from school.

