

VOYAGE *TO*  
VAJU

VERNON D. ANDERSON

Desert Willow Publishing

VOYAGE TO VAJU

By Vernon D. Anderson

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Cover by Lynn Vadney

Though it is not usual to dedicate a novel to the author, since we are publishing this novel many years after the author's death, I would like to dedicate this book to the memory of my uncle, Vernon D. Anderson. He was born in 1934 and died in 2002. His completed manuscript was unearthed after the death of his youngest sister. My thanks to my aunt, Anita Love, for saving the novel written by her youngest brother and storing it for so many years. And thanks to my cousins, Kathy Jones and Debra Goodheer, for unearthing the manuscript and rescuing the tale from obscurity. In addition, my thanks to my brother John Black, who makes an excellent proof reader, for helping me find Vernon's typos and the typos I entered when transcribing the manuscript. And my thanks to our cousins who expressed their enthusiastic support of the project.

Lynn Vadney, editor



## Characters

### Sightseers:

Dave Hall, leader of the after-hour's tour  
Nellie Hall, Dave's niece  
Don Dale, Dave's good friend  
Jim West, race car builder  
Dr. John Monroe, Dave's college roommate  
Diana Hunter, news director of public television station  
Clay Churchill, an Englishman  
Jack Hardin, NFL linebacker  
Matthew Bell, Olympic champion  
Bryan Scott, an engineer  
Pamela Monroe, John's wife and a veterinarian  
Ben Sanchez, Dave's high school friend  
Jessie Sanchez, Ben's sister  
Cindy West, Jim's wife  
Linda Sanchez, identical twin, a cousin of Ben  
Katie Sanchez, identical twin, a cousin of Ben  
Scott Short, fraternal twin, a nephew of Dave  
Dean Short, fraternal twin, a nephew of Dave

### Astronauts:

Dan Owens, captain of the crew  
Dr. Karl Werner, chemist  
Dr. Paula Taylor, biologist  
Brad Patman, copilot



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## VAJU: THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM

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A Vajuvian Medicine Show  
Out of the Frying Pan  
The Arena  
The Race for Life



VOYAGE TO  
VAJU

or *Vajurooned*

**Part I**



## PRELUDE TO A HUMONGOUS SNAFU

Dave Hall first knew that something was seriously wrong when the floor began to shake beneath his feet. He was showing his niece, Nellie Hall, and his two nephews, among others, around the third, or storage deck, of the *Jules Verne* when the floor (or deck) began to quiver, accompanied by a low but increasing rumble. The *Jules Verne* was an exhibition spacecraft identical in every respect to the *Robert P. Goddard* rocket which was to be launched to the moon that night. At first, knowing of the many rumors of sabotage, he thought that there must have been an explosion nearby. The thought of an earthquake even passed briefly through his mind, but as the noise increased, it dawned on him that it could mean only one thing. Somehow, unbelievably, the engines had ignited, NOT on the *Goddard*, but on the *Jules Verne* and they were about to embark upon a trip for which they had no tickets and which, in the main at least, they had no desire to take! He started to try to reach the intercom, but he realized that it was too late for that. They had reached the point of no return. The launch could not be aborted. He yelled to warn everyone in the party that he had been escorting to get down and protect themselves as best they could from the g-forces to come. These measures were predictably insufficient to keep everyone from losing consciousness.

Dave did not dream while he was unconscious, but if he had, he might have reflected on the events leading up to this present incredible turn of events.

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As the turn of the century neared and the increasing budgetary crisis in the United States caused a sharp curtailment in space spending, the return to the Moon, the Mars program and the space station were all put on hold or cancelled. However, a still present desire to stay ahead of the Russians, (or whatever they were called that week), the Chinese, the French, the Germans, the Japanese and anyone else who might get into it caused Congress, in its finite wisdom, to pass

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a bill providing various incentives to private space projects. These included the usual subsidies and tax breaks for the successful companies and, as a publicity gimmick, cash awards for any astronauts actually landing on the moon or any other extraterrestrial body. The cash was substantial, almost as good as that received by a Major League utility infielder or journeyman NFL football player (but not so high as that awarded to an NBA benchwarmer).

Even though the rewards offered were high, the expenses and the risks involved were so immense that only the very largest of corporations could even think of attempting it. Exploratory research was undertaken by half a dozen companies or combines. Three organizations actually began moon projects. One of these quickly dropped out when it became apparent that the only thing astronomical about the venture was likely to be the loss incurred. The remaining two were undertaken by the nation's largest auto manufacturer, Humongous Motors<sup>1</sup>, and by Interplanetary Research, Inc.<sup>2</sup>, a consortium of half a dozen of the nation's largest companies in various fields.

Interplanetary Research had the advantage of larger funds but was hampered by a lack of adequate communication and cooperation between the diverse elements that made up the consortium.

Humongous Motors would have rejected the project as too immense and risky even for its mega-billion dollar resources after the preliminary survey except for the fact that the scientists in one of its subsidiaries had made some significant discoveries in rocket fuel research. Preliminary tests showed that the fuel developed was so much more powerful than any previously known that it would allow significant cost savings elsewhere which would in turn make the project feasible and give them an edge over all other competitors.

As a result Humongous Motors (known by its employees, sometimes affectionately, as The Humongous One and by its competitors, not at all affectionately, as Godzilla) was able to construct a rocket much larger than any of its competitors with a greater safety margin and to complete it much sooner. The ship was presented to the government and public as a true interplanetary vehicle capable of carrying not two or three but twelve to fifteen people to Mars along with the supplies to sustain them! AND (they claimed) at a pace which could reduce the time required for a Mars trip by half or even more! The immediate objective, however, was still the Moon and a crew of four was selected to make the initial voyage although for purposes of demonstrating its capabilities the ship would be provisioned for a full complement.

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1. Obvious pseudonym.

2. Pure inspired fiction.

## PRELUDE TO A HUMONGOUS SNAFU

Dan Owens would be the captain of the crew. An astronaut of about fifty, he had flown for NASA but quit when it became apparent that he would have no further flight opportunities with them. Dr. Karl Werner was the scientist largely responsible for their fuel breakthrough. A brilliant chemist, he made himself expert in other vital fields and twisted the arms of the men in charge to get his seat on the flight. Dr. Paula Taylor, a biologist by profession and former student of Dr. Werner, had likewise trained herself to assist Dr. Werner in his functions on the flight and offered her knowledge as an amateur astronomer, if needed. Being an undeniably qualified woman did not hurt her chances in the environment of the nineties either. Brad Patman also had quit NASA because the flight possibilities at Humongous seemed more attractive to him than being a “truck driver,” as he put it, on a reduced shuttle run. He was an electronics and computer specialist as well as being the copilot.

Several accidents occurred on the project soon after the first public disclosures were made of the rocket’s capabilities and the launch date announced, raising the fear that someone, either one of Humongous’ domestic competitors or agents of one the foreign enemies of the United States (or friends for that matter), was trying to sabotage the project.

Security on the project was tightened and someone in the upper echelons whose exact identity is not important to this narrative conceived an elaborate ruse to divert the potential saboteurs. A second vehicle whose construction was well under way was rushed to completion ostensibly for use as a public exhibit to be open to the press and to the public before the launch. The ship designated as the launch vehicle, the *Robert P. Goddard*, was to be clamped under a very tight and very obvious security while the demonstration vehicle was to be guarded just tightly enough to keep the visitors from carrying off the entire ship as a souvenir. This demonstration vehicle was named in honor of *Jules Verne*, a French novelist of the 1800s known for his science fiction novels, in the hope that the connection with science fiction would lend an aura of implausibility to any thought that the *Jules Verne* might actually be the launch vehicle. Both ships were fully provisioned as the second ship was supposed to be an exact duplicate of the moonship in every way. It was also to be fueled on launch day to demonstrate one of the prime advantages of the secret fuel, the fact that it was much safer and less apt to cause spectacular and devastating explosions on the launch pad.

Like many previous schemers in Man’s long history they were trapped by their own deviousness. The *Jules Verne* was prepared and made ready for launch. The guards around her were instructed to clear the area and close it to

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the public at a specified time before the scheduled liftoff. At this time only a few top executives and security officers knew of the decoy plan.

All went according to plan until a disturbance nearby pulled the guards away from the locked gates after they had cleared the ship of visitors.

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When Thomas Jefferson Davis Hall, more concisely known as Dave Hall, had come to the locked gates with his party of friends, he had just returned from a weekend of amateur road racing and was unaware of the ruse or the latest mishap. He did, however, in his capacity as a part-time auditor and general fiscal snoop on the project, have a set of keys which would open the gate which he promptly did, ushering his guests through so that they could tour the exhibit and still not miss the launch.

Dave reflected, as he watched them file through, that he had not realized that he had so many friends and relatives until a short feature was done on his moonlighting job and it occurred to people that he might just possibly be able to get them good “seats” to the launch. There were more than a dozen people in the group he was now shepherding ranging from a niece and a pair of nephews and his good friend Don Dale to Jim West, a race car builder and driver that Dave knew casually through Don, to an Englishman with Jim whom Dave knew not at all. In between were assorted relatives and friends some of whom Dave had not seen or heard from in years. Dave himself was in his early thirties, single, an accountant by trade, and recently infected with a restlessness born of a feeling that life was passing him by. It was a classic, if somewhat premature, case of the middle-age crazies and had caused him to try to change his life style and hence his life. His treatment of the disease included dieting and acquiring new interests such as handball, karate and now sports car racing.

He took his group on a tour of the ship from the control area on the top level through the living quarters in the middle level to the engine and storage area on the lower levels. They were still in the lower level when the guards returned from what turned out to be a wild-goose chase followed, almost immediately, by the crew and launch personnel picking up the interrupted countdown without any further delay. One of the first items on the procedure was to automatically lock and seal off the three levels of the ship. None of the unknowing visitors were aware of their predicament until five minutes before liftoff when they

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started to leave the ship in order to witness the launch only to find that they were locked in. Even then there was no immediate alarm, only disappointment that they would miss the launch. As it turned out they did not miss it at all.

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They were in deep space when Dave recovered consciousness. The only other person conscious was the Englishman. When they were unable either to open the hatch to the next level or to communicate with the crew they set about reviving the rest of the members of the battered group, quieting the panic which threatened to develop among some of them who were not quite prepared to enter the Space Age in this manner, and administering first aid to those who required it. There were only a few bloody noses and minor bruises.

Jim West, who in addition to his other occupations was a mechanical engineer, and Dave's friend Bryan Scott, who also was an engineer by training and a consummate practical handyman by nature and practice, were finally able to bypass the regular control system and open the hatch to the living quarters deck. This set off an alarm in the control cabin and brought on an investigation by the crew.

The discovery of the accidental passengers set off shock waves of stunned disbelief which quickly leaped across the airless miles from the *Jules Verne* to the control center in Texas. The repercussions in the Humongous Motors family and in the press and government are of no great concern to us at this time. Suffice it to say that there was a turnover in project management, and the press and government upheld their time-honored traditions. That is to say, the press was filled with exposés and recriminations and "investigative journalism" piled on top of each other, and Congress was filled with speeches while committees were appointed to investigate everything remotely connected with the project with little if anything useful coming out of any of it.

When the first furor had subsided enough for the voice of reason to be heard, it was apparent that a decision must be made immediately as to what was to be done about the flight. Obviously the excess weight had thrown all calculations off, although Dr. Werner pointed out that the new weight calculated was still well within their theoretical limits so great was the power of their secret fuel. Equally apparent was the fact that the most logical option was to park the ship in orbit until they could make the calculations necessary to bring it back to Earth as soon as possible. However, Dr. Werner contended and most agreed that the stowaways were in little more danger if the mission was continued than they would be if they simply aborted and returned to Earth as quickly as possible

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inasmuch as it would only entail their riding as passengers on a trip to and orbits around the Moon while two of the astronauts landed in the special shuttle craft. The main risk in each case stood to be the landing. Unspoken was the fear that after they returned any future flight might be indefinitely delayed by the endless investigations sure to be undertaken.

In the end the ground authorities left it up to Colonel Owens as the captain of the mission and Dr. Werner and Dr. Taylor as to whether the mission continued on a limited basis with the proviso that all of their “passengers” would have to give their formal consent. This marked another space first, being the first time that The Buck was passed to outer space! The passengers all eventually agreed with varying degrees of enthusiasm or apprehension. Owens was reluctant since he considered that their safety was his final responsibility, but the two scientists finally swayed him.

The extra weight had dragged the ship into a lopsided and unstable orbit around Earth which would quickly deteriorate so it was necessary to recalculate the fuel mixture to compensate and get the ship reoriented for the new course and length of burn. No particular difficulty was expected after the figures were made and double checked.

Fate still had a trump card to play, however, and soon irrevocably changed the nature of the flight and the lives of the ship’s crew and passengers. The card Fate dealt was a malfunctioning fuel regulator. The new formula was supposed to result in a gentle push which would take the ship out of Earth’s grip and put it into orbit around the Moon.

After the figures were fed into the main computer Owens instructed everyone to prepare for a brief burn of the engines. Most of the passengers were able to strap themselves in within the crew’s living quarters. They should have fared much better than the previous time. But when the switch was thrown using the new formula the push was anything but gentle. Dave felt like he had been blindsided by a blitzing linebacker. The last thing that he remembered was the pockmarked face of the Moon looming ever larger in the window and approaching at a fantastic and increasing speed. Or was this an illusion caused by the draining of oxygen from the brain? He never knew for sure. The extreme g-forces resulting from the burn caused everyone aboard the vessel to black out once again and remain that way for some time.

When Colonel Owens regained consciousness and cut the engines, Earth’s satellite was no longer in the viewscreen in front of him. After making sure that the ship was in no danger, Dan and the others who had now regained consciousness turned their attention to those who were still out. The impact

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this time had been much greater than that experienced on take off and there were some more serious injuries in the form of a minor concussion, a sprained ankle and a broken wrist. Fortunately, the astronauts were well trained in first aid and in addition one of the stowaways, an old college roommate of Dave's, John Monroe, was a doctor. More shocks of a different nature soon made these seem slight.

The first of these shocks came when someone noticed that the ship's chronometer indicated that they had been unconscious for several hours. This did not seem possible since they should have exhausted their fuel long before that and likewise Dr. Monroe observed that the human body could not have withstood the g-forces they seem to have endured for that period.

Owens was quite definite that the engines had been burning when he regained consciousness. He remembered cutting the engines himself. He also recalled that the g-forces seemed much lighter than would have been anticipated. Their individual watches also confirmed the correctness of the chronometer.

A greater shock followed when the crew turned their attention back to the ship's instruments. They indicated that the *Jules Verne* was traveling through space at a speed measured not in the thousands but in the millions of miles per hour! This was, of course, patently absurd.

A look outside made it more believable, however. Neither the Earth nor the Moon were readily discernible through the windows of the ship. Only with difficulty could they be seen astern and their appearance constituted the greatest shock yet for the Earth was only a fraction of the size of the Moon as seen from Earth and the Moon was of course comparatively smaller. It was evident that an incredible distance had been covered. Dr. Taylor immediately began to calculate their exact position.

Owens and Brad Patman began to search for the faulty equipment which had caused their unexpected burst of acceleration. This search took the better part of two hours. Patman was sure that he could make the necessary repairs in a short period of time. He was also of the opinion that it had been deliberately sabotaged.

Dr. Taylor and Dr. Werner had by this time established the position of the ship to their satisfaction and confirmed the accuracy of the ship's instruments. Patman, who handled the ship's radar and radio, confirmed the speed and position by the use of the ship's radar. The ship's radio had suffered minor damage, but Patman was able to fix it and reestablish contact with the ground control station although its equipment had not been designed to transmit and receive over the distances now required. A conference was held by the members of the crew and officials on the ground, made more difficult by the now perceptible time lag in

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communication caused by the increasing distance. Some thirteen hectic hours had passed since liftoff. All of the crew were nearing exhaustion.

The outcome of the conference was that the crew was to take an eight hour break for some rest and sleep leaving one crew member awake to watch the instruments. Four of the stowaways were drafted to assist in the watch. A detailed check was to be made of the ship from nose to tail after the break. They did not want any more surprises the next time they pushed the button.

They would arrive at a course of action to return the ship to Earth as soon as possible after the check was completed. Surprisingly enough the fuel tanks still seemed to contain more than enough fuel to accomplish this despite the apparent length of time they had burned and the fantastic speed attained. It appeared that the fuel had been consumed at a minute fraction of the anticipated rate.

Very little sleep was obtained by any of the crew or passengers during the break. Dave Hall and Jim West, who were two of the “draftees”, listened to an animated discussion between Dr. Werner and Dr. Taylor as to the reason for the completely unexpected outburst of energy experienced earlier. They had determined the exact fuel consumption and the best that the two scientists could determine (very unsatisfactorily for them) was that the burning of the fuels in these exact ratios had created a “circumstance” in the area of the ship which allowed it to disobey some of the natural laws.

“Or probably more accurately,” Jim West said in his dry, west Texas drawl, “to obey some natural laws which we presently know nothing about.”

This remark precipitated another more animated argument which was still going on when Dave dozed off.



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Dave was awakened by Jim West who informed him that he had been nominated to assist Dr. Taylor in the fourth watch which was about to begin. He gathered that he did not have the option of declining the nomination, so he tried his best to comply. Dave had never been one of those people who spring out of bed in the morning to face the world bright-eyed and bushy-tailed. He did not even understand such an unnatural outlook. Add to that the fact that he had never been very good at one on one conversations with strange, if attractive (*especially* if attractive), PhD's of the opposite sex and it made for an awkward and somewhat silent beginning of the watch, which for the most part did not require them to do anything anyway.

They were both relieved when Diana Hunter entered the cabin and asked if she could stay there since she could not sleep. Dave had not known Diana Hunter before. He had seen her enter the gate with them, but since she looked vaguely familiar, he thought she was with one of his newly resurrected friends. It was not until after the launch that he remembered that he had seen her on one of the local public television station's fund-raising broadcasts, or as she usually referred to them, their semi-annual whining and groveling contests. She was the recently arrived news director of the station and it was in that capacity that she had been at the launch. To Dave, the title news director conjured up a picture of an editor from a 1940's movie, middle aged, paunchy and balding with a cigar in his mouth and a caustic personality and vocabulary to match. Instead, Diana, as she insisted on being called, was a pretty, well-spoken woman of about thirty with dark brown hair and no sign of a paunch or bald spot nor (thankfully!) a cigar.

In the course of the next hour or so he learned that she came from the Midwest, graduated from a Midwestern state university, worked at a couple of commercial stations in the Midwest and Colorado in various capacities before learning of the vacancy in the news director's slot at the local station. She had

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not in that time ever found a convenient time or person to marry although he was sure it was not for lack of applicants.

Paula Taylor, in contrast, had married upon graduation from high school, worked six years to put her husband through college and graduate school only to find that when he got his master's degree her high school diploma was no longer good enough to qualify her for the lofty position of his wife. After a bitter divorce she had then gone to college herself, eventually earning a PhD. She sent her former husband an invitation to the graduation ceremonies.

For the last two years before she got her degree she had been Dr. Werner's assistant. When Dr. Werner later went with the Humongous Motors project he wired her at the eastern university where she was teaching and offered her a job. She quickly took it, grasping the opportunity to escape what she had come to consider the stifling and petty world of academics, a world that, rather than being the stimulating intellectual environment that she had imagined, was becoming all too politically correct with each passing day. If a person was not careful to examine each statement or paper in light of the political orthodoxy of the educational establishment that person risked being accused of all sorts of politically incorrect high crimes and misdemeanors.

Dave himself had grown up on a west Texas farm and graduated from Texas A&M University with a degree in accounting, earned his CPA license and had taken up the moonlighting job with Humongous Motors because of his interest in space and a life-long addiction to science fiction. Well, okay, his addiction was not actually life long, it had begun at age twelve.

This discussion of backgrounds had been perhaps therapeutic in distracting them from their present position but that position could no longer be ignored. Dr. Taylor pointed out to them that they had passed the orbit of Mars (!) though some millions of miles from the Red Planet. She focused their telescope on the planet and let them view it. It was only a mysterious crescent shaped red ball but there was a certain thrill to the fact that they were closer to it than any human beings had ever been. Diana raised the possibility that they might get a closer view on their return trip, but Dr. Taylor said that would depend on the geometry of the matter and on whether the scientific benefits would be worth the costs and risks involved.

The watch was nearing an end when a warning beep sounded. Dr. Taylor immediately sprang (literally, in the absence of gravity) to the radar screen. After a glance at the blip on the scope which was drawing nearer to the ship at a fantastic rate she sent Dave below to rouse the rest of the crew. Although this only required a couple of minutes the blip had moved halfway across the screen. Since the equipment the ship carried had an extreme range of more than

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twice the distance from the Earth to the Moon this meant that the object had covered about a quarter of a million miles in less than three minutes! As Dave was digesting this fact he was returned to reality by Dr. Werner's observation that it was of course the speed of the ship that was causing the two objects to draw near at this rapid rate and not the speed of the object itself. The speed of the object which Dr. Werner guessed to be an asteroid was insignificant when compared to the speed of the rocket they were riding, therefore it seemed to be heading almost directly opposite to the direction in which they were heading, though somewhat to one side and "above" them.

The object soon became visible and when it passed by them it was seen to be a potato shaped chunk of rock about two hundred yards long and half that wide. Brad Patman said there was no recorded asteroid in his computer file with an orbit corresponding to the one that their recent visitor had been traveling. This raised the disquieting thought that they might well expect to encounter more such wandering objects since there are untold thousands, even millions, of these uncharted, wandering chunks of quick-frozen rock too small to be seen even by the largest telescopes. They were, Dave thought, the icebergs of space. They would have to be careful or they might become the *Titanic* of space.

In view of these facts, Dan Owens, as commander of the ship, directed that the check was to begin immediately with two of the crew directing it while the other two ate and stood watch. One of these two had to be capable of piloting the craft since it might be necessary to take evasive action if an asteroid came too close to the vessel. The other person on watch kept lookout on the radar screens and was to give an alarm to everyone if evasive action was to be taken. Some of the passengers were able to help the crew in things which did not need too much specialized knowledge or skill, but for the main they had to sit helplessly by while their fate was decided. All who could be of no assistance were required to stay close to the acceleration couches in the lower compartment to avoid injury in case of maneuvers.

Dr. Werner and Dr. Taylor had a conference and decided on a formula to be used in any emergency maneuvers which would conserve as much fuel as possible.

Work was somewhat handicapped since only Owens and Patman had any appreciable experience at the controls although the other two crew members were theoretically capable of it. For a couple of hours the check went smoothly with no radar alarms. Then a second sighting was made and hard on the heels of this one two more which required a slight change in course to avoid the risk of collision. For the next sixteen hours this cycle continued, the exacting routine of the checking procedures alternating with the sound of the alarm and the

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subsequent maneuvering. Altogether, their course was changed three times and there were numerous false alarms. The emptiness of space began to ring a little hollow. At the end of this time everyone was once more nearing exhaustion and a respite was taken for sleep and food. Radar sightings had fallen off from five or six an hour at the peak to only one or two and some rest was obtained in the eight hour “night” declared by Owens.

The checkout procedures were resumed by a weary crew soon after the end of the rest period. The checklist was nearing an end with no important flaws found. Spirits rose aboard the ship.

A short time later the ship suffered its first damage from meteorites when it passed through a “cloud” of almost microscopic particles. The ship suffered several hits but since they were passing in the direction of the longitudinal axis of the ship most were deflected by the tough shield on the front of the vessel. However, due to the terrific relative speed of the particles two did breach the wall of the ship, one of them passing through the wall of the vessel at a sharp angle and also penetrating two decks narrowly missing two of the female passengers on the living quarters level. The object was not found but a second one which did not have quite the penetrating power of the first but merely ricocheted off of the deck of the control room was found, an object little larger than a pea. Patches were quickly improvised without too much trouble since the holes were quite small, but the event did little to soothe the nerves of anyone aboard.

“Make a note that we need to strengthen the front shielding if we’re going to be traveling these speeds,” Owens instructed matter-of-factly.

Their maneuvers had caused their course to deviate significantly, which they checked and duly noted and then rechecked from time to time. Not long after the incident with the small particles Brad Patman, in a check to see how much their dodging around had changed their course, noted that their speed had shown a slight increase and their course an equally slight deviation. It was the Englishman who pointed out the cause of the deviation, a bright red star almost straight ahead of them, but it was Dave, who had a small astronomical telescope of his own at home, who recognized the red star for what it really was, the gas-giant Jupiter. Through the ship’s telescope it showed up quite clearly as a large, banded disk, looking bloated because of the flattening at the poles caused by its great speed of rotation.

For the next few hours there was little for those aboard not actively engaged in the checking to do but exchange nervous talk and watch the point of light resolve itself into a disc and slowly grow larger. The watch had been reduced to

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a single crew member and a “civilian” helper since there was little likelihood of encountering a maverick asteroid this far out of the main asteroid belt.

It was hard for Dave to grasp the fact that he was really here in the neighborhood of Jupiter when shortly before he had been carrying on his regular activities in his usual Texas habitat. He would not have dreamed that it was within their technical ability to travel so far in such a short time, but then, neither had anyone else.

Eventually the check of the ship was complete and the crew returned to the control cabin. While Patman tried to contact the ground control station Dr. Werner and Dr. Taylor calculated and recalculated the fuel mixture accidentally used earlier. They were unable to completely reconcile the mixture shown by their instruments with the amount of fuel remaining in the tanks as shown by those same instruments. However they were forced to accept the evasive maneuvers that they had performed in the asteroid belt as the explanation for the discrepancy. As Owens said, they had little choice but to follow this course since they could hardly run fuel tests out here in space with the fuel they needed to return home. The first try would have to be right since they would not have an opportunity for a retrieval.

The scientists agreed that the sensible thing to do was to use Jupiter’s mass to slingshot them back the way they had come. This, however, would have to be a very precise calculation or they might go flying off into interstellar space or equally disconcerting, and fatal, into the planet itself. It would require more from them mentally than they could be certain they had after all the stress and strain that they had endured.

It was the Englishman who proposed a solution which a few days earlier none of them would have given any consideration. He suggested that they put the ship into orbit around Jupiter and park it long enough for all of them to get a good rest and make their computations at their leisure. This would have been rejected out of hand earlier as putting the civilians in too much danger but now after only a brief discussion as to the probability of there being danger from space debris being sucked in by Jupiter’s great mass they accepted the suggestion and set about to implement it.

After a flight plan was calculated Brad Patman made a final try at communicating their decision to Earth. He could detect no reply. He did not know whether this was because of interference from the Sun, Jupiter or some outside source or just the enormous distances involved. In any case there was the probability that some earth stations with their vastly superior equipment would pick up the message.

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“If anybody’s still listening,” Dave thought to himself, “and doesn’t just believe there is no use listening because we’re all lost.”

## THE CHRISTENING OF THE *JOE BTZFLK*

The atmosphere in the ship was tense as the time approached for the deceleration to begin. Dave was in one of the spare seats in the control room. Jim West was in the other. They had every reason to believe that since they were prepared this time there would be no blackout as before. Nevertheless, there was a great deal of uneasiness even among the crew in view of their experiences of the recent past. It remained to be seen whether their superfuel was house broken yet or not.

The shock that came when Dan Owens started the engines was terrific even though they were all waiting for it. For what seemed like hours Dave felt himself pressed far back into the yielding substance of the padded seat. He found it difficult to breathe and a red haze swam in front of his eyes. However he did not pass out and eventually the weight on his chest eased somewhat. He was able to move with some difficulty. A glance at his watch showed him that several minutes had passed. The roar of the engines had faded to a background noise. When he called out to the others he got no response. With an effort he got out of the seat and went from one to another of his companions. Dr. Taylor and Dr. Werner were both unconscious as was Brad Patman. Dan Owens and Jim West were just regaining their faculties.

After checking the instruments and the ship's course, Owens asked Dave to check on the rest of the party since he seemed to have weathered the deceleration better than anyone else. When he had worked his way down the ladder to the crew's quarters he found Clay Churchill and Jack Hardin up and working to rouse the rest of the group. Dave knew Hardin only slightly, more by reputation than anything else. Belying his amiable personality he stood perhaps six feet two and weighed two hundred and twenty-five pounds and it was almost all hard muscle. That was fortunate since, until recently, he had been a linebacker in the NFL. This physique was topped by an almost boyish face belying his thirty-five years. However, the expanse of forehead showing through the sandy-brown hair crowning his head hinted at them. It did not surprise Dave that he would be

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the first to recover. The g-forces they had experienced must have seemed like just one more three-hundred-pound tackle to survive.

Everyone else on the lower deck had passed out once again but fortunately there were no injuries this time since they were better prepared for it.

The tale told by the ship's instruments was followed with great interest, especially by the scientists. As Dr. Taylor explained, with what she admitted was an oversimplification, they indicated that in the initial acceleration process earlier the consumption of fuel had increased at a rate which could be roughly represented by an arithmetic progression while the speed had increased at a rate approximating a geometric progression as if most of the fuel was used to overcome the initial inertia and then less was necessary to increase its speed.

In any case the rate of fuel consumption had been an infinitesimal fraction of what would have been expected. Why this was so was a more difficult question. The instruments had not recorded the g-forces in the earlier episodes. Now as the onlookers watched, the instruments showed this process reversing itself. Also, the instruments were now adjusted to record the g-forces and they did not bear any apparent relation to the acceleration recorded by these same instruments. The g-indicator had gone way up the scale in the initial burst and then rapidly came back down the scale. It had indicated roughly two g's when Dave had first regained mobility and had been slowly dropping ever since although it was still appreciably more than one g.

When he wondered aloud at this phenomenon, Jim West just offered the comment that this was just another of those natural laws of which we were previously unaware and did not presently understand.

"I'm sure that neither Sir Isaac Newton nor Albert Einstein were on speaking terms with it," he observed and added an aside aimed in the direction of the two PhD's, "Maybe in a few years we'll be discussing the Werner Law or Taylor's First Law of Time and Space Distortion."

The two doctors passed up the opportunity to give them a preview of their presumed scholarly papers on the laws mentioned.

For the next nine hours the party passed the time either looking at the rearview screens at the increasingly impressive sight of the Giant of the Solar System and its family of satellites or watching the indicated speed drop steadily but at a decreasing rate. When not doing either of these things or talking to someone else about them they ate or slept. Since the gravitational force felt was still sufficiently high to make moving about uncomfortable and very tiring they passed much of the time flat on their backs.

At the appointed time the engines were killed and the ship coasted in space at a speed of "only" ten thousand miles per hour and about a half-million miles

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from the great planet. Of course, to them they did not seem to be moving at all. The return to weightlessness after the extended period of gravity was somewhat disconcerting to the stomachs of several of the travelers.

Their present speed was not nearly enough to put them into orbit even if their angle had been, so they set about computing an orbit closer to the surface of the planet to facilitate good photographs of the surface of the planet or more accurately the surface of its atmosphere since the consensus of modern scientific thinking was that Jupiter did not really have a solid surface or, if it did have a small solid core, it was covered by so many thousands of miles of gases that the pressure would be such that it would be hard to tell when the atmosphere ended and the surface began.

Since they were out of contact with Earth, and did not have the benefit of their equipment and counsel, it required a couple of corrections after the first adjustment before they were satisfied that they had a good, stable orbit.

When the stability of the orbit was assured the crew all went below to take their first real rest since the flight had begun. Dave and some of his companions took turns keeping watch. It was some twelve hours before they returned to the business of running the ship feeling more refreshed.

The ship had been put into orbit just inside the orbit of the innermost satellite of Jupiter. Now a series of maneuvers was begun to drop the ship to within a few hundred miles of the apparent surface. The face of the planet looming up in the portholes and view screens was certainly alien and, Dave thought, rather ominous looking. The bands so familiar to any astronomer, amateur or professional, and the great red spot, added to this menacing effect.

Dave was watching Dan Owens put the ship through its maneuvers when he noticed Brad Patman lean forward and tap an instrument in front of him. He looked at it a moment, tapped it again and then turned toward Owens.

“Dan—,” he began.

Before Patman could say anything more Dave felt himself being slammed back into his seat by a sudden burst from the ship’s engines. They ran only a few seconds and then shut off. The lights flickered on and off, grew very bright then dimmed. Dave was jerked from side to side as the directional rockets fired sporadically and seemingly at random. At Paula Taylor’s cry Patman looked over at her instrument panel. Instrument readings changed rapidly and with no apparent reason, going from one extreme to the other. For brief periods they would stabilize and then give patently erroneous readings. It was obvious that they could not be trusted.

The ship was whirling at a rapid rate. As Dave looked toward one of the windows he could see the image of the giant planet roll past several times a

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minute. It was obvious that they were falling toward it at a great rate of speed. Dave watched this for a few seconds with a horrible feeling of helplessness. Incongruously, a part of his consciousness speculated about how long it would take them to strike the surface of the planet. It appeared that the first human beings to definitely ascertain whether Jupiter had a solid surface or not would be unable to impart this knowledge to the rest of humanity.

Then the rotation seemed to slow and he turned to see Dan Owens desperately fighting to regain control of the ship despite the erratic instruments and the uncertainty of the controls. His test pilot's instincts seemed to be succeeding to some extent as they were no longer spinning wildly though still hurtling toward the surface. Dave marveled at this since, as far as he could tell, the instruments were still useless. Dan was flying the ship blind. He had turned the ship and was using the main rockets to slow their headlong plunge. Then, when he had managed to slow their speed, he managed to change their direction to such an extent that it seemed that they just might get away with a very near miss. He reoriented the ship and extended the "wings" with which the ship was equipped for reentry into the Earth's atmosphere. They were entering the planet's atmosphere ("Too fast," Brad Patman whispered.) at a steep angle with the ship now tilted with the nose somewhat "up" and the main rockets, or part of them, firing to both slow their descent and increase their speed enough parallel to the surface to allow them to at least stay aloft. Brad Patman's instruments indicated that they were now some two hundred miles above what appeared to be a solid or possibly fluid surface. This was received with the skepticism rightfully due information that was against the best scientific knowledge and theory and was gleaned from instruments which so recently had been quite useless. Dan now had the ship well under control and Brad's eyes were glued to his instruments giving him readouts. Equally important were the temperature readings Dr. Werner was giving since they had heated the skin of the ship to a dangerous extent during their high-speed dive into the atmosphere.

They were dismayed to see a series of bright flashes from outside and a series of loud noises which seemed to emanate from the rear. Sonic booms were the first guess but were quickly dismissed as they would not have heard them since they were traveling at many times the speed of sound (though what that speed was in the atmosphere of Jupiter, Dave did not know).

A look into the rear-view screen showed that they were trailing a series of intermittent explosions which lit up the sky. Dave remembered that methane was supposed to be one of the ingredients of the Jovian atmosphere and he knew it was a highly volatile gas. He did not at first understand the degree of excitement this caused in the scientists until they pointed out that this also

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indicated the presence of an amount of oxygen which had not previously been detected in the planet's atmosphere. Fortunately there seemed to be a shortage of one or the other of the two gases since the explosions, though spectacular, were short-lived and limited in extent and produced more light than anything else. It was a pity, Dave thought, that there were no intelligent beings on the planet below for they would have been treated to a spectacular fireworks display, courtesy of their poor relations from the third planet. Dave guessed that the sound was conducted through the fabric of the ship rather than the atmosphere.

"Brad, the shuttle!" Owens said, "Jettison the shuttle!"

Patman reached forward and unlocked the shuttle emergency abort controls and pressed the button. They saw a large fireball veer away behind them. The shuttle, not meant to withstand reentry, had caught fire and blazed away in their rear for a few seconds before its fuel ignited and it exploded spectacularly. It was none too far away when that happened.

They were now quite close to the planet's surface and traveling at a relatively slow speed. Dan Owens had to maintain their altitude by intermittently firing their engines. Suddenly Patman leaned forward over his screens. He reported that the nature of the echoes had changed and now indicated that they were being reflected from a solid surface. This was received with disbelief by both Dr. Werner and Dr. Taylor since all previous observations made it unlikely that there was any solid surface to the planet and certainly not this far out from the center. The usual discussion followed (animated, of course). The view from the ports did nothing to resolve the question since they were now on the dark side of the planet. However, they did have the infrared mapping cameras going so as soon as they could check them they would have an answer.

This answer was to be delayed, however. A shout from Patman brought their attention back to the radar screen which revealed an object straight ahead of them on a collision course. The two scientists scrambled back to their seats as Dan Owens pointed the nose of the ship up and gave full power to the engines. The crew breathed a sigh of relief as the altitude increased to one hundred miles and the object dwindled away on the scope. This relief was short lived, however, as the ship was rocked by a terrific blow and commenced to shudder and roll. The ship had apparently collided with an airborne something one hundred miles above the surface of the planet! They had no time to guess its nature because it had seriously damaged one of the four projecting wings which had been extended to guide the ship in the atmosphere. At first Dan tried to retract all the wings into their sheathes. However, the damaged fin would not fully retract and continued to hamper the ship. Once again Dan fought for control. Dave watched him as he struggled and the ship slipped lower toward

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the forbidding face of Jupiter. Finally the pilot turned to the rest and told them to get ready for a landing. To the chorus of objections he merely shook his head and said that they had no choice, they were going down one way or another to whatever might be there. All they could do was try to set down on what seemed to be a solid surface and pray that they would be able to do so safely and make enough repairs to take off again. Unspoken was the fact that if it was not a solid surface their problems would be over and they would not have to worry about making what were quite probably impossible repairs.

As they began their descent, Dave faced the fact that he was entering the last few minutes of his life. He did not see any way that they could survive. It was a distinctly unpleasant feeling, like someone had reached deep inside of him, took a firm hold and twisted every organ of his body. A feeling akin to anguish rose up in him as he thought (quickly) of all the things which he had wanted to do and now would not get to do and also of all the things he should have done. For all that, knowing that there was nothing he could do about it, he remained outwardly relatively calm.

Owens instructed Patman to keep glued to the scope and guide them in as best he could. He then partially extended the vanes to try to get all four into an equal degree of extension to reduce the turbulence to a minimum. He succeeded to a degree and Dave breathed easier as the altitude figures were read out evenly. It seemed as if for once something was going routinely for the unlucky ship but Fate had one more dirty trick to play on the ill-fated *Jules Verne*. As they slowed Dan fully extended the vanes in preparation for landing, but as Brad counted down routinely toward 10,000 feet, he suddenly cried out frantically for Owens to give all possible power to cut their rate of descent as the altimeter was suddenly giving readings in the hundreds of feet.

A crash signalled their contact with the surface. Owens immediately cut the engines. The ship tilted and finally came to rest at a decided angle. For a moment no one moved, waiting to see if the ship was going to continue to tilt and finally crash to the ground. *Ground!* Or at least a solid surface. There was a further silence as everyone digested this fact. As a final theatrical touch the lights flickered and grew dim. Patman broke his trance to lean forward and flick a switch causing the lights to grow bright again.

“I want to make a proposal,” Dave said, breaking the silence, and all eyes turned toward him. “Out of respect for Jules Verne I want to propose that we rechristen this ship the *Joe Btzflk*<sup>1</sup> as being more appropriate.”

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1. A character in the comic strip *Li'l Abner* by Al Capp, “the world’s worst jinx.”

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“Don’t knock it, Dave,” Owens said amid the tension-breaking laughter that greeted his remark, “it got you safely down.”

“And as any pilot will tell you—and tell you, and tell you, and tell you, until you are sick and tired of hearing it,” Jim West added, “any landing that you can walk away from is a good landing.”

“Yes,” Dave replied, “but it could be a damn long walk. And,” he added, “through what?”

Owens shrugged his shoulders. “I don’t know,” he admitted, “but we’ve already lived two minutes longer than I expected. We’ll just have to take it one step at a time.”

They were joined by Don Dale and the Englishman from the lower deck causing Owens to get on the intercom and request everyone who was not needed to keep to their places as much as possible until they determined that it would not endanger their possibly precarious position.

The Englishman, having heard their conversation as they climbed to the upper level, said to Dave, “How can you complain about the length of the walk home when we are given the opportunity to be the first to explore a new world? Have you no spirit of adventure?”

“Well,” Dave said after considering it briefly, “it may be a great adventure, but what good will it be if we don’t get back to tell about it? Who will know?”

“We will know,” the Englishman replied, and even though Dave sensed that he was teasing him, as he came to know the man better, he believed that he meant what he said too. For the Englishman, knowing himself would be enough.

A flood of questions was raised by their situation. Jupiter was supposed to have no solid surface, yet they were unquestionably resting on something solid. What the nature of it was could not be readily determined. Half, perhaps all, of their instruments could not be trusted until they had checked them out. The ports revealed nothing but blackness since they had come down on the dark

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side of the planet. Likewise, Dave did not feel two and one-half times his Earth weight as he should have if he was on the nonexistent surface of Jupiter. As a matter-of-fact, if anything he felt lighter than he had back on Earth. This fact, as well as the solid surface, caused much discussion. It was a fruitless discussion, however, with no more data than what little they had.

Eventually Owens brought them back to “earth” with a practical assignment of tasks to be performed to assess their situation. Everyone in the control room except Dave was soon busy. When he asked Dan Owens for something to do Dan thought for a long while but came up with nothing. Then Dr. Werner looked up from what he was doing long enough to say that the instruments which could analyze the atmosphere were not working. If they were to be stranded on the surface, even temporarily, it would be vital for them to know the makeup of the atmosphere. He suggested that Dave don one of the spacesuits and gather atmospheric samples. Also rock and soil samples, “If any,” Brad Patman added.

Dave pointed out that this would make him the first to set foot on the alien world, a privilege that rightly belonged to one of them. Of course, a certain queasiness that stirred in him at such a venture into the unknown might have had a little to do with his thoughtfulness. It could have a LOT to do with it.

TOTALLY unknown was the correct phrase, he thought. However, the objection he raised was dismissed with the observation that time was valuable to them and that each of the others was busy at necessary tasks which Dave could not perform.

“Besides,” Jim West said with a straight face, “If it develops that Jupiter has an acid atmosphere or surface you may not think it such an honor.”

“And we won’t have lost an irreplaceable member of the crew,” Don Dale added, watching him covertly as he said it.

“Thanks a lot,” Dave said then added as an afterthought, “But if we are sitting in a bowl of sulfuric acid, you will all find out about it quickly enough anyway when it eats a hole through the wall.”

It was obvious from the reaction that this had already occurred to at least some of them.

Patman helped Dave find the suit which came nearest fitting him and helped him into it, demonstrating the operation of it. Fortunately the suit was much more generic and adjustable than the customized versions the early astronauts had used and much simpler to operate. Then Brad returned to his duties while Dave learned how to get around in his new suit. When their duties allowed they instructed him on the procedures to be followed in gathering specimens. They did not require a rocket scientist to comprehend, basically consisting of opening a vacuum-sealed container to let air in.

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“Grasp Jar ‘A’ in hand A,” Don Dale said, “then grasp lid ‘B’ in hand B and rotate counterclockwise until it comes off in your hand—”

“I think I can handle it from there,” Dave said among the laughter that followed the tall Texan’s helpful instruction. But he was glad that his good friend was there to ease the tension and offer his support.

“And if a rabbit comes by,” Diana Hunter said, “grab him by the ears and stuff him in your tote bag.”

Dave looked into the journalist’s eyes and offered, “If you want to come along and film the event I think Paula’s suit will fit you and they have plenty of cameras and video tape.”

“No, that’s all right,” she responded. “There’s not enough light tonight. I’ll take your picture tomorrow.”

At last he was ready to go and everyone quit work momentarily to watch as he entered the airlock. Although the lock would be worked from the inside of the ship the manual operation of it was explained to Dave in case he should have to work it from the outside.

Dave felt a mixture of anticipation and apprehension as he stepped into the airlock and saw the door swing shut behind him. Then he felt alone. The apprehension faded away as he heard the calm voice of Dan Owens over his radio taking him through a final check of equipment and then asking him if he was ready for the outer door to be opened. Without thinking he nodded his head and then, remembering that he could not be seen, answered into the microphone. He turned to watch the door open.

He did not know quite what he expected, but after the door was completely open all he could see was blackness. The light in the chamber did not penetrate the darkness outside of the ship. But at least the chamber was not filled by sulfuric acid! The queasiness he had previously felt came back greatly multiplied as he looked out into what was for him The Great Dark Unknown. He felt like a little kid peeking under his bed or into the closet when he went to bed. He stepped to the door and switched on the powerful handlight he carried with him. As he swung the light around it revealed what appeared to be a normal, rather rocky area. A thin mist limited his visibility to about twenty yards or so. The ground seemed to rise steeply at the limit of his light, but it was indisputably ground, and from all he could tell in the light he had, it seemed to qualify as “earth.” At least in every respect except location.

Dave reported his observations and then carefully descended to the ground by way of the steps that had automatically extended when the outer door had opened. He stooped and examined the surface he stood on. It consisted of a

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rocky soil scorched by the blast of the rocket's engines. He obtained his air sample and then scooped up some soil and a few rocks to carry back to the ship. He worked his way a short distance from the ship, always keeping in sight of it. He discovered that the slope that he had seen was a small cliff. He could not explore it any further and keep in sight of the ship but he did discover what appeared to be smoldering vegetation of some kind at the base of it. He put some of it in the sample bags and walked back toward the ship. He walked with some alacrity since he still had the feeling of a little boy whistling past a graveyard.

When he reached the base of the ship Owens asked him to explore around the base to see what was causing their tilt and also to see what the damaged wing looked like. He walked about one quarter way around the ship and found the reason for the tilt. The ship had apparently come down squarely and then had started to fall in the direction of the crippled wing when it had come to rest against the small cliff. After he had relayed this information he retraced his steps and started around the ship the other way. The mist had increased now to the extent that visibility was practically nonexistent, no more than twenty feet. His light stabbed into the mist and showed nothing. He was cautiously advancing in this direction when the silence was shattered by the most hideous scream he had ever heard or even imagined. Startled, he jumped forward and his right foot came down on nothingness. His hands grasped for the vane to stop his fall. As he did this the light fell from his grasp. Clinging to his precarious position (try clinging in a spacesuit some time!) he watched it tumble over and over for what seemed an eternity. Then it hit something, bounced crazily and then continued to dwindle from sight until it hit again and winked out for good.

Dave realized that the blackness he was now staring into extended straight down for an incredible distance. By leaning against the slope of the hull and extending his left leg as far as he could he finally was able to touch what appeared to be solid ground. He was a little reluctant to test this by giving up his comparatively safe hold on the vane but it had to be done since he doubted that he could maintain it until someone else could suit up and come to his aid. This reluctance was reinforced by the fact that he knew that somewhere back in that direction was the author of the unearthly scream that had caused his present precarious predicament.

Taking a deep breath he made a commitment and once again found himself standing on solid ground. Mindful that he apparently had company that he had no desire to meet, he felt his way as quickly as possible around the hull to the steps and up them into the air lock. He radioed the ship and moments later the door slid shut behind him. His sigh of relief could probably be heard by

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everyone on the ship. There was a decontamination process to go through just as there had been before he had emerged from the ship but ten minutes later he stood inside the ship and related his tale to the interested, if skeptical, members of the crew as they defrocked him.

Dave's report was given to the crew only since they did not wish to unduly alarm any of the others. His description of the scream he had heard evoked considerable skepticism. The general consensus was that it was just a gust of wind although Dave swore that he had felt no wind at all during his time outside. To which Dr. Werner replied with a pained expression on his face, "You expected to feel wind in a spacesuit?"

Dave had to admit the logic of that observation but it did not change his mind as to the reality of the sound he had heard, one he was not apt to forget.

"I grew up in west Texas," he said, "and thus I am quite familiar with the sound of wind of all velocities and that was no wind. Besides, there couldn't have been much wind or it would have dissipated the mist."

The contents of his specimen bags drew much interest, especially when he produced the burnt vegetation which Dr. Taylor put in an airtight glass container for examination and analysis. While she was doing this Dr. Werner took the air sample and began an analysis of it.

The thermometer in Dave's suit had recorded the outside temperature. Much to his surprise it read 61 degrees Fahrenheit. From all that he had ever read he would have expected it to be well below zero. Dr. Werner had an explanation for this though. As he completed his analysis of the air sample, which proved to be no less astonishing than the temperature reading, he theorized that the planet itself emitted considerable heat and that it was retained by a greenhouse effect.

As to the composition of the air, the sample had a nitrogen content of about 50%, an oxygen content of 25%, 5% carbon dioxide, and 15% of various inert gases, argon and helium being the most common. The remainder of the sample consisted of traces of many gases, with ammonia and methane being prominent among them. There were also traces of free hydrogen. Dr. Werner theorized that this makeup would be greatly changed as you rose above the surface of the planet with the lighter gases, methane, ammonia, helium and hydrogen becoming more prominent. This was more in line with previous observations made from Earth and the earlier space probes. Apparently only the surface of the gas ocean had been previously observed.

If the methane and ammonia content did not make the air unbreathable it should make the use of spacesuits outside unnecessary. And equally important, the large carbon dioxide content tended to raise the temperature of the planet by means of the greenhouse effect to one which humans could tolerate. Even

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considering heat which Jupiter itself provided, if it had not been for this Venus fly-trap process the meager amount of heat Jupiter received from the Sun would have left the surface far colder than the coldest temperature ever recorded naturally on Earth. Everyone was encouraged by this news since it would greatly facilitate the repair of the ship. No one gave voice to their unspoken fear that it might not be possible to repair it.

Paula Taylor's examination of the vegetation had not shown a great deal. The specimens had been too badly burned to reveal much about them. But their mere presence was exciting, for it showed that there was indeed extraterrestrial life in the universe.

All of this made them eager to make an expedition outside, but Dan Owens, knowing that they had all been up for a long time and that it would be some time before the Jovian 'day' began called a rest period and ordered them all to get what rest they could. Much more information could be gained in the light. Also, though he did not say so, the information revealed by the tests made Dave's mysterious noise seem a little more plausible. If it was as fearsome as Dave described, it would be better faced in what light might be in a Jovian day.

They were more exhausted than they thought for nearly everyone fell asleep as soon as they closed their eyes. It seemed to Dave to have only been a few minutes before someone was shaking him by the shoulder. It was Don Dale, which was somewhat surprising since he was so famous for his habitual tardiness that he was often referred to by his friends as 'the late Mr. Dale.' But this morning he was one of the first up and about. Anticipation drove the customary cobwebs out of Dave's head also. By the time he had finished the rations that passed for food on the ship (Matthew Bell wryly expressed the hope that they would find something edible outside to replace the toothpaste they had been eating for the last few days) Dan Owens was selecting a landing party. Besides himself, Dr. Werner and Dr. Taylor he singled out Dave, Jim West, Don Dale and the Englishman. He also selected Matthew Bell but had to rescind that when no spacesuit could be found to fit the giant ex-Olympic champion. At her insistent request he also selected Diana Hunter to come along with a video camera. Brad Patman was disappointed to be left out but Dan pointed out that one of the two pilots should remain aboard.

When they had looked out of the windows the mist was still so thick that they could hardly see the ground ten yards away so they still had little inkling of what might await them.

When they were assembled on the lower deck and suited up he outlined the procedure he wanted followed until they were sure that there was no danger.

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A little experimentation showed that three people could squeeze into the tiny airlock though it had not been designed with this in mind. They would go through three at a time with the two women bringing up the rear.

Dave found himself squeezed in between Dan Owens and Dr. Werner in the first threesome. Dan Owens was facing the outer door as it slowly opened. He stepped into the doorway and looked around for a full minute. Then he slowly climbed down to the ground. He carried a rifle although he could not have operated it with his gloves on and it seemed to Dave that anything dangerous would not likely be chivalrous enough to give him time to remove them.

Dave stepped into the doorway and peered outside with Dr. Werner looking over his shoulder. The scene outside seemed to be that of a heavily overcast day with the mist now rapidly dissipating. The sky had a subdued reddish or brownish tint to it. The ground was simply that, ground. It was quite rocky and quite flat for a distance of perhaps fifty to seventy-five yards where it began to slope upwards at an increasing rate until it culminated in a steep cliff that rose upwards to a height of fifty feet or so. As his eyes travelled to the right Dave saw that the cliff curved sharply in their direction until it came right up to the ship on the other side from the door, fortunately for them. He heard a gasp from Dr. Werner behind him and as his gaze traveled up the cliff he saw the reason for it.

The cliff was crowned by a kaleidoscope of color. As he looked further he saw a forest of sorts. It was certainly vegetation, but although many of the tree-like plants were more or less conventional green others were of colors which gave it, appropriately enough, an unearthly appearance. His survey was interrupted by Dan Owens' voice in his radio telling him to descend and let Dr. Werner do likewise. This they quickly did and soon all eight of the party were on the ground. As soon as all were on the ground and after all had commented on the Technicolor forest, Owens brought them back to earth, or Jupiter, by reminding them that their most pressing problem for the moment was to examine the damage to the ship and its position.

Owens quietly called Dave over to his side. The rest followed. What they saw was breathtaking. Dan stood at the spot where Dave had taken his spill the previous night. Before him was a precipice the like of which no human eyes had ever beheld. The ground fell away at an almost perpendicular angle for an unmeasurable distance. It had to be several thousand feet. A haze partially obscured the ground below but it was a broad valley many miles in width. In the distance a broad river could be seen and on the other side in the distance lay a mountain range. But it was the cliff that drew the comments. It caused Dave to draw back involuntarily when he first approached it. He had seen the Grand

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Canyon but this was something different. For one thing this was like a single, continuous wall for as far as he could see, curving gently out far to the right and bending away from them to the left so that they could see perhaps twenty or twenty-five miles in one direction and five or six in the other. As far as they could see there was no break in the wall.

As they retraced their way around to the side of the ship away from the precipice they found that the wing on that side of the ship was crumpled and the ship had toppled in that direction and come to rest against the side of the cliff above them. The ship had come down in an eroded area on the edge of the escarpment; apparently there was some run off from the plain above. If they had come down a few feet in one direction they would have hit the side of the high cliff and crashed to the valley floor below. If they had come down a few feet the other way they would likewise have crashed although they might not have fallen over the edge. Altogether, they had been pretty lucky.

Their chances of getting off the ground again were something else again. Owens said the damage looked bad although he would have to leave it up to Brad Patman to say whether they could possibly do a makeshift repair job. At any rate it would take a long time to do the job if it was possible. Their ship's oxygen supply would never last long enough even if it could be done, so the question of whether they could breathe the planet's atmosphere became critical. Clay Churchill solved this question matter-of-factly by opening the visor on his helmet before Owens could stop him. His remark was that they would have to come to this eventually so if it was going to be fatal to breathe the atmosphere, it might as well be now as a few days later. He showed no ill effects, but Dan ordered the rest of them to keep their helmets shut until Dr. Monroe had thoroughly examined the Englishman for any possible adverse aftereffects.

After a search of the nearby surroundings had revealed nothing further Owens had Don Dale go inside to watch the radio and send Brad out to take a look at the damage along with Dr. Werner and Jim West, who was a mechanical engineer when he was not racing cars. They spent the rest of the day, and enlisted the aid of Bryan Scott, another of the stowaways with an engineering background, in making a thorough examination of the damage to try to see what they might be able to do about it. In the meantime the rest of them explored the nearby surroundings. Churchill had completely removed the bulky suit and it was he who discovered the track of the beast Dave had heard the previous night. It was the print of a huge three-toed foot with claws to match the size of the rest of the foot. From the size of the track the creature made it would be fearsome indeed. Though the single print was all Dave or the others could see Churchill said the trail of the beast led up the rocky ravine toward the plateau

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proper. After this the landing party spent quite a bit of time glancing nervously up that way.

As the diminutive sun neared the horizon the party returned to the ship. While the rest of the group ate Dr. Monroe made a thorough examination of the Englishman then pronounced him in perfect health. There were no traces of ill effects from his four hours of breathing the atmosphere of the giant planet. This was heartening news for it eliminated the major short-term obstacle to their survival on the surface of the planet long enough to fix the ship. What this would entail if it could be done was still very uncertain. This was the next major topic of discussion. It was decided that the next day most of them would concentrate on the ship's repairs while a few explored the nearby woods with the idea of trying to gather some specimens of plant and animal life which might offer a source of food. Dr. Taylor's examination of plant specimens showed that they were basically similar to their earthly counterparts, some of them remarkably so. Given these facts the scientists saw no reason why the animal life, if any, should not have evolved similarly and perhaps be capable of sustaining human life. Clay said that though the forest was devoid of any animal life when they had made a brief foray into it there were signs of small animals to be seen. He guessed that they had been frightened away by the rocket's descent and the ensuing grass fire and would return in a day or so. Jim West said that he hoped Dave's three-toed friend wasn't in any hurry to do so. He got no argument.

By the time they had finished discussing the day's events and making plans for the next day the short Jovian night was almost over. It was evident that they were going to have some difficulty adjusting to the ten-hour days.

Despite the fact that they had only an hour or two of sleep everyone was eager to go when the sun appeared over the horizon. Even those of the stowaways who might have some qualms about setting foot on a strange planet were eager to escape the confinement of the spaceship which had carried them halfway across the solar system.

After those who had not yet been outside had a few minutes to look around Dan Owens assigned them tasks to do. The castaways had by common, unspoken assent ratified his continued leadership of the group even though they were no longer on the ship where his authority had the force of law. He, Brad Patman, Dr. Werner, Jim West and Bryan Scott set out to examine the ship more closely and map out their procedures to follow in the repair of the ship. He told Clay Churchill, Dave Hall and Diana Hunter to explore their surroundings and possibly collect specimens of any flora (or fauna) which looked interesting. Dr. Taylor, Dr. Monroe and Dr. Monroe's wife, Pamela, who was a veterinarian, would take a look at whatever they brought in and see if any of it might be

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edible so that they could extend their supplies which would be depleted rapidly with a party of their size. The remainder of the party was to scout the very near vicinity and try to pick a permanent campsite so that they could eventually move out of the crowded confines of the ship.

Dave and Diana both carried light rifles. He was surprised to learn that the journalist could shoot, a legacy of her Midwestern grandfather who had taught her when she visited him on his farm as a child. The ship carried a dozen of these guns as well as five .44 magnum rifles which would stop an elephant. Don Dale had asked Dave when he saw this arsenal if he was sure this wasn't a CIA enterprise and they were supposed to accidentally land in some country and start a war. You might have thought so, Dave thought, if you had caught sight of the Englishman who not only carried one of the high-powered rifles but a knife and a hatchet too. Dave also somewhat resembled a back-country revolutionary because he too carried a knife the Englishman had thrust into his hands as well as a .22 magnum pistol of his own that he had brought onto the ship with him in a small bag, being reluctant to leave it in his car outside the gate so long ago.

The trees in the forest they entered were generally similar to the ones they had known on Earth though different in some respects. They were of medium height, none being over eighty or ninety feet in height, but it was the colors which made them so different. Though there were many varieties whose coloration would have made them seem perfectly in place at home there were many more of them which were colored almost every color of the rainbow, mostly reds, browns, yellows and combinations of them. And some were of colors which neither Dave, who was color-blind, or the others could define. Dave also discovered something which delighted him. As they proceeded it became apparent that he and Don Dale, who was also color-blind, could distinguish between some of the more common shades which appeared to the others to be the same.

Dave was very impressed with the mysterious Englishman. He was an athletically built, dark-haired man who seem to be in a vigorous middle age. It was easy to see that he was an expert woodsman. He proceeded like he was at home in the forest and no detail, however small, escaped his notice.

They had gone about one hundred yards through the trees without seeing a sign of life when the ground began to slope more steeply upward. The trees began to thin and they soon came to a low crest and came upon a sight which surpassed in splendor even the previous wonders to which they had been exposed.

Before them lay an open valley about ten miles wide. On the far side of the valley lay a breathtaking sight. Range upon range of mountains the likes of which no human eye had ever seen were piled on top of each other until

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it seemed that they would completely fill the sky. The three of them stood silently for some time staring in awe at the sight before them before Diana even remembered to film it.

The silence was broken by the Englishman who pointed to some small animals grazing some distance away. They were small, deer-like animals who were almost hidden by high reddish brown grass. After a few minutes they were able to approach them closely enough for Dave to shoot one of them. The animal was the size of a small dog, very deer like, but hornless. The animal did not have highly developed hooves but otherwise it might have been mistaken for a small deer or fawn from one of the forests of Earth.

Carrying the carcass of the animal with them the trio worked their way along the edge of the woods to the left until they found themselves back at the edge of the plateau once again looking down for what looked to be two miles or more at the great valley below. They walked along the edge for a short time looking for a possible way down but found none. Then they retraced their path to the trees and skirting along the edge of them traveled back past the spot where they had emerged previously and about a quarter mile beyond until they came to a tree-filled ravine. They followed it away from the cliff's edge for about a mile until it became wider and shallower and eventually became almost indistinguishable from the rest of the grassland around it. Retracing their way down the far side of the ravine they eventually reentered the forest and a few minutes later came back to the area of the ship.

The mini sun was directly overhead when they came in sight of the ship and they stopped to eat a bite and told the others all that they had seen, including other animals the exact nature of which they had not been able to make out. The animal that they had brought with them elicited much interest among the others of the party. After the meal was completed Dr. Taylor and the Drs. Monroe took the carcass off to make some tests. John Monroe already had several specimens of berries and fruits and nuts. His analysis had revealed nothing which should be harmful to human beings.



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**Part II**



## WOOLY BOOGERS AND OTHER THINGS

After the meal was completed Dave, the Englishman and Jack Hardin left to explore the area on the other side of the ravine and to see if there might be a break in the face of the seemingly unscalable cliff on that side of the ship. The results were the same as the morning's. The woody area soon yielded to grassland and the cliff yielded no break. They saw some weird looking herbivores who looked as if they had been put together by Dr. Frankenstein from his spare parts bin, clumsy looking beasts as large as a Brahma bull but resembling overgrown pigs more than any bovine creature.

When the sun began to sink rapidly toward the western horizon the men retraced their steps to the ship. They arrived to find the carcass of the animal that they had shot that morning being roasted over an open fire. It had been subjected to every test that the two doctors could think of without negative results. The small animal did not last long after it had been cooked. Everyone was glad to taste fresh meat again. They also sampled some of the fruits that had been gathered. Some proved to be inedible but others were quite tasty. After the meal they sat around the fire and made plans. Clay Churchill suggested that they sleep in the ship, cramped as it was, until some kind of shelters could be built and they could do some more exploration to determine what dangers the surrounding countryside might present. He described the large animals, apparently herbivorous, that they had seen that afternoon and observed that where there were grass eaters of this size there would almost certainly be large carnivores to prey on them. No one argued with his assessment.

The repair crew had already discussed their problem and had determined that they would have to cut some trees and build a fairly elaborate system of braces before they could make a really comprehensive assessment of the damage. In addition, someone pointed out that since they were evidently in the bottom of a wash that they should take precautions to see that the ship did not get undermined if it should rain. This was given a priority. They would concentrate on building levees around the ship and work area in the morning

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before beginning the work of constructing the bracing. Also, Brad Patman was given the task of trying to get off a message to home base if it was possible to do so.

The problem of getting acclimated to the ten-hour days of Jupiter was apparent. Just as the human system had trouble coping with jet flight on Earth it now refused to cooperate with the switch from twenty-four-hour days to ten-hour days. Only time would accomplish this. Their best temporary solution was to have a meal at dawn and sunset and try to get in the habit of taking three-hour naps during the night hours.

They also set up a loose division of duties for the near future. By common consent Dan Owens retained his position as overall head of the expedition. Jim West and Bryan Scott, with their engineering background, would take charge of the levee building operations while Brad Patman concentrated on trying to step up their radio power to the point where they could get a message through to Earth. Dan Owens would concentrate on setting up a camp outside the ship. Dr. Werner and Dr. Taylor, along with John and Pam Monroe would proceed to collect specimens and conduct scientific experiments of a practical nature. All the others would help wherever they were needed.

As they made these plans they were treated to yet another sight never before seen by earth men. The night was fairly clear and almost directly above them were two moons smaller than Luna seen from Earth, and just rising over the trees to the east came a third, fully half again as large as the Moon with which they were familiar. Dr. Taylor and Brad Patman consulted their charts and pointed out two more extremely bright stars which they stated were some of the smaller and more distant satellites of the planet. It would be a rare night on this world when one or more of the four largest satellites were not seen, if the clouds would allow viewing of them. So, while the days were much dimmer than those to which they were accustomed, a pitch-black night like those often experienced on Earth during the dark of the moon would be rare indeed. Only the heavy mist of the previous night had made it so dark.

The other factor affecting their view of the outside universe, of course, was the clouds. They were to find that although they were more numerous than on Earth, especially in Texas, they were not as obstructive as might have been thought, especially at night when the sky seemed to be clearer. The most common clouds they encountered at this altitude were high, thin types similar to cirrus clouds on Earth. They did not ordinarily obstruct the view too badly, at least as far as moons were concerned, as much as they, perhaps, obstructed the view in, acting as somewhat of a one-way mirror.

## WOOLY BOOGERS AND OTHER THINGS

For the next few days work proceeded on the levee and the setting up of a campsite. While this work went on Dave and the Englishman, sometimes alone and sometimes accompanied by others of the group, explored the vicinity and kept the party supplied with meat. There were plenty of fruits, berries and nuts, or their Jovian equivalent, available in the surrounding woods, and a spring a couple of hundred yards up the ravine kept them supplied with water.

Game was plentiful on the grassland and there was always plenty of meat for the party to eat although it was not always procured without incident. Their ignorance of the habits of the local wildlife tended to add to the number of incidents. On the second day, after shooting two of the small deer-like animals which were plentiful in the vicinity, Dave and Clay Churchill were trailing along behind a group of large herbivorous animals built on the order of a rather small hippopotamus when the wind suddenly shifted and brought their scent to the animals. It quickly became apparent that if the animals looked like malformed hippos they had the disposition of a rhino with a toothache for a particularly large one wheeled and, sighting them, charged directly at them. It moved with remarkable agility for an animal of such bulk, for by the time the two men had turned and started toward some small trees about fifty yards distant the animal had attained full speed and was only about twice that distance from them. The combination of low gravity and the high oxygen content of the air enabled Dave to move faster than he probably ever had (the presence of a couple of tons of angry animal just behind may have had some influence too) but the Englishman was already in the tree and leaning down to give him an assist up when he arrived only a few yards ahead of the charging beast. Perched safely in the tree he turned to find the older man laughing as if he had enjoyed the incident. Personally, Dave thought, he had not found it all that amusing. It was the better part of an hour before they were able to climb down, retrieve their guns and the deer carcasses and return to camp.

On the fourth day they returned to camp to discover that they had missed the party's first encounter with a Jovian carnivore. The Triplets, the name they had given to the twin cousins and sister of Dave's high school classmate, Ben Sanchez, had gone to the spring to get some water accompanied by Don Dale who carried one of the light carbines. A short time later the camp was startled by the sound of a scream, quickly followed by others and a number of shots and a tremendous roar. The camp quickly reacted as they had previously planned. Those in the group who could not use a gun ran to the ship, while those who could grabbed rifles and started up the ravine. They had not reached the trees before the women burst from the cover of the woods closely followed by Dale, who paused at the edge of the woods to fire another volley of shots and then

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turn again to run toward them. The reason for their flight appeared almost immediately. It was a huge beast whose teeth, which it displayed as it uttered fearsome roars, clearly proclaimed it to be a meat eater. But it was the sheer size of the animal which momentarily froze the would-be rescue party. It was built somewhat on the model of a wolverine but was larger than any bear that had ever walked the face of the Earth. When on all fours it stood taller than a man at the shoulder.

“What a wooly booger!” Jack Hardin exclaimed upon seeing it thus forever naming it as far as the Earthlings were concerned.

Quickly recovering from their surprise, the men let loose a barrage of shots. Considering the range and the size it would have been difficult to miss but the monster hardly paused in his charge, shaking off the effect of the carbines and the powerful .44 magnums with seemingly equal ease. Only the size and clumsiness of the beast saved them. They scattered to each side and the huge beast’s charge carried him on past them and through the camp. He vented his rage by scattering equipment in every direction and then wheeled and charged again. He came directly at a group of them who were scrambling up the side of the small cliff. Halfway up they had to turn and face him. Finally, just as it seemed that some of them would fall victim to the fearsome beast the effect of the high-powered rifles at last brought the animal down and left him lifeless on the ground. The carcass of the animal was still where it had fallen, and they were still searching for a method of moving its more than two tons of weight.

Dave and the Englishman watched as the veterinarian Pam Monroe and Paula Taylor examined him and commented that for all his size he was a very primitive type of carnivore.

“Like a creodont?” asked Dave.

Pam looked up at him.

“Looks like your youth was more misspent than I thought if you are familiar with things like that,” she replied; she cut off any reply with a gesture and continued, “but it probably occupies about that rung on the evolutionary scale here, even if its biology doesn’t quite correlate with the Earth version.”

As they cleaned up the mess left by the giant beast they reevaluated their plans for a permanent camp. It appeared that they would have to erect a very high and very stout stockade around any camp which was to be safe from the likes of this beast. The Englishman, however, came up with a novel alternate plan which was ultimately adopted. He pointed out that the large, spreading trees at the edge of the clearing offered platforms upon which they could build their camp safely out of reach of the monster which, whatever else it might be

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able to do, seemed unlikely to be able to climb trees. He offered to supervise the construction of such a camp.

When Dr. Werner suggested that they could manhandle the body of the great carnivore over the side of the cliff he drew a few snickers. However, when he explained his reasons for believing this they showed more interest. Briefly, he stated that the lighter gravity caused both themselves and the beast's carcass to weigh less. Add to this, the effects of the richer air and they should be able to lift or push approximately fifty percent more than on Earth. Notwithstanding some skepticism they put his theory to the test and after a suitable amount of grunting and groaning proved it correct and the body went over the side. Dave hoped they were not violating some unknown Jovian environmental law by what they had done. Of course, he reflected, they were probably violating a host of Jovian laws just by being there, beginning with the immigration laws.

The fifth day saw the completion of the diversionary levees. It also witnessed Brad Patman's first attempt at communication with Earth with the souped up radio transmitter. However, it yielded no results. If the message was getting through, which he privately admitted that he doubted, they could not perceive any reply. Owens instructed him to continue to try to communicate once daily and in the meantime to begin analyzing the data which the ship's many recording instruments had accumulated during their approach to Jupiter and during the orbits that they had made around it prior to their disastrous landing.

With the Englishman busy supervising the building of the tree village the bulk of the hunting fell to Dave. Owens forbade anyone leaving the vicinity alone, so Dave took along whomever he could enlist. He took Don Dale with him when he could. He had known the tall, blond banker for a dozen years. He had met him when both were members of the same sports car club connected with the local university. It was a close knit group of friends that, due to the fact that most of the members were students, slowly dwindled away until only Dave, Don and a couple of others were left. Dave could only reflect that Don was undoubtedly his best friend and probably the best friend that he had ever had. He had such a congenial personality that Dave could not conceive of him having any enemies. He called himself an agnostic but, Dave reflected, he had never seen anyone who practiced the Golden Rule any better. He had often seen him stand in the lobby of the bank where he worked and patiently listen for half an hour to a disgruntled customer whose complaint or request he knew that he could not satisfy and in the end send him, or her, on his way mollified in spite of that fact.

Quite often Diana Hunter accompanied him. He had to admit that she was about as good a shot as he was. This should not have surprised him as he had to

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admit to himself that when he was a teenager hunting rabbits in west Texas his older sister was at least as good a shot as he, and if he had been able to view it absolutely without bias, she was probably the best shot in the family.

In addition to her marksmanship Diana brought along a minicam to record the local flora and fauna, especially the wondrous fauna.

At other times his high school pal Ben Sanchez, Jack Hardin or others would accompany him.

After their encounter with the wooly booger Dan had taken it upon himself to poll the group to see who could handle the rifles and to teach a short course to those who could not. The astronauts had all been instructed in their use and all the other men had at least a passing acquaintance with guns. Even among the women only Pamela Monroe, Jessie Sanchez and Nellie Hall really needed training. Paula Taylor was an indifferent shot but both Diana Hunter and Jim West's wife, Cindy, were quite good. Ben Sanchez' identical twin cousins, Linda and Katie were fair shots.

The training, however, was hampered by the need to conserve ammunition.

Dan Owens came to Dave Hall and Clay Churchill after a few days and said that he would like for them to take as many of the members of the party as possible with them on their hunting and exploration forays. He wanted everyone to gain some experience with the flora and fauna as well as the terrain of their new home. He also wanted to know how they reacted.

Dan asked Dave to take the three neophytes, Pam Monroe, Jessie Sanchez, and his niece Nellie Hall along with him frequently to give them some rifle practice without wasting too much ammunition. This quickly revealed that, while Pam Monroe would never be more than mediocre with a rifle, both Jessie Sanchez and Nellie Hall would develop into excellent marksmen.

But the first people Dave took with him were Jim and Cindy West. Jim was a lean, quiet-spoken west Texan whose speech was typically unhurried, but usually to the point. He was possessed of a perceptive, dry wit. A very competent engineer, his mind was at the same time practical and innovative. He often chose paths others left unexplored in seeking solutions. The others soon learned to listen when he spoke. He was interested in all that he saw on the forays he made with Dave and the Englishman and was a crack shot. So was his wife, Cindy, who was a slender attractive blond about Jim's age. She was also intelligent and extremely competent. She managed the business end of Jim's racing operations. The only possible flaw Dave could see in Cindy was that she tended to be impatient when anyone failed to catch on to what was

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obvious to her. Dave liked their company and had no hesitancy in trusting his well-being to them, but he told Dan Owens that he thought Jim's value to the group as an engineer and problem solver made it unwise to risk him a great deal to the vagaries of life among the often dangerous fauna of this world. He did not notice the look Dan and Clay exchanged at this assessment but they accepted his opinion and acted on it.

John and Pamela Monroe were the next of his guest hunters and explorers. Pamela would never be more than a mediocre shot, but John could become proficient if he worked at it. Dave felt that John's services as a doctor being vital, he likewise should not be overly exposed to the perils of the pampas. Pamela was a veterinarian (Dave could just see a shingle saying, "The Doctors Monroe—We Treat The Whole Family—From Grandad to Garfield") and worked with both her husband and Dr. Paula Taylor on the specialized tasks assigned to them. Dave had not seen John since he entered medical school and had never met Pamela previously, but he could not help feeling sorry for her because she had a young son back on Earth that she obviously missed terribly.

The next pair he took with him were his nephews, Scott and Dean Short. They were fraternal twins twelve years younger than he. They were opposites both physically and in personality. Scott was black headed, of medium height and rather husky and was an extrovert and impetuous to the point of being rash. Dean's hair was much lighter, and he had less of it; he was taller and rather slender and was introverted and conservative. Scott was a leaper and Dean was a thinker. If I wanted to stay out of tight spots, Dave thought, I would rather have Dean with me, but if I fell into a tight spot that required instant action I would rather have Scott because he would not stop to think of the consequences; he would just leap in. There is a time and a place for both. They were both filled with the enthusiasm of youth and showed great interest. They were also competent marksmen and Dean showed a great deal of aptitude for tracking.

Ben Sanchez came along when Dave took Linda and Katie Sanchez, the eighteen-year-old identical twin cousins of Ben, on a couple of expeditions. The college freshmen had been taught to shoot by some high school boyfriends and were reasonably competent. The main problem was keeping them quiet and in check enough to be able to stalk anything. They still had the teenage giggles. But they did not break and run at the first sign of danger and did not mind getting their hands dirty when it came time to field dress something they had shot and without complaining they toted it back to camp. As for Ben, he could shoot almost as well as he could play the trumpet, and he was excellent at that. In high school Dave had been envious of Ben's artistic, musical and athletic

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talent. He was lean and of average height but was swift of foot and excelled at every sport their small school offered.

Dave's other ex-roommate, Bryan Scott, had been in the army so he knew how to handle a rifle and he had been involved in scouting for many years so he knew a lot about woodsmanship. He was over six feet in height and huskily put together but needed the exercise to remove a spare tire around his midsection, so it was unfortunate that his other skills kept him from accompanying Dave more than he did.

In the time while Clay was busy with the construction of the tree camp, Dave took Jessie Sanchez and Nellie Hall his niece with him more than anyone else to give them experience with the rifles. Sometimes Ben went with them but after Dave had become comfortable with the young women the three of them mostly went alone.

The first time they went alone they were stalking some small antelope well to the south of the camp when Dave suddenly got a prickly sensation on the back of his neck. He had learned not to ignore this so he turned around and saw that they were in turn being stalked by several animals of a predatory type common to the valley. The animal was something of a combination of primitive dog/hyena/bear in form. They were larger than any Earth hyena and were anything but cowardly or harmless. He had seen three of them take a kill away from a female Jovian 'lion' and in pack size they had been seen to take a kill away from several 'lionesses'. On the other hand they rarely confronted even a single adult male 'lion' no matter what their number.

There were at least four of these formidable beasts behind them and it was obvious that the animals considered the humans entrees. Dave looked around for suitable trees in which to take refuge, and the nearest were uncomfortably far away. He saw too, that there were an unknown number of others out in the tall grass to their right. His heart racing he called quietly to his companions, warning them not to panic.

"Start toward those trees to the left and don't run until I tell you to or until these things charge," he ordered them.

He was happy to see that they obeyed. He was unhappy to see that the trees were a hundred yards away while the hyenoids were less than that and closing. When he saw movement in the grass to his right, as he faced them, he knew it was time to act.

"Run!" he yelled.

The two girls did as instructed. When they did the six animals he now faced broke into a run towards them. He brought his rifle up and fired bringing one down. That did not stop the others, and as he backed away, he stopped to

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kneel and fire again. He hit a second one but he knew that if they kept coming he would not be able to bring them all down, if for no other reason than that the clip in his .44 magnum only held five shots. In addition, he could see that the ones flanking him were coming now also.

He fired a third time but missed. He swore and started to fire again when the animal went down from a shot from one of the girls' carbines. He got a glimpse of Nellie beside him and heard a carbine fire from his other side too. The hyenoids soon decided that there must be easier prey than around these puny-seeming but lethal little things.

As his breathing and heartbeat began a return to normal he looked at the two white-faced girls on either side of him and said, "Thanks, I needed that.

"Seriously," he continued with sincerity, "I'm supposed to look out for you, but you just saved my life."

"And ours too, I would think," Jessie rejoined, still somewhat pale in the face.

Dave looked at the dark-eyed, long-haired girl. She was not over five feet two, if that, but to him she looked bigger than Matthew Bell at that moment. And prettier too, he thought, I believe that she is the first truly beautiful woman I have ever known.

He looked at Nellie and, after his shaking had somewhat subsided, gave her a hug, which was a tremendous show of emotion for him. He thought, she may not be as beautiful as Jessie but I am sure glad that she was a fellow stowaway. He became a little flustered when Jessie came over and gave each of them a hug.

As he had come to know Nellie better, she had passed from the status of Niece to Human Being and one he thoroughly enjoyed being around. After this I'll have to elevate her to Human Being First Class, he thought. And, if she wasn't beautiful, she was surely very pretty, even if she was his niece. She was probably five feet four in height, of slender build with brown eyes and hair that was either very dark brown or black, he could not decide which. She was intelligent and extremely easy to get along with ninety-nine and forty-four one hundredths percent of the time. She did, however, occasionally exhibit a certain Hall family trait sometimes referred to by people who had been exposed to its exercise, and did not know better, as mule headedness.

When they returned to camp that night Dave sought out Dan and told him what had happened.

"I would be dead now if—" Dave said, leaving his sentence unfinished.

He then told Dan that the girls could play on his team anytime and that he wouldn't worry about his back if one of them was guarding it. In addition they, like Jessie's cousins, were not afraid to get their hands dirty. They couldn't tote

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as much meat as Matt Bell, of course, but it was surprising what they could carry and would tote for miles without complaint.

The inhabitants of this world were the subject of much lively discussion around the evening campfires. Although they had seen many strange animals, they would all more or less fit into the general divisions of the animal kingdom that either roamed the Earth now or had done so in the past. As a matter-of-fact they had almost all been of an order that would fit very well the specifications of mammals. There were small grass eaters who depended on their swiftness to remain alive, others who depended on size and brute strength coupled with a perennially nasty disposition for their defense. Others had various kinds of armament including horns, thick skins, and sharp claws. Then there were the carnivores whose existence depended on overcoming those defenses. All of these were of course well armed for offense. Some of them ran their prey down while others lay in wait and pounced on it from hiding. There were others, like the fearsome beast that had wrecked their camp, who did not seem well equipped to do either but whose numbers and size attested to their success at the game of survival.

Many of these animals very closely resembled earthly animals. Perhaps the most striking of these were the cat-like animals referred to as 'lions' above which were most conspicuous on the valley floor. They resembled the familiar African lion more than anything else, even to having something of a mane, which they were later to find many Jovian predators sported. This animal was easily half again as large as his earthly counterpart but shared many of the same habits. It tended to run in groups like the African lion and even monsters, on the order of the one that had attacked the camp, would hesitate before attacking a group of these animals. The 'lions' as they inevitably named them, were extremely intelligent. They seem to have some sort of communication as they hunted and fought.

Dave, Don and Diana tried to approach them closely one day not realizing that they had just made a kill. When they were about fifty yards distant one of the cats sighted them and with a low growl charged straight toward them. Almost as if on signal four more of the animals leaped up and charged toward them fanning out to each side as if to cut off retreat. Dave and Don Dale both scored hits on the first animal, who led the others by fifteen yards, bringing it down. At this the remaining animals pulled up and retreated a little way. The humans began to slowly retreat but halted when they heard one of the huge animals give a low growl. They watched him calmly walk up to the fallen cat. He sniffed at it for a minute then stood and looked directly at them for

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several seconds before turning and walking almost leisurely back to where the others sat or stood. Then, with considerable growling and snarling, they returned to their kill. The leader did not join in the feast immediately though, crouching instead and watching the humans. When the humans made no move toward them he turned his back on them and shoving two others out of the way resumed his meal. As Don Dale described it, it was as if, never having seen either a man or a gun before, he had instantly associated the strange beings, the flash and noise and the death it had brought his companion and then figured out that the humans were no danger to them unless attacked and that it was not worth their while to attack them.

Dr. Taylor theorized that all of these animals, she called them “pseudo-mammals,” were the result of parallel evolution. As she explained, similar conditions had produced essentially similar creatures. Although they would probably encounter many widely divergent branches of the evolutionary tree most of those that they had met so far would seem to be virtually indistinguishable from those which had prospered and perished at some time on the planet from whence they had come. Dr. Monroe did not disagree with this assessment.

Then there was the planet itself. They probably knew more about it than any other humans alive since so much that they had *thought* they knew about it before turned out to be wrong.

But they only knew *what* and not *why*. Why for instance was the gravity only about eighty-five percent of Earth’s instead of about two-and-one-half times as much? Why was the atmosphere so congenial instead of the unfriendly mixture they would have expected? Why was the temperature so mild? And, above all, why were they not sinking into a mass of increasingly soupy gas instead of standing on seemingly firm and Earth-like ground where no ground should exist?

About the only one of these questions the scientists could answer at all satisfactorily was the temperature. The planet had been postulated to give off more heat than it received from the Sun so as long as you were deep enough into the atmosphere it was not impossible that you could have a livable temperature.

You could even concoct a theory to explain the composition of the atmosphere by saying that the atmosphere previously detected by Earth instruments was the lighter gases which had risen to the top and obscured the heavier, earth-like atmosphere they were experiencing. Dr. Werner did not think much of this theory, but he could not come up with a better one for any theory must take account of the facts, and if the facts (or your perception of them) change then the theories must change to fit them.

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None of the above, of course, could begin to explain how they could be standing on solid ground on the surface of a planet with a specific gravity of only 1.33 times that of water! Dave's mind returned again and again to this perplexing question, and he was sure many others did too, without coming up with any possible answer that he would want to say out loud in public. But the facts spoke for themselves; the reasons would have to wait while they went about the business of surviving.

Two more days saw the completion of the platforms in the trees where the shelters were to be built. Another day was sufficient to see the erection of temporary shelters on them. Everyone was happy to move out of the confines of the ship.

Dave moved into a spacious room with his two nephews and Don Dale. This worked fine except for the fact that Scott liked to tease Dean about anything and occasionally this would precipitate some medium to heavy quarrels. More than once an exasperated Dave threatened to dangle them out the window by their ankles, a patently empty threat since it was extremely unlikely that he could accomplish this feat with Dean much less the muscular Scott. This obvious fact amused them so much that it usually ended the squabble, temporarily. Don just seemed to be amused by the entire thing.

The move into the trees brought them into contact with more of the native wildlife. The trees were inhabited by various arboreal creatures, most of them annoying at the worst, the Jovian equivalent of monkeys, squirrels and similar earthly creatures. However there were other creatures who frequented the trees to prey on these harmless animals. Chief among these was a curious creature, essentially cat like but with a prehensile tail and a fifth toe on all four feet that was set at an angle to the other four like a thumb enabling the animal to grasp the branches like an ape. In addition the front legs were joined at an angle that facilitated this use of the front feet. They seemed to come in various sizes but none were larger than a leopard. They could often be seen watching them from a high limb but made no move to attack them.

With the completion of the tree camp the attention of everyone was centered on the repair of the ship. Those working on the ship had been working primarily on bracing to guarantee that the ship would not topple over when they tried to repair the crippled wing. This was somewhat difficult since the ship's supplies, intended for survival in a forced landing on Earth, did not include axes or saws equal to the task of cutting the large trees they needed. It did, however, include hatchets and machetes with which the crew was slowly obtaining the logs needed.

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While Dan Owens was supervising this operation the remainder of the crew were analyzing the data contained in the many recording instruments of the ship. They were chiefly concerned with information about the planet upon which they were stranded. Among the facts recorded by the instruments as they orbited the globe was that apparently about one-third of the surface was covered by oceans and two-thirds by land. They assumed that since there was a spring near their landing site that these oceans would be water, but the instruments were not conclusive in this matter. There had been a lot of atmosphere between the instruments and the surface. They even had some imprecise outlines of the continental landmasses taken from information which had filtered through the thick atmosphere and was thus somewhat suspect.

Probably the most important data was obtained as they made the descent to land. Though the glare from the ship's engines had obscured the cameras' view most of the time, in the short pauses between blasts, they had gotten a series of pictures of the surrounding territory as they descended. They had landed about ten degrees north of the planet's equator. The longitude they declared to be zero in the best (worst?) traditional arrogance of explorers. The Englishman then promptly named their camp, Greenwich. Dave protested, wanting to give it a Texas name, since they had come from there, but settled for naming the valley Kyle Field. The succeeding pictures showed mountains to the east as well as a high plateau. To the west lay a broad river valley and still further west a vast drainage basin for a mighty river system.

The ship's radar records and other instruments seemed to indicate that they were at least twenty miles above the planet's sea level! This in spite of the fact that to the east they could see enormous piles of mountains, the height of which they could only guess, though Dr. Werner estimated that they might be as much as fifteen or twenty miles higher than the spot upon which they were standing. If the planet's huge mass was dragging the mountains down as it seemed it should, it seemed obvious that there must be equally impressive tectonic forces at work building them back up.

They received confirmation of these forces when they felt a few minor tremors. Then one day just before dawn they were awakened first by a much greater shaking and then an ear-splitting roaring noise which continued without letup for several hours. It came from the north. They could see nothing to account for it, except perhaps for some turbulence in the high cloud layers in one particular area. When they climbed to the control cabin and trained their telescope on this area it was evident that there was something going on there, but they were mystified as to just what. This continued for about four hours

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and suddenly stopped. It recurred for a shorter period twice more in the next two days and then ceased. Their instruments detected a change in the makeup of the atmospheric gases. Dr. Taylor guessed that it had to be volcanic in origin, but there was no ash detected.

Dave said that the only thing he had ever heard remotely resembling it was when he was in high school. A gas well about ten miles from his house had blown out when they brought it in, and it remained out of control for days. The roar was similar to what they heard now though on a smaller scale. They conjectured about a volcano spewing pure gas, but they could only record their readings and not conclusively solve the mystery.

Perhaps the most interesting thing shown on the flight's photographic record was the presence in the last few frames of a bright spot of light, well to the east of them over most of the mountains. Various theories were advanced to account for this. The most plausible were that it was either an indication of volcanic activity, indicated a forest or grass fire, or was merely a reflection of the rocket's fiery exhaust on the lens. There were arguments for and against each of these but no other more likely explanations were forthcoming.

The *Jules Verne* contained special metal-detecting instruments that were to have been used while they were orbiting the Moon to detect any large ore deposits on the surface of the satellite. They were pleased to see several positive readings registered at spots in the mountains to the east. This shook Dr. Werner's pet theory. To account for the extremely light gravity he had theorized that the planet was made up of very light rocks, probably quite porous, and with a high water content in the interior.

An alternate and very incomplete theory to account for the light gravity involved the magnetic field that they had passed through. The field had very nearly wrecked them before their encounter with an 'airborne something' had done so for a fact. They theorized that this airborne menace might possibly have been a large flying animal (?) a hundred miles above the planet. The magnetic field was much stronger than the one we are familiar with surrounding Earth and apparently somewhat different in nature. The scientists built a theory that this field in some way partially counteracted the effect, at least on the surface, of the gravity of the planet which, by the observations and calculations made previously, should have been much greater. Regardless of the soundness, or lack of it, of this latest theory, the fact of the lower gravity was indisputable. To this they owed their lives.

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It took the crew four days to complete the bracing on the ship so that they could get to the task of inspecting and hopefully repairing the crippled wing.

The role of scout and forager fell more and more to Dave. At first this filled him with considerable trepidation, to say the least. He had never considered himself to be a candidate for hero. Far from it. His cranium was home to a host of phobias. One of these was fear of the unknown, albeit mixed with fascination. On this world the unknown quite often metamorphosed into the life-threatening known. His first instinct when meeting something strange and threatening was retreat, as precipitously as possible, which was probably a survival trait on Jupiter. However, in this role as scout and forager, he could not always do this, especially if he was responsible for someone else, like Nellie and Jessie.

His early excursions with Clay Churchill were very helpful. The Englishman seemed not to know the meaning of the word fear, and his presence was very comforting. Eventually Dave became more at ease in his role. When he mentioned this to the Englishman at the time that Clay had to work on the tree houses, the Englishman cautioned him.

“I have watched you. You can handle the task. But do not become overconfident. Do not be ashamed of feeling fear. A certain amount of it is an ally, so long as you do not let it rule you. It is like the pain a small child feels when it touches something hot. The memory of that makes the child respect the hot object and be careful in the future. You need to respect the things that endanger you and keep alert for them, and when you do encounter them do not panic, but weight the options,” he smiled, “—quickly—and retreat if possible. If it is not possible to retreat, sit on your fear and do what you must to defend yourself.”

He took the Englishman’s advice to heart always keeping on the alert for dangerous animals and situations that might harbor them. Eventually, although

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he knew the basic fear was still there, he thought he had it on a leash and began to feel more comfortable.

He found the assigned task to his liking. Animals had always held a special interest for him and, as he became more comfortable, the new varieties encountered made him look forward eagerly to each coming day. Although he did not particularly relish shooting them, he certainly recognized the necessity of it unless they all wanted to become vegetarians which no one had proposed.

The light gravity and the rich oxygen content made the air exhilarating. The miles seemed to flow beneath his feet with effortless ease. If the country was open and he did not have to be constantly on alert for predators he could trot at a swift pace for miles without tiring. The only problem that the air seemed to cause was an increase in the amount of food required. John Monroe explained this by the fact that extra oxygen allowed you to use the energy taken in faster and hence you needed to take in more.

Dave's explorations extended across the rolling grassy plain they had discovered the first day, across a shallow stream and on to the base of the first low range of mountains. On one particular day Dave, Jack Hardin and John Monroe had forded the stream to bag three of the small deer-like animals that abounded in the area. Dave wanted to explore the base of the mountains, but they could not make it back to camp with the kill and do this also. So Dave persuaded the other two to start back with the "groceries" while he took a short side trip to the mountains and then caught up with them later. They finally, but reluctantly, assented and started back. Dave kept one of the big magnums with him. He ordinarily preferred to use one of the carbines but there was no telling what kind of beasts he might encounter.

The mountains that confronted Dave were low and very eroded. They were largely covered by woods consisting of rather low trees and undergrowth. The face of the lower slope was broken with frequent woody ravines. These caused Dave to have to exercise more caution since they might harbor unknown types of wildlife, but he traversed half a dozen without incident, seeing less animal life than he would have expected. The swiftly moving sun was getting quite low, and he was just about to turn back toward the camp when he heard a tremendous roar from beyond the next ridge. This was followed by still more screams and snarls indicating more than one animal was originating them.

Dave hesitated for a moment but his curiosity won out, and he cautiously crept up to the crest of the divide, rifle at the ready, and peered over at the source of the uproar. The first thing that he saw was one of the huge carnivores that had nearly destroyed their camp a few days before and that had caused them to build the tree village. The wooly booger had its back to him and for a moment he could

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not see the object of its attentions. Then as the great animal shifted its position he saw a female 'lion' slowly backing away from the animal. The great cat-like animal had already suffered some serious wounds but still seemed capable of easily outdistancing the awkward brute it faced, and Dave was wondering why she did not do just that when he saw three small cubs behind her. Then he realized that he was witnessing a scene that had been repeated countless times in the eons since the first spark of the mother instinct had been implanted in some unknown form of primitive life. He also knew what the inevitable end of this scene would be, even as he watched the huge beast charge the cats again. The claws and fangs of the female inflicted terrible wounds on the body of the primitive beast, but she received terrible wounds in return. Just as the creodont seemed on the verge of delivering the final blow of the one-sided battle a new factor intervened in the form of a huge cat which appeared from the direction of the plains and in a single leap fastened itself to the back of the attacking beast.

The scene which followed was one of desperate ferocity. The lion clung to the back of the monster sinking his fangs into the back of its neck and raking its back and sides with his fearful talons. The beast they called the wooly booger tried in vain to reach the thing on its back with his own terrible fangs and failing clawed at him and finally rolled over and over on the ground trying to dislodge its assailant. This tactic was ultimately successful as his great weight finally forced the lion to relinquish his hold and scramble back away from his foe.

At this pause in the action Dave had an opportunity to look more closely at the newcomer and recognized him as the leader of the pack which they had encountered previously when they had been forced to kill one of them, and they had since become familiar with the pack. He then turned his attention to the lion's antagonist. The great carnivore had blood pouring from the spot on its neck where the cat's teeth had probed for a vital spot and from literally dozens of wounds on his back and sides where the cat's great talons had repeatedly slashed him. However, his thick coat of hair and equally thick folds of skin had prevented any of these wounds from being more than painful, and even as Dave watched he resumed the battle, charging with another frightful roar.

There followed a scene of such savagery as Dave could not have imagined a few short days previously. In raw power the giant wolverine-like creature had all the better of it. His opponent countered with quickness and cunning. As the beast charged, the lion would leap aside at the last moment and leap in from the side slashing at his enemy with tooth and claw always maneuvering so that he had open ground upon which to operate. The female was too badly wounded to be of much assistance, so the battle continued in this manner for a good fifteen minutes until the back and sides of the huge creature were completely red with

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its own blood. However, the wounds were more showy than vital, and aside from loss of blood the great creature was not badly hurt. Indeed his wounds just seem to feed his frenzy.

Given time the wounds the wooly booger had sustained might even cause his death from loss of blood or infection, but it was evident that this would not occur in time to help his opponents for the great cat had not escaped scot-free either. Blood flowed from a dozen slashes on his coat, and he now limped from the effects of a blow of one of the creodont's great paws which had sent him sprawling into some rocks. It was soon evident that the larger beast must prevail. The cats obviously knew this also as they stood together between the cubs and the mountain of primeval bloodlust which readied itself for another, and possibly final, charge.

Dave had been moved to admiration for the courage and skill with which the out-manned cats had defended their cubs. It was evident that the two adult cats could have made good their escape at almost any time, but it was also evident that they would not do this as long as any of the cubs were alive. No human couple could have displayed the virtues of parental devotion better.

Now their attacker charged once more and this time the cats rose up to meet him head on. Dave knew the inevitable end of this encounter and almost involuntarily he raised up on one knee and bringing his rifle up fired catching the great beast behind the shoulder just as he engaged the cats. This new attack elicited a scream of pain and rage from the creodont and brought him around to find the source. He immediately caught sight of Dave, and while it is doubtful that his primitive brain could really associate the impact of the bullet and Dave, it had been so inflamed with hatred by the wounds inflicted upon it that this rage would be focused upon any living thing his eyes lit upon. Whatever the cause it now charged directly toward the earthman.

When Dave was asked later if he wasn't frightened he would reply that he was afterward but at the time did not have time to think about it. He did have time to work the bolt action of his rifle and put four more .44 magnum slugs into the beast and was trying to reload when several things happened almost simultaneously. He saw a tawny body hurtle through the air and fasten itself to the throat of the two tons of death bearing down upon him. As he struggled with the fresh clip he slipped on a rock and fell backwards just as he was buried in an avalanche of flesh and fur. Then blackness overtook him.

He awoke to the feeling of something wet and abrasive being dragged across his face. As he struggled to consciousness he saw the large, mottled yellow face of Io in the brightly lit Jovian night sky, but the thing which held his attention was the face of a Jovian lion only inches from his own. This time he

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was petrified. He expected the great mouth to open any second with a snarl and close again about his throat bringing his career as an interplanetary traveler to an abrupt and, to his way of thinking, untimely end. How long they remained this way he did not know but presently the cat's face moved away, and Dave saw that he was moving some distance away to where the lioness and the cubs lay.

When it became evident that he was in no immediate danger from the great cats he became aware of other aspects of his predicament. He was lying half under the now lifeless body of the wooly booger. He could feel a throbbing pain in one leg and ankle. In addition he had numerous other cuts and bruises which were causing him varying degrees of discomfort.

He struggled for several minutes to free himself to no avail. Then he noticed his rifle lying nearby. Straining himself to the limit he still lacked six inches having a long enough arm for the task. Finally, making a loop with his belt, he was able to snag the bolt of the gun and work it close enough to grasp it. Then, after making sure the chamber was empty, he stuck the stock under the shoulder of the animal on top of him and tried to pry it up enough to pull himself out. By straining himself to the utmost he could move his legs a fraction of an inch at a time at the cost of extreme pain. He paused on the verge of unconsciousness to rest and reflect on his situation. As slow and painful as the process was he probably could eventually worm his way free if he did not grow too weak from his struggles or if some wandering carnivore, attracted by the bountiful feast lying on top of him did not come along and dispose of him. Of course if he could last through the night he might attract the attention of a search party sent out for him the next day.

He was brought out of his reverie by the sense of something standing over him. He had heard nothing but he knew something was there. He wormed his pistol out of its holster but before he could bring it up he saw the big cat who had awakened him earlier approach and with a low rumble grasp the foreleg of the beast atop Dave in his powerful jaws and tug backward. When he had recovered from his surprise he renewed his effort to free himself. Even the powerful muscles of the big cat could not completely remove the great weight pressing him down, but it did lighten it enough to allow him to wriggle free at the cost of considerable pain.

Dave doubled over with pain as soon as he put weight on his injured ankle. He leaned back against the side of the dead beast and waited for the pain to subside. As it grew less he noticed that the great cat had moved back to his mate and neither seemed to take any further interest in him. He marveled once again at the unfeline level of intelligence the cat-like creatures exhibited. Not only had the big male realized that he had come to their aid but he had grasped

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Dave's predicament and had intelligently come to his assistance. It was evident that these creatures far exceed their Earthly counterparts in intelligence.

An examination showed him that he had some painful cuts and bruises but probably nothing more serious than a badly sprained ankle. It quickly became evident that he was going nowhere fast, so he picked up the clip from the ground, reloaded his rifle and settled back to wait for the dawn. With considerable discomfort he crawled away from the carcass of the dead beast since he figured it might be in great demand by the hungry denizens of the forest which he could hear moving around growling and roaring in the dark. When this happened he wanted to be as far away from it as possible. He would rather have been up a tree but with his ankle he doubted that he could manage it.

A growl behind him made Dave turn abruptly. Then he sighed with relief as he saw that it was only the lioness warning him not to approach her cubs any closer. He had no intention of intruding on her territory, especially since she had ample teeth and claws to back up her position. As soon as he ceased moving in her direction she ceased growling and went back to cleaning her many wounds. She paused only now and then to snarl back at some of the disembodied noises coming out of the dark. Dave noticed that the male was no longer to be seen. He would have felt much better if he were still there as the two big cats would make a formidable opponent for any potential scavenger or group of scavengers attracted by the feast lying across the clearing.

The female made a few half-hearted dashes to run the slinking creatures back into the darkness, but they seemed to sense her weakness and quickly returned. Eventually they grew bold enough to rip and tear at the carcass of the beast on the side furthest from the lioness. She finally stationed herself between them and her cubs and settled herself uneasily to defend them from anything that came too close.

Dave backed himself into the dubious protection offered by the spreading roots of one of the huge trees that grew on the lower slopes of the hills and made sure that his rifle was loaded and ready. He was as close to the cats as the female would allow him. In this manner he hoped to have his back protected by the tree and one side protected to some degree by the scavengers' fear of the cat. Thus he would have only a limited area to guard against any possible attackers. There were now many of these.

He glanced anxiously up the tree once more, but its trunk was bare of limbs for fifteen or twenty feet, and he knew that he could not make it up to them with his twisted leg and ankle. He turned his attention back to the feast.

There were several varieties of beasts now tearing at the carcass of the slain giant. Two were rather canine in appearance. One was slender and long limbed

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and the other very short legged. It slunk around very close to the ground. Dave had seen both of these species plying their trade out in the grasslands. Others he had never seen before. He guessed that they stayed in the hilly forests and did not venture out into the open. One of these was a curious beast about the size of a large dog and very pale in color. It was almost hairless and possessed of short but powerful appearing legs and armed with formidable claws on its feet. Its limbs, however, were somewhat awkwardly joined to its body and it did not look capable of much speed. Dave guessed that this was why it did not venture out into the comparatively treeless valley. From the nature of its legs he surmised that it could probably climb very well.

The most peculiar characteristic of the beast was its head. It did not look like the head of a carnivore at all, being small and elongated in nature with a small mouth. The nose appeared to be almost prehensile. Dave watched this creature with a great deal of curiosity in spite of his precarious position. He thought at first that it was a herbivore which had been badly frightened by the commotion and ran the wrong way. It became apparent that this was not the case though as it fought its way through the pack of snarling animals using great claws on its clumsy appearing legs with great effect whenever it was necessary. He saw that the creature had sharp, if quite small, teeth in the small mouth as it tore at the throat of the dead beast. After a minute it ceased its efforts, and Dave thought that it had given up until he noticed that the scavenger appeared to be changing color in the moonlight.

A shiver involuntarily ran down Dave's spine as he realized that this beast was drinking the blood of his victim. His color was actually changing to pink and deepening as he sucked more of the life-giving fluid from its veins. Age-old legends of vampirism made the creature seem evil to Dave though he knew that it was neither good nor evil but just another wild creature following its nature.

There were no hyenoids at the feast, fortunately.

As the grisly scene unfolded Dave glanced at his watch and translating the Earth time reflected there into "local" time, he saw that there were still two hours until dawn. He wished fervently that the time would pass quickly for he feared that sooner or later some beast would decide to opt for tenderer fare than the giant carnivore or would be unable to fight his way to the dinner table, and he would have to fight for his life.

The carcass was almost invisible now under the swarm of scavengers. No dead animal would be allowed to rot if they were this plentiful everywhere.

The rest of that night seemed like a nightmare come true to Dave. As the contest for the grisly prize became more hotly contested the losers began to cast hungry glances toward him and the lioness and her offspring. Ordinarily most

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of these creatures would not have thought of attacking one of the great cats, but they sensed that she was gravely wounded and of course the young cats, formidably armed as they were, would have been no match for most of these creatures.

As for Dave, his physical appearance was certainly not calculated to inspire fear or respect in these savage beasts. Primarily carrion eaters, they could also sense that he was injured and seemed easy game for them.

Eventually some of them worked up enough courage to launch an attack on the lioness and her brood. This resulted in two slinking dog-like creatures receiving blows that ended forever their never satisfied quest for a full belly. Their bodies had not even stopped twitching before their allies of a moment ago pounced on them and began devouring them. It seemed like a lesson in politics.

Dave was not given much time for philosophizing however for the fresh carcasses did not begin to fill all the empty bellies that surrounded him. They turned on him as easier prey than the crippled queen of cats. He knew that only quick action could possibly save him. As they began to slink toward him, he aimed the big magnum rifle at them and in quick succession sent three of the most dangerous looking ones on to whatever reward might await them in some unimaginable carrion-cluttered heaven for these sanitary engineers of the wild.

Once again the other beasts were diverted from their stalking of him to leap upon their fallen comrades and tear them to bits. As soon as they were finished with these fresh carcasses they resumed their menacing approach to him. Once again he used his powerful gun to good effect and provided them with more fresh meat. The whole process was repeated three more times, and Dave began to fear for his supply of ammunition. There seemed to be an unending supply of hungry bellies and nothing seemed capable of satisfying their appetites. He dragged himself as close to the female lion and her cubs as he dared. She bared her teeth at him as if to warn him that she did not trust him as much as her mate. This caused Dave to wonder at the seeming desertion by the male after he had so valiantly defended them in a seemingly hopeless cause against the giant wolverine-like animal.

He did not have long to worry about this though for once again the scavengers were beginning to slink closer. Dave began to husband his ammunition, shooting only one animal at a time and carefully picking it for size. Sometimes his shot did not kill, but as soon as he hit an animal and it became apparent to the others that it was badly wounded, they completed the job for him. Dave's defensive problem was easier now for he had the bole of a great tree at his back and the big cat to one side effectively protecting him from attack from that direction so that he had only one direction to cover. If any luckless creature tried to circle around

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him and wandered into the reach of the lioness it did not last long. Likewise the big cat no longer snarled at him, sensing that a truce was in order for mutual protection.

Dawn was almost upon them when Dave put the last of his ammunition into the rifle. He also took his pistol out of the holster and laid it on the ground near him along with the spare loaded cylinder. He did not think it likely that he would be around to see the miniature sun when it broke over the mountains for it seemed unlikely that either he or the cats would survive the charge which was about to commence. The scavengers seem to sense that their time was about to come, and they were even more excited than they had previously been.

Dave had drawn a bead on the largest beast he could see when suddenly a tremendous roar broke from the jungle and several of the Jovian lions charged from the shadows into the midst of the circling animals. A few of the more determined, or perhaps hungrier, of the beasts, reluctant to give up their hoped for meal, stood their ground, but they were no match for the superior strength and armament of the cats. The clearing was a scene of carnage a few minutes later when the last of them fled the field of combat.

Dave began to have reservations as to whether he would be any better off now than he had been. He could not defend himself against all these beasts if they chose to attack him. There was no guarantee that the tolerance of the big male, whom he saw had returned with them, would be shared by the newcomers or the female either for that matter, since their mutual defense pact was now at an end.

These fears proved to be groundless however. A few snarls were hurled in his direction but the great male, still indisputably the leader of this pack, quickly silenced them in the same manner that Dave had previously seen him call off the charge on the plains the first day he had seen them.

The victorious cats settled down to devouring the unappetizing appearing remains of their defeated foes, and Dave began to feel the fatigue caused by the previous hours' events as a reaction seemed to set in and make it almost impossible to keep awake. When he jerked his head up at a sudden noise he saw that the sun was halfway up the sky and all the big cats had gone from the scene except the female, her cubs and two of the great males, one of whom was her mate. All of them were looking toward the western edge of the clearing, and in a moment he saw what they were watching so intently.

Four men from the ship had emerged from the forest and were conversing in low tones among themselves while keeping a wary eye on the big cats. Dave shouted at them in relief. For a few minutes there was a standoff as each time the men, led by the Englishman, tried to approach him the cats made menacing

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motions. Dave did not wish to see any of them come to harm and after some difficulty he managed to half walk and half crawl far enough away that the cats did not feel threatened when the Englishman approached alone. He then carried Dave to the part of the clearing furthest from the danger and the others gathered around to examine his wounds and hear his tale of the previous night's events.

There was still ample evidence of the terrible slaughter that had taken place the previous night. They listened intently to his narration, interrupting him with questions frequently.

While he recounted his adventures to Clay Churchill, Don Dale and Jack Hardin, John Monroe examined him. He informed Dave that his knee was twisted and his ankle badly sprained but not broken. However, he would not be able to put any weight on it for some time, so they would have to carry him back to the ship.

As they began to fashion a litter the men watched the great cats who now completely ignored them unless they approached one of them too closely. They were still feasting on the last night's kill, which did not look at all appetizing to the earthmen.

Dave had noticed the previous night that, unlike their earthly counterparts, the cats had five functional toes on their front feet and the fifth one was slightly opposed in the manner of a rudimentary thumb and now the Englishman pointed out that they used it as such as they wrestled with the carcasses. Paula Taylor had previously noted that many of the cat-like species here had a similar feature, especially the arboreal varieties.

They reluctantly left their observation post as the sun neared the zenith of its rapid arc across the heavens and began their return to the ship. Although Dave had feared that their progress might be slow because of him, the Englishman and Jack Hardin swung along as easily as if there was no litter between them. They cut straight across the valley and easily made the protection of the camp before dusk without any further incidents.

The group's arrival was greeted with relief by the rest of the party and the events of the preceding hours had to be recounted many times to various groups of them. Dave could not help but notice that they did not create quite the stir that they would have just a few short days ago. Since landing on Jupiter each passing day seemed to bring so many adventures that they were becoming somewhat blasé about them.

Dave noticed other changes in the members of the group too. For one thing the vigorous exercise to which they had been forced to become accustomed had caused most of them, including himself, to slim down some. Also, many of

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the women who tended to scream at the first sight of some strange creeping or crawling thing now took them quite calmly for the most part.



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After the evening meal was completed Matt and The Englishman came by and said that Dan Owens had something he wanted Dave to do in the ship and assisted him inside. Dave thought that it must be quite important for them to go to so much trouble for they had to virtually carry him the entire way and boost him up the ladders.

He was right.

The crew area of the ship was quite crowded, for in addition to the regular crew several of the others of the party were there. When the three latest arrivals were settled Owens began to speak.

“Those of you who do not already know must be curious as to why I have had you brought together,” he said solemnly, “but after you hear what we have to say the reason will be plain. To begin with, we have completed our survey of damage to the ship. I’ll let Brad take over and tell you our findings.”

The engineer, who had been gazing somberly at the floor, looked up, faced the group and began slowly.

“Our biggest problem in repairing the ship is straightening the bent vane with inadequate tools and no source of heat sufficient to work on these materials which were designed to withstand great heat,” he said. “Burning wood will not create high enough temperatures under the conditions to do the job. For this job we need some sort of fossil fuel. Coal, oil or something similar.”

“Then our only hope of completing the repairs is to find some deposit of high-grade coal?” asked Jim West. “How could we possibly expect to do that without a fantastic amount of luck? And even if we did, would it be in a form we could use?”

“AND, —” he added, “would we be able to mine it and transport it to this spot?”

“The answer to some of your questions is maybe,” Patman answered eliciting some half-hearted laughter at his response to the torrent of questions from the west Texas engineer. “Part of our equipment was designed to locate

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mineral deposits and, as a matter-of-fact, indicated some possibilities in the mountains to the east of us.”

There was a perceptible sigh of relief from the gathering at the extension of at least some degree of hope.

“Don’t get me wrong,” West rejoined, “I did not mean to paint the picture you drew as hopeless simply because it entails difficulties. You find the fuel, and we will find a way to extract it and get it here.”

Dave knew that the Texan had proven in his racing endeavors to be an innovative and sometimes downright ingenious engineer, so he had no reason to doubt his last statement. However, someone quickly pointed out that those mountains which seemed to be stacked one on the top of the other were not exactly the foothills and might present difficulties which neophytes such as they could not overcome even if they were able to find the deposit for which they were looking.

At this Owens reinjected himself into the exchange.

“All four of the crew have had some training in climbing mountains,” he said, “and Clay Churchill has indicated that he has had much experience with rough country such as this.”

“Wouldn’t you know that would be true?” Don Dale muttered to Dave under his breath. Dave smiled, for he had the same thought.

Their little aside went unnoticed as the Englishman responded.

“I have had a great deal of experience traveling in the mountains of Africa,” Churchill said, “but never with anything remotely approaching the dimensions of these. But then neither has any other human being. However, I am sure that we will be able to cope with it if that is the only obstacle we have to overcome.”

“Unfortunately,” Owens replied, “that is not the case. In the course of checking things out Brad came across something which could be much more of an obstacle. As a matter-of-fact it may very well turn out to be insurmountable.”

With this ominous statement the pilot had everyone’s undivided attention.

“In order for you to fully appreciate the situation I will have to tell you something so secret that few people, even many of those very closely connected with the Project, know about,” he said, “and that is the secret of our fuel. In the beginning our scientists were experimenting with some quite volatile but still rather conventional fuels. There were several accidents causing delays and injuries from resulting explosions. In an attempt to keep the fuels stable enough to be safe to work with an inert gas was mixed with one of the ingredients. Supposedly, this would lessen the chance of an accidental explosion and when the intended detonation occurred the gas would become waste material and be ejected. For a while this seemed to work fairly well but then as they

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experimented with different combinations a strange thing was noticed. First, the reaction that resulted from some formulas was much more violent than anticipated. As a matter-of-fact, there were more accidents before they learned to control the reaction. But then as they began to analyze the data from the experiment, they realized that they had much less inert gas waste than they anticipated. At first they thought the data was faulty, but as the experiment was repeated many times, they began to realize that under certain circumstances the gas was not completely inert, and in fact, was interacting with the other ingredients to produce power never before released in anything other than a true nuclear reaction.”

At this point Jim West interrupted to ask if any radiation resulted from the reaction. To this Owens replied in the negative and then resumed his narrative. “To make a long story short, this breakthrough made our present trip possible and also leads to our present dilemma. When I checked our supply of fuel this morning the gauge for one of our tanks of this gas read almost empty. When we investigated we discovered a tiny hole from which the gas was escaping. We apparently received a direct hit by an almost microscopic meteorite. We have patched the hole but our supply of this gas is much too small to get us off of this planet even if we successfully complete our other repairs.”

“Is there any chance we can find a supply of this gas on the surface of this planet?” asked Dave uneasily.

“I guess nothing is impossible, but it is not likely to exist in great quantities in a free state on the surface of the planet,” Owens replied.

“And if it is basically inert that’s the only way it could exist, since it cannot combine under normal circumstances,” Paula Taylor added.

“We are going over our survey data at this time, though,” Brad said, “to see if it shows up anywhere. It is present in the atmosphere in limited quantities.”

“I’m not a scientist,” Churchill said, “but if it is present in the atmosphere would it not be possible to obtain it from that source?”

“That would be a possibility if we had the proper equipment,” Dr. Werner replied, “but it would be very difficult, if not impossible, to extract the quantities we need with the equipment we can manufacture from what we have.”

“Then there is little, if any, hope of us being able to lift off again?” West asked.

“To be quite frank the possibilities look bleak at this time,” Owens answered. “That is the main reason for this meeting. It is, however, not completely hopeless. We may be able to overcome the obstacles that face us, but still, we must face the very real possibility that we will be here permanently.”

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A subdued silence greeted these revelations. Though they all had to have realized that they had serious problems, Dave thought as he looked back on the last few days, that he had never had as good a time or one he found more fulfilling, hazards and all. Nevertheless he did not really want to be sentenced to spend the rest of his life there with no possibility of parole, and he doubted that any of the others did either.

With the possible exception of the Englishman, he thought as he glanced at him. The Englishman was always a possible exception.

The rather grim silence was broken once again by Jim West.

“What you say may be true and the worst may be realized, but if we are marooned and I live to be a hundred, I will still be looking for a solution,” he said and added, “We have a great deal of scientific knowledge and some innovative people here, and I am not ready to recognize the problem as insoluble.”

General agreement was expressed to his statement.

“What about the radio?” Diana Hunter asked, bringing Dave back to the real world, unearthly as it was, and bringing back a flicker of hope. He had forgotten about the radio. Since they had been able to make the trip here, if they could contact the Earth another ship could duplicate it, avoiding the pitfalls they had blundered into.

“It, as you know, suffered some damage when we landed,” Brad Patman replied. “I have repaired it as best I can, but the magnetic field around Jupiter is quite unusual and seems to interfere on a scale proportionate to the planet. We haven’t received any messages, and I do not believe that we have been successful in getting any through either.”

“Keep trying, please,” Don Dale said. “I’ve enjoyed my stay here, but it’s a case of ‘It’s a nice planet to visit, but I wouldn’t want to live here—forever.’”

“Don’t worry,” Patman replied, “I promised my wife we would go to her mother’s for Thanksgiving, and she’ll kill me if I try to weasel out of it with some lame excuse.”

The tension eased a little bit, and they discussed how they should go about telling the rest of the party the good news. Owens said that was his job, and he would be frank and open about it but would also emphasize that no matter what difficulties they faced, they had no intention of giving up.

Dave had been silent through most of this conversation contemplating their predicament but now reentered it as he turned to the copilot.

“Brad,” he said slowly, “I appreciate the difficulties you have had in trying to repair the radio without access to any resources other than what we brought with us but, if we are unable to find the necessary gas and/or fuel might it not

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be possible to, as a last resort and with the help of the considerable scientific knowledge and engineering expertise this group seems to have, construct some kind of booster or 'electronic super-charger' to get a message back to Earth?"

There was some subdued laughter as his question trailed off and left him floundering around in a swamp of electronic ignorance.

"Let me answer that, Dave," Dr. Werner said. "That will certainly be Plan B if we fail in our search. And it holds considerable possibilities, though the effect of the magnetic field on anything we might contrive is unpredictable at this time."

"But Plan B, as Dr. Werner calls it, would undoubtedly necessitate cannibalizing some wiring and other things from other systems of the ship," Dan Owens interjected, "and we don't want to do that except as a last resort."

"If the atmosphere poses a problem perhaps we could transport the device up into the mountains where it should be thinner," Dave suggested.

The pilot grimaced as he replied, "With great difficulty, I'm sure."

"But if necessary, I am sure we could do it whatever the difficulty," Clay Churchill offered.

They all looked at the Englishman, whose manner and bearing seemed to inspire confidence.

"We would sure give it one hell of a try," Owens agreed.

"We have to," Brad Pitman added. "I still have that appointment to keep for Thanksgiving."

This exchange seemed to lighten the atmosphere of the meeting somewhat. At least they were going to be exerting every effort to extricate themselves, with somewhat definite plans and goals and not just sit around feeling sorry for themselves.

"Dan," Don Dale said thoughtfully, "even if we don't succeed in getting a message back to Earth, they still have the fuel and the capability to launch the *Goddard* on a mission out here don't they?"

"Yes, they do," the colonel replied. "Eventually, they almost surely will send it or another ship out here, but when is another matter. In the first place, there will probably be a lengthy investigation, with the government taking it over. Then, it depends on what they think has happened. If they just lost track of us out here—"

"But with their superior tracking capability they must surely have followed us all the way out here, probably into orbit at least," Dave interrupted. "Wouldn't they want to send a ship immediately to effect a rescue before our supplies ran out?"

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“Possibly, if they thought there was anything to rescue,” Brad Patman replied, “but with no more information than they would have I would be inclined to think that their reaction would be like the one to the *Challenger* incident.”

Owens nodded. “Brad is right; in the absence of an SOS there would probably be a strong bureaucratic tendency to avoid any possible screw up on THEIR watch.”

“The good old government issue CYA<sup>1</sup>,” Jim West added dryly.

“Precisely,” the astronaut agreed.

“It is inscribed in their DNA, I think,” Paula Taylor commented, not without a touch of bitterness.

“Eventually they will come out here regardless, won’t they?” inquired Diana Hunter.

“Certainly,” Owens agreed, “it is just a matter of when. If they don’t think there is anything to rescue, it might be several years.”

“So, then, do we instruct our grandchildren to greet them with open arms or anti-aircraft fire?” Dave asked sardonically.

Clay Churchill laughed. “I don’t know about you, but I intend to still be here when they arrive, if it comes to a lengthy wait, and greet them properly.”

“How about with a gigantic sign saying ‘Yankee, go home!’ ” offered Don Dale. Laughter greeted his remark.

“Careful, Don,” Dave cautioned, “we don’t want to offend certain members of our little philosophical society here.”

“No offense intended,” the banker offered, looking toward Diana Hunter and the four astronauts.

“None taken,” Diana Hunter replied, adding, “In any case, we would be happy to accept the suggestion offered, if you would just show us the way.”

This little byplay lessened the tension somewhat, and they went on to discuss other aspects of their predicament. Dr. Taylor noted that since the gas they lacked was a very light gas it might be more plentiful at higher altitudes. Since it appeared that they would have to explore the mountains anyway in search of a fuel supply they could also investigate this possibility. On Earth this would not have been much of a possibility, but here the mountains were apparently several miles higher than their present altitude and the total effect on the atmosphere of the strange magnetic field they had passed through on the way down was not known. And, as Dave remarked to Don Dale, since Dr. Werner’s original area of expertise was chemistry, if they could just find an ample supply in the atmosphere or elsewhere, he was sure that Dr. Werner and Dr. Taylor could figure out a way to extract it.

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1. A euphemism for the profane phrase assumed to be the reason for governmental cover ups.

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It was decided that Brad would concentrate his present efforts on trying to get a radio message through to Earth. If this could be done and they could relay their findings on the fuel to the scientists there, they might be able to look forward to eventual rescue from this source. In the meantime the rest of the group would concentrate on completing an analysis of the survey instruments' findings and decide on the most likely area to explore in search of fuel and, hopefully, the precious gas.

The reaction of the rest of the party was not as bad as Dave had feared it might be. Though they were mostly women, whom he had feared might react more emotionally to such news, they fooled him. Again, he thought. It was not the first time they had fooled him, and hopefully, it would not be the last. Most of their great-grandmothers had been pioneers in the American west, or in some cases had greeted those pioneers, and had withstood more hardships than their men. Here was another frontier unimaginably wilder than that one, and Dave was sure they would withstand any hardships this one might bring, if need be.

Also, everyone must have realized deep inside that their chances of repairing the obviously grievous wounds to the ship with none of the modern tools with which it had been built in the first place were quite slim. At the same time the fact that they had not abandoned the attempt left them with the eternal optimism of the human species which may be one of the most important reasons for its rise to prominence.

The next few days were filled with preparations for the upcoming expedition into the mountains. After considerable debate it was decided that the entire group would go along since it was not known how long they would be gone. The search would undoubtedly take several weeks if not months and it was thought better that they should all stick together.

All of the weapons were included in the items to be taken with them along with plentiful supplies of ammunition and emergency medical and survival supplies.

One evening as they neared completion of their preparations John Monroe approached the fire about which Dan Owens and several of the others were standing. He was carrying one of the monkey-like creatures which had begun to make nuisances of themselves as they grew less afraid of the earthmen. The animal was as big as a large monkey, had a prehensile tail and very large and prominent eyes that made its face remind the humans of an owl. They also enabled it to see quite as well as the bird.

"Hello, John," Brad Patman said. "Are you going to introduce us to your nephew?"

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The remark brought laughter from the group around the campfire, more than it deserved, probably. The doctor was not amused, however.

“You may not think it’s so funny,” he said shortly, “when I tell you where I found this thing.”

“Where?” Dan Owens asked.

“He was in the lower deck of the ship,” the doctor said. “He made quite a mess too. Somebody must have left the hatch open.”

There was a brief interruption as the animal made a sudden lunge, freed himself from the doctor’s grasp and scrambled up a nearby tree where he sat screeching loudly down at the group around the fire.

“We must be more careful about keeping the hatch closed,” Owens said. “These creatures could damage some of the delicate instruments in there.”

“I was the last one out of there, Dan, and I’m sure it was closed and latched after me,” Patman said. Jim West confirmed this fact.

Paula Taylor, who had been nearby and overheard the conversation observed that the little creatures had displayed a very high degree of intelligence and had ingeniously opened several containers which had been left unattended in the camp. It had become so bad that you had to leave a weight too large for the little animals to move on top of almost anything to keep them out of it.

This caused some concern that the creatures might figure out how to get into the ship while the humans were gone, no matter what kind of barricade they left on the hatch, and wreak havoc with the interior. This also caused Jim West to bring up something which had been bothering him, namely that erosion might undermine the bracing that they had rigged up for the ship if they left it unattended too long.

This brought on a mostly fruitless discussion on the subject that dragged on for so long that Dave finally exclaimed in some exasperation, “Well, it’s too bad we can’t just bury the ship like a dog would a bone and then come back and dig it up when we need it.”

Jim West cocked his head for a moment and then observed, “That just might be the answer.”

The rest of the group looked at him as if he had just started to sing the Jabberwocky song.

“You’re kidding of course,” Dave said. “That would take more earth than we could drag up here by hand in a year. Even if we could do that what would keep erosion from undermining that?”

“We wouldn’t have to completely bury it,” Bryan Scott put in. “If we just bury it up above the level of the hatch we have settled the problem of the monkeys, and that amount of fill would effectively stabilize the thing where

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we wouldn't have to worry about one of the supports being undermined and toppling it over. As to erosion, we can't completely eliminate it but with proper levees and dikes and using some clay that I have seen back up the ravine we wouldn't have to worry about it washing away for years."

After further discussion, Owens directed the engineers to investigate the feasibility of this suggestion and estimate the length of time it would take to complete the operation if it was found to be practical.

The next morning, after a full night of calculations, Patman, Bryan, whose training was in civil engineering, and West reported to Owens their conclusion that it was practical. Owens' response to this was to begin issuing the orders to make it come to pass though he commented that it seemed something of a shame to bring a billion dollar ship nearly half a billion miles only to bury it. It could have been done a lot easier and more economically in Texas.

Work progressed rapidly for the next few "weeks". A mound of dirt and clay which would eventually rise more than twenty feet high began to take shape around the base of the ship. While this was taking place the supplies were sorted and made into easily carried packs. Those which were not to be taken were stowed on the ship.

Churchill showed the group how to dry meat and a large supply of this was accumulated so that they would have an emergency food supply. He also showed them how to plait ropes from materials they had in ready supply all around them. The ship's emergency supplies contained a limited amount of nylon rope but it was thought best to supplement this in preparation for the assault on the forbidding mountain ranges to the east.

The Englishman's skills and knowledge had come in very handy. He had searched for and found many plants which enabled them to 'manufacture' a reasonable substitute for soap. He had also found many which were useful in spicing up their food as well as finding a source of salt. He located edible tubers and plants to vary their diet.

He also, soon after their landing, made some bows and a supply of arrows, teaching the others the skill as he did it, and soon had many people competing with each other as archers. Dave realized that this was not solely entertainment. They had a finite, though plentiful, supply of ammunition and if they were stuck here these 'primitive' weapons would be vital for their survival. Jim West was already designing a cross bow!

Animal skins and furs were prepared for use against the anticipated cold of the upper reaches. Most of the stowaways had only the clothes on their backs

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which were calculated to withstand a Texas summer, not the almost certain sub-zero temperatures to be experienced at the higher altitudes.

Shortly before the burial was complete some ten Earth weeks after they had first set down on the planet Brad Patman made his final attempt to contact Earth. He had made alterations to the equipment to step up its power as much as possible and had allowed the solar batteries to soak up as much energy as could penetrate the atmosphere in order to try to get a short message through to Earth letting them know their situation.

Dan Owens and Dr. Werner had spent many hours carefully constructing a short message to try to tell their friends as much as possible while telling their enemies nothing useful. Patman estimated that they would have only about ninety seconds of transmitting time with the power output that they had. Then the solar batteries powering the radio would be almost completely drained.

When Patman said they were ready the graying astronaut handed him a carefully written-out message to be repeated as long as they had power. Tension filled the small control room as the message was sent and then repeated twice more.

Work had ceased while this was transpiring and after the engineer reached over and clicked off the transmitting switch everyone was reluctant to leave the area even though they knew that, due to the distance, there would be no reply right away even if one were to come eventually. Owens exerted his authority to get everyone back to work in order to keep them occupied and not dwelling on the possible consequences of failure. Someone was left on duty by the radio constantly from then on.

Another Jovian week saw the dirt pile grow until all that remained was to fill in the area in front of the hatch. When this point was reached Owens declared a two-day holiday to rest them up for the long journey ahead.

Although there were periodic storms, the climate remained quite pleasant. The temperature never varied more than twenty degrees from the temperature they had first recorded on the planet's surface. This made it possible to swim in a pool below the spring which was their water supply. Nearly everyone now took advantage of this.

The evening of the second day found Dave relaxing with several others on a comfortable ledge from which they could look out over the valley to the west. The view of the river valley seen from the cliff was breathtaking. Although they could not tell the height for sure, Jim West estimated that it was ten to twelve thousand feet to the valley floor and primarily in just one tremendous step. Several miles distant a large river could be seen. Most of the area between was composed primarily of grassland with only an occasional clump of trees to

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be seen. There were, however, a few heavily wooded areas which could be seen to the south.

Wildlife abounded on the meadowland that they could observe. Great herds of strange looking creatures could be seen. Observed through binoculars they presented a sometimes strange, sometimes familiar picture. Most, though not all, of these animals were quadrupeds. Some resembled horses, deer or antelope. Others were huge, lumbering creatures with all sorts of defensive armament in the form of horns, tusks and spines.

Occasionally carnivores could be seen stalking their prey. These were mainly of the types they had already encountered. The Jovian lions predominated. On rare occasions one of the wooly boogers appeared and attempted to make a kill. It seemed to be out of place in the open grassland though since it was not swift enough to run down its prey and could not hide its bulk in the grass. However, it was a very effective scavenger since few animals could defend their kill against it and possibly this accounted for its survival.

As they sat gazing at the vast area spread before them Diana Hunter remarked that all of this vast empty land could be a great boon to an Earth whose normal political, social and environmental problems were made increasingly worse by a rapidly expanding population. To this the Englishman observed that it did not look so empty to him if the scene they were witnessing was representative. Dave added that he doubted that the number of people who could afford the fare here would greatly alleviate the overcrowding back home.

This last remark of Dave's brought the wry and pointed observation from Diana Hunter that some people could not look at a Rembrandt without calculating the cost of the paint required to cover the canvas. This brought a burst of laughter from the others, and even Dave could not help smiling at his automatic reversion to his profession.

Dr. Werner observed that a few years development might make large scale transportation possible and this area could then conceivably be put to the use Diana proposed.

"After all," he pointed out, "the Wright brothers could hardly have conceived of a plane the size and speed of the giant airliners we now use. There is no reason that similar advances may not be made here, and probably in a much shorter period of time."

As the conversation continued Dave wished that they might stay here under these pleasant circumstances for much longer, but he knew that the next day would see them turning their back on this pleasant place to embark on new adventures still unknown.



## ONCE MORE INTO THE UNKNOWN

The following day they made a final check of the interior of the ship. The radio remained silent. There was not enough power built up in the ship's solar batteries to try another message home, so Dan Owens reluctantly ordered the beacon Brad Patman had conjured up activated and the hatch covered up. The message would be sent to Earth periodically and if any message was received from Earth it would activate a 'beeper' which Brad would carry with him. This device would also tell him if the radio was still functioning as programmed. After this had been done to his satisfaction they took the tools they had used to move the dirt and buried them in a prearranged place, leaving them only three or four G. I. shovels<sup>1</sup> that they would take with them. This burial would insure that when (WHEN, Dave repeated to himself, not if) they returned the tools would still be there.

Owens wisely did not allow them time to think too much about leaving this only link with their past. He urged everyone to quickly pick up the equipment and supplies they were to take with them and get underway.

He stood and watched the group as it filed past him up the ravine toward the mountains. They made quite a procession, he thought, fourteen men and eight women. They were unbelievably fortunate to still be here with such a tremendous overload of eighteen extra travelers on the ship. He mentally gave thanks for the gross miscalculation made in the power potential of their fuel.

As he reached a turn in the ravine which would hide the ship from view he turned and took a last look at it. As he turned back toward the east he fervently hoped that it would not be the last view that any of them ever had of the ship.

At the front of the line Dave and the Englishman broke into a trot as they entered the open grassland. They had previously picked a campsite for that night and now wanted to go ahead of the group and check it out.

As the sun neared the horizon that evening they greeted the party at the site with fresh meat roasting over a fire after an uneventful trip. No one needed any

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<sup>1</sup> Military entrenching tools.

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prompting to sleep that night for Owens had deliberately driven them hard the first day. The last thing Dave remembered as he drifted off to sleep was what sounded like one of the big cats growling softly somewhere outside of the circle of light thrown out by their fires.

They arose early the next morning and, after a quick breakfast, got under way. They had camped in a low saddle in the first low range of mountains near a spring. Now they were descending a gentle slope toward a somewhat larger stream in the middle of another valley some six or seven miles distant. From now on they would be going through country none of them had seen. The terrain that they now traversed was mostly open and quite similar to the area with which they were familiar.

Their plan was to descend to the river and then proceed down the valley until they could find what appeared to be a good place to cross the next range of mountains. This range was somewhat higher than the one they had just crossed. Their present altitude appeared to be two or three thousand feet higher than the floor of the valley but there seemed to be several, possibly viable, passes much lower than that.

In their discussions before the beginning of the expedition they had decided to march straight through the daylight hours in order to make as much time as possible, pausing only briefly for rest stops along the way. Meals would be eaten only before and after the day's trek. They hoped to cover twelve to fifteen miles in the short, Jovian day in this manner on level, open terrain. When they reached the really difficult mountains which loomed ever before them it was anybody's guess how much progress they could make in a day's time.

When they had covered about half a mile Clay Churchill called Dave Hall's attention to the campsite they had just left. As he turned to look, he saw some of the big lions wandering about the abandoned campsite. One extraordinarily large one sat on his haunches looking after them. It was too far to tell for sure but Dave thought, no he *knew*, that it was the big male that led the group near their ship and to whose aid he had come that memorable night against the booger.

When he said as much to Churchill the Englishman agreed with him and stated that he was sure it was the big male. He pointed out distinguishing characteristics of individuals in the group of cats which Dave could not discern from that distance. Once more he had to shake his head and marvel at this unique man who had to be in his fifties at least but whose physical and mental faculties were at least the equal of any man on the expedition. There was absolutely no doubt as to his superiority as an outdoorsman and hunter.

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As they entered a wooded area they lost sight of the cats and started up to the head of the column since they would presently go ahead to scout for the best route and a good campsite.

Back at their previous campsite the cats finished their investigation of the area and soon began to wander back toward their familiar valley until only the leader of the pack and his mate and cubs were left. Finally the female tired of waiting and with a few peremptory growls led her cubs after the rest of the group, swatting a laggard on the rump occasionally as they went. Still the big cat crouched in the same spot gazing at the spot where the strange bipeds had disappeared into the woods.

Meanwhile the Earth party had emerged from the trees and encountered a herd of large grazing animals that Dave and the Englishman had become very familiar with in their hunting excursions. They appeared to be totally herbivorous, but they were anything but harmless. About the size of a rhinoceros they had an array of armament that would have made one of those Earth creatures green with envy, had they known of it and been capable of feeling the emotion. In addition to two large horns growing above the eyes and two more growing one behind the other on his nose, each of the beasts had a sort of collar of horns growing around his neck and a ridge of sharp spines growing the length of his back culminating in a tail armed with a bludgeon. These creatures were the clear winners in the Jovian arms race as far as Dave could tell. If they weren't he didn't want to meet the winners.

None of the earthmen had ever seen any animal so rash or so hungry as to attack one of these creatures. Their apparent safety had not, however, bred a pacifistic attitude. Far from it. From their dispositions, one might infer that they suffered from a bad case of chronic indigestion.

Safety from attack had, however, apparently begun to breed evolutionary complacency as these fearsomely armed creatures' senses of hearing, sight and smell had seemingly dulled and if one were careful not to move too quickly or approach too closely there was little danger of being discovered. Keeping this in mind they skirted around the group of grazing monsters with no untoward incidents, keeping always to the downwind side of them.

Midday brought them to the banks of the stream that they had seen from the ridge. It was larger than the small stream in their valley. The banks and the stream itself were infested with several types of reptile-like creatures who exhibited a nature and an array of teeth which made it apparent that it would be unsafe to attempt to ford the stream there. They turned upstream and traveled about two miles without finding a better place to attempt a crossing. Twice they

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had to fend off the attacks of some of the aggressive reptilians which they had dubbed croctiles.

They had been heading across the valley directly toward the most likely looking pass in the next range of mountains and now since they were having to diverge from this chosen path they decided to try to cross where they were. Churchill and Ben Sanchez had determined that there was no change in the nature of the stream for some distance and in addition the ground was growing more swampy and the inhabitants were growing both in size and number.

As a consequence of these factors they spent the rest of the day building rafts and then ferrying the party across the river. After finding high ground on the other side which was free from the river dwellers, they made camp for the night.

On the third day out they began to get a foretaste of what lay ahead of them. They struck out in the direction of the pass they had picked out in the next range. Although they were able to maintain a nearly straight line toward their goal it lay through swampy land and it took them two hours to cover about four miles to the base of the mountains. This journey was memorable only for their encounter with a huge reptile-like creature that looked at first glance like one of the large meat-eaters<sup>2</sup> that are featured in museums. It stood with its head a full dozen feet above the ground and was at least thirty feet in length and walked on its two hind legs which were considerably longer than the front ones.

Clay Churchill, who had been scouting ahead, came back to halt them and bring them quietly up to a point to where they could see the creature. Although it looked fierce it was actually engaged in eating leaves from the tops of some of the low trees growing in the swampy ground. Though it was apparently not carnivorous they did not wish to test it and skirted quietly around the area where it was feeding.

The earthmen reached the foot of a steep incline just as the sun reached its zenith. After a short rest they began the ascent over what looked like a game trail that the Englishman had found. It then took them two more hours to travel one horizontal mile during which they climbed about 1500 feet. Since it was now about dusk they found the best shelter they could and made camp for the night. The view from their campsite was not in the least encouraging. They had crossed two mountain ranges and were now about two thousand feet higher than they had been when they began but the incredible mountains to the east still towered above them like an insurmountable barrier.

The mountains were arrayed generally in parallel ridges with little in the way of foothills in between. They spent the next five days completing their crossing

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2. Tyrannosaurs.

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of this ridge and two more. At this point they were, according to the calculations of Jim West and Brad Patman who were making a rough map of their journey, only about forty-five miles horizontally from their starting point. The peaks of the range they had just crossed were, they estimated, some sixteen thousand feet higher than their starting point and the valley they were now traveling down was more than two miles higher than the spot the space ship rested on. But, although it was somewhat cooler than their campsite at Greenwich, the snow line was still considerably higher. Things were put together on a different scale on this world.

The party followed a stream down the middle of the valley and was having easy going for a change. They were approaching a forest with trees of much greater size than any they had seen previously. They were fully the equal of any that they had seen on earth. As they neared the dark and forbidding forest they could see that it was structured in layers with distinct levels of trees of different sorts and sizes. It was unusually silent as they neared it. They made camp just at the edge of it.

It was an exhausted group that gathered around a campfire with Dan Owens that night. Most of the previous four days had been spent in hard climbing and difficult descents. They had to resort to the use of ropes as a safety measure frequently in crossing the last range of mountains.

There was no clearly discernible break in the mountain range which they were now confronting. In addition, the great trees would tend to screen them from it once they entered them. After hearing Bryan Scott, who among other things was an excellent cook and had been put in charge of provisions, say that they were nearly out of meat and John Monroe give the medical opinion that some of the less athletic of the women in the group were near total collapse from the unaccustomed rigors of the past few days' journey, Dan decided that they would make camp where they were since they had shelter and access to good water. They would rest while scouting parties were sent out to seek a feasible crossing of the next mountain range and also procure some fresh meat for the camp.

Paula Taylor also suggested that they do some exploring while they were resting there and see if there were any signs of the minerals they were seeking as well as just gather general information about the local geology. Owens assented to that suggestion and on that note the meeting broke up.

Dave watched John Monroe walk off as the meeting broke up and, eyeing his former roommate's shrinking but still noticeable paunch, wondered how much his recommendation was based on the condition of some unnamed female members of the party and how much it was based on the condition of an equally unnamed male doctor. Dave smiled to himself with the anticipation of a

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leisurely but unrelentingly complete probing of this question. If he enlisted Don Dale's help and they played it right they might draw the investigation out over several days, stopping just before the good doctor decided to hone his surgical skills on them.

Everyone rested the next day with no one venturing far from camp. One reason for picking this spot was that the side stream entering the main river here was free from any dangerous appearing inhabitants and many of the party took full advantage of this fact to remove the grime accumulated by several days of hard travel and swim and relax on the banks. The break from the previous days' routine was such a relief that before nightfall most of them were acting like a bunch of school kids at recess.

On the morning of the next day, the eleventh since they had left the ship, four men left camp to strike out downstream and seek a pass through the mountains. The party included Clay Churchill, Dave Hall, Jack Hardin and Ben Sanchez. Ben was a former high school classmate of Dave's who had just showed up on his doorstep a couple of days before the launch, along with the Triplets who were now attending the university in the nearby town. Benito, as most people including the Triplets called him, was slender but athletic in build and fleet of foot. Both Jack and Ben were experienced outdoorsmen and had become skillful in climbing in the last few days. Dave was not too much at ease climbing but did what was necessary efficiently enough while the Englishman seemed as much at home on a sheer cliff as on the level ground. They carried enough provisions to last them three days as they did not know how long it would take to find a suitable pass over the mountain range.

As they progressed into the dark woods they encountered the local animal life, the most troublesome member of which was a cat-like creature about the size of a lion or tiger that had peculiar tusks protruding upward a full six or eight inches from its lower jaw. The earthmen could not imagine what real use he could have for them until they came upon two of them attacking another of the forest's more capably endowed creatures. This beast was of elephantine dimensions and somewhat resembled an elephant in that it had a greatly elongated mouth, both the upper and lower jaws protruding, and had four tusks, two curving downward from the upper jaw and two curving slightly upward from the lower jaw.

Their method of attacking this creature, who stood a full eight or nine feet tall at the shoulder, was for one to dart at it from one side and when it turned to face this danger the other would dart in from the other and slash upward at the beast's belly with the upward protruding tusks. Although the elephant-like

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creature put up a valiant defense these tactics were eventually successful and the cats settled down to gorge themselves on their kill.

This scene was played out before them in the center of a narrow clearing along the trail. There was no possibility of them being able to go around them in the clearing and the undergrowth at this point was too dense for them to seriously consider trying to circle around them off of the trail. It seemed that they would have to settle down and wait for the beasts of prey to fill their bellies and leave their kill which might take quite a while. The Englishman went over to a large tree near the edge of the trail and started to climb it calling back over his shoulder that he would try to see if he could see a way around the obstacle from the vantage point of the tree.

Moments after the Englishman had disappeared into the foliage above he called out to them to follow him and see what he had discovered. The three did not have the agility of the acrobatic Englishman but soon had made their way up to where he stood on a large limb from which the ground was not easily visible.

“Here is your highway,” Churchill said, motioning in the direction they wished to travel. When they followed his pointing finger they saw a tangled web of branches reaching as far as they could see in the semidarkness broken by the trunks of the large trees.

“It doesn’t look like any superhighway I would like to travel,” Dave said, eyeing it apprehensively. To this the Englishman just laughed and walked as easily along the branches as if he were still on the ground.

After some hesitation Jack Hardin followed the Englishman and after exchanging glances Dave and Ben followed suit. It was not as bad as Dave had thought it would be. The branches of these trees were truly gigantic and the leafy branches obscured the ground enough so that the sensation of height was lessened and there were usually other branches or vines at about the right height to hold on to if necessary. Dave made full use of these. They soon joined Hardin and Churchill who were bent over examining the trunk and branches of the tree in which they were standing.

“It seems that this is someone’s superhighway, Dave, even if it isn’t yours,” Churchill said, pointing at something before him. Dave did not see what the Englishman was trying to show them until he proceeded with his explanation.

“Look at the other limbs around you,” Churchill said. “You will notice that they are not as clean of small limbs and twigs as this one we are standing on. They have been broken off this one either by design or just accidentally as a result of great use.”

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As Dave and his two companions bent over to examine more closely the area Churchill had indicated, the Englishman rose and peered intently at the branches overhead. Then he directed their gaze in that direction.

“Have you noticed that there is hardly any spot along the path that isn’t within easy reach of some sort of handhold? And look at this,” the Englishman said as he reached overhead and tugged at a tangle of leafy branches and vines. They parted suddenly and the branch whipped upward a few feet well out of reach with the vine dropping away into the blackness below bringing an exclamation of surprise from the three men watching Clay.

As they proceeded carefully along the aerial pathway they noted more of the signs and glanced uneasily around them for any sign of the builders. However they saw nothing and soon were beyond the clearing where the cats were feasting and made their way back down to the ground. They could not follow the tree path very well any longer anyway for the trees were getting smaller and the footing more perilous. But speculation as to the nature of the pathway’s owners filled their conversation as they proceeded up a canyon with walls that were getting progressively closer together and higher. Dave was not too unhappy when the trees became much smaller and more scattered as they ascended the mountain heights.

They made camp that night at the foot of high, twin waterfalls. The cliffs over which they spilled were very steep but a short exploration of them convinced the Englishman that they could get the party over them with the aid of guiding ropes without too much peril. This was the best possibility they had yet discovered of crossing the forbidding mountains that confronted them. There did not seem to be much in the way of problems to be seen beyond the one in front of them.

After a further examination of the cliff in the morning they turned back down the canyon to inform the rest of the party of their find. They made good time back to the clearing where they had made the discovery of the tree path. Churchill wanted to explore it further so they ascended once more into the trees and followed the pathway some distance until it curved away from the direction that they wanted to travel. Then they descended to the ground and continued back toward camp. At no time had they seen anything on the path except one solitary tree-cat they had come upon feasting on a small arboreal creature that he had killed. He quickly carried his kill up into the upper reaches of the trees where he remained snarling at them until they were out of sight.

The sun was low in the sky as they neared the spot where they had left the rest of the party. They were perhaps a mile from camp when the calm of the

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forest was broken by a piercing scream off to their right, quickly followed by others and shouts and the snarling of some type of animal.

“Someone’s in trouble,” Dave exclaimed as he turned in that direction, unslinging his rifle as he did.

As quickly as Dave had acted he was comparatively late as Clay Churchill was already speeding in the direction of the screams with Hardin following. Dave and Ben quickly followed suit.

The undergrowth was not as impenetrable here as it was in some places, but Dave knew that he would have been quickly lost if it were not for the terrific noise ahead that made the right direction unmistakable. As it was, Dave lost sight of Hardin at times and was lashed unmercifully about the face and shoulders by branches whipping back into place in the big football player’s wake.

The fern-like foliage gave way suddenly, and the earthmen burst into a clearing on a hillside and came to a sudden halt as they beheld a scene from the dawn of history, or to be more precise, from prehistory. Matthew Bell stood near the other side of the clearing. His clothes were torn and blood covered one side of his face. But it was not the appearance of the big man, disturbing as it was, that drew their attention but the savage creatures that surrounded him. There were eight or ten of them, squat, hairy, bipedal creatures that were caricatures of men. From the rear they looked almost human except for their heavy covering of hair, but when they turned around their faces were pure animal, small eyes set close together and fierce tusks protruding from their mouths.

That the creatures were cunning was evidenced by the way that they circled the earthman, keeping out of reach of the large tree limb he wielded. That they had not been altogether successful in this endeavor was apparent by the fact that two of them lay crumpled on the ground. The others, however, were undeterred by this fact and even as the earthmen raised their rifles they charged Bell from all sides simultaneously. He swung and felled another of the grotesque creatures then went down under a swarm of hairy forms.

The earthmen could not fire now for fear of hitting their friend. They lowered their guns in frustration and raced across the clearing to the aid of their beleaguered comrade. The giant Olympic champion’s great strength, which had won him fame on Earth and was truly awesome in the lesser gravity here, was standing him in good stead now. A lesser man would undoubtedly already lie dead on the ground. He hurled his attackers in every direction but always they returned to the attack.

As they neared the affray Churchill, who was a few yards ahead of the rest, shouted and attracted the attention of the participants. Three or four of the beastmen turned to face the new challenge. Churchill clubbed his rifle and

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knocked the first to the ground and then, drawing his knife, leaped on his fallen opponent. Dave Hall had only time enough to see Jack Hardin knock another to the ground before he became too busy with a third to take further notice.

Dave dodged as the creature leaped at him and, still unable to fire for fear of hitting one of his companions, gripped his carbine and tried to use it as a club on his adversary. He was unsuccessful as the beastman dodged nimbly to one side. This continued for a minute or so as Dave tried to reach for the pistol at his side without giving his foe an opening. Each time he shifted his attention though his opponent made a move to attack and finally managed to knock his rifle to the ground.

With a scream of triumph the creature leaped straight at Dave's throat, knocking him to the ground. It was now a hand-to-hand, life-and-death struggle as they rolled, kicking and clawing in the dirt. Dave's foe was very strong and he had all he could do to keep it from sinking its fangs into his throat. Finally he managed to reach the revolver on his belt but could not bring it to bear on his opponent. Then in the struggle it discharged harmlessly.

At the sound of the shot Dave's attacker sprang back from him in surprise at this new turn of events. His hairy companions who were still in action likewise stared questioningly at this strange creature who made such loud noises with his hand. Seizing the opportunity Dave fired again into the trunk of a tree by which his adversary now stood in indecision. At the explosion of bark from the tree it screamed in terror and turned and ran from him to disappear up the trunk of a large tree nearby. The three remaining beastmen followed with the agility of monkeys.

As Dave lay grasping for breath, staring at the spot where they had disappeared, Jack Hardin limped over to him and offered him a hand. As he got to his feet he checked himself over and discovered that apart from a few bruises and minor scratches he was none the worse for wear.

"Say, Dave," Hardin said as he watched him take inventory, "you didn't seem to be doing too well against that thing. What happened to all this karate you've been bragging about?"

"I haven't been bragging," Dave responded defensively, but then grinned ruefully and admitted, "To tell the truth, I was so busy trying to keep his teeth out of my throat that I didn't even think about anything like that." He winced as his fingers found another sore spot and added, "Besides, he probably couldn't understand Japanese, anyway."

As they moved toward the spot where the Englishman and Ben were bent over Matt, Dave eyed his companion's limping gait and added pointedly,

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“You don’t seem to have fared all that well yourself. What’s the matter with your leg?”

“Just a twisted ankle,” Hardin replied. “If you think these guys were tough,” he said, motioning toward the crumpled, hairy forms littering the clearing, “You should try playing the Bears some Sunday afternoon.”

Matt was just regaining consciousness as Dave and Jack Hardin walked up to Churchill who was ministering to him.

“He’s not badly hurt in spite of the way he looks,” the Englishman said, looking up at them. “He just got knocked cold by a club or hitting his head on the ground in the melee.”

For the first time it sunk in on Dave that some of the beastmen had indeed carried branches or clubs and used them.

The big man did look terrible with blood coming from a dozen or more wounds. They all appeared to be superficial though and aside from some loss of blood the greatest danger would be from infection.

Matt groaned and opened his eyes at first seeming disoriented. He was breathing deeply, almost grasping from the exertions of the fight just ended. Suddenly his eyes cleared and he struggled against the restraining arms.

“Take it easy, Matt,” Churchill said.

“No,” the big man grasped, “the girls—”

The Englishman stiffened. “Who are you talking about? There’s no one here but us.”

“Dr. Taylor,” Matt said, “Paula and Diana.” He paused for breath and then continued, “Paula was collecting geological specimens from some outcroppings here. I was along to guard them from animals. We were approaching this hill when suddenly those things dropped out of the trees on top of us.”

“What happened to the women,” Hardin asked. “Did they get away?”

Matt shook his head. “No, that’s what I’m trying to tell you! The first thing after we were attacked, a couple of those big hairy things grabbed them and hauled them off up that tree over there,” he said, pointing at the tree where the creatures had made their escape. “Some job of guarding I did. I didn’t even get off a shot.”

“You had no reason to expect anything like this,” Churchill said reassuringly. “Besides,” he said waving at the lifeless forms around them, “under the circumstances I think you gave quite an account of yourself.”

“Fat lot of good that will do the women,” Matt said angrily. “We’ve got to go after them, or they’ll wind up as those things supper—or worse.”

“We will go after them,” Churchill said grimly, “but not you. You’re in no condition to go where I’m sure they have gone. And from the looks of things

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neither is Jack. You two stay here. I'm sure someone will be here from camp to investigate soon. Ben, Dave and I will try to follow the trail. We will blaze a trail for you to follow with this." The Englishman hefted a hatchet that he took from Jack Hardin's belt.

"You think you're going to find another of those elevated trails up that tree, don't you?" Hardin asked.

Churchill nodded affirmation and added, "I will be very surprised if we don't. These creatures look like the engineers that would build something like that. At any rate we will soon know."

With this last statement he walked over to the tree in question and began to climb nimbly up the trunk and soon disappeared into the foliage. Dave fingered the carbine he had retrieved until the Englishman reappeared and dropped to the ground.

"It's just as we thought," he said. "There is another of those trails up there. There is nothing in sight but it is not hard to tell which direction they went."

Quickly they filled the perplexed Matt in on their earlier discovery of a well used pathway through the mid levels of the trees. Both he and Jack Hardin were reluctant to let them leave without them but had to admit that in their condition they would probably just slow them down. It was agreed that since time was of the essence the three of them would leave immediately and when a search party arrived from the main camp they could be directed onto the trail.

As they ascended into the tree Dave could not help but feel like the proverbial fly entering the spider's turf. This in spite of the fact that they were well armed. All of them carried the light carbines as well as knives. In addition, Dave had his .22 magnum pistol and the Englishman carried the hatchet which could be lethal in his hands.

The sight that met their eyes as they reached a level about fifty feet above the ground was the now familiar tangled pathway through the branches. Churchill did not hesitate but immediately started off in a direction which Dave felt must be back up the valley toward the north. He paused only to put a mark on the next tree trunk with the hatchet.

"We don't have any time to waste," Clay said, motioning toward the west. "We will have a hard time following them in the dark."

The sun was undoubtedly very low in the sky now although the foliage overhead filtered its light so that it was difficult to place it exactly.

They moved as quickly as they could, the Englishman only pausing intermittently to blaze the trail, usually at a junction of two paths. Occasionally they stopped for a minute or two to rest.

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At one of these halts Dave, peering apprehensively at the floor of the forest a good fifty feet below said, "This is sure no place for a couple of flatland west Texans is it, Benito?"

Ben followed the direction of his gaze and then turned and grinned at him. "Oh, I don't know, Dave, it's not so different from the top of an oil rig. Of course, for you guys who never got out of the cotton patch, it might be a little steep."

Before Dave could think of an appropriate reply to this Churchill called for them to renew the pursuit. But Dave reflected as they went that his friend was right, it WAS steep for him and over the weeks and months to come it remained so every time he had to do it. He did what he had to do but, if it involved heights, he was never comfortable doing it.

It was getting quite dark now as the swiftly moving Jovian sun had obviously sunk beyond the horizon. It was frustrating too as Churchill was sure from the signs he read that the beastmen had slowed their flight, feeling safe from any pursuit and were now not far ahead. What these signs were Dave could not tell for he could see little in the way of a spoor. (Wonderful word, spoor, a detached part of Dave's consciousness thought, not sure exactly what it means, but it sounds great.) In less pressing times, Dave would have marveled at the woodcraft of the multi-talented Englishman and asked how he did it but there was not time for that now.

Fortunately for their purposes the largest two moons were now well up and furnished a dim light to travel by, but nevertheless progress was now reduced to a snail's pace. They had just reluctantly decided to halt for the night when a scream pierced the night.

All thought of stopping left the minds of the earthmen. Churchill had to restrain his more youthful companions from rushing precipitously ahead. He stressed that it was now doubly important that they proceed cautiously and not have a tragic accident or in their haste warn the beastmen of their approach.

They continued cautiously on their way but the intermittent cries coming from a point increasingly near them made it hard to control their pace. As the sounds grew nearer they were now accompanied by chattering and snarling which could only be emanating from the ape-like beings they were pursuing.

The Englishman came to a halt and motioned the other two forward. They found themselves crouching at the edge of an area that was open to the sky. It was hard to realize that they were a hundred feet above the ground for limbs and branches had been crudely entwined and lashed together to form a platform perhaps fifty yards across. The two moons now shone brightly overhead illuminating the scene before the trio.

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In the middle of the clearing six of the beastmen surrounded the two earthwomen. The reason for their screams was evident. The creatures had discovered that their captives outer “skin” was removable, and they were busy doing just that apparently jabbering excitedly all the while at the wonder of removable skin. The women were unenthusiastic about the process to say the least, but they were no match for their powerful captors and were rapidly losing the struggle. So were their garments since their primitive captors were not versed in the use of such civilized items as buttons and zippers. All they understood was that if you grabbed the loose skin and pulled hard enough it would tear away and come loose in your hand.

Churchill whispered to Dave to stay where he was and had Ben work to the right while he went to the left leaving the beastmen an escape route on the far side of the clearing. On the Englishman’s signal they were to advance a couple of steps into the clearing and shout and fire their rifles into the air. If the hairy creatures left their victims and took to flight that would be the end of it. If they did not then they were to shoot to kill. “And make every shot count,” the Englishman emphasized. “If they try to flee and take the girls with them I will cut them off and try to stop them. Be sure of your actions. This may be the only chance we, and the women, get.”

With that warning he turned and disappeared into the shadows. Ben started working his way around in the other direction. It was perhaps five minutes before the two Texans saw Churchill’s signal.

Taking a deep breath Dave stepped into the open, rifle at the ready, and gave a loud shout. His companions did likewise. Startled, the man-like beasts before them whirled to meet this intrusion upon their entertainment leaving their two hapless victims, now wearing only what they had come into the world with, who gave a cry of recognition and relief.

“Make a run for it,” Dave shouted as he raised his rifle and fired over their heads.

At the loud noise two of the savage creatures broke and ran for the far side of the platform. The others stood fearful and undecided as the women got to their feet and ran toward Ben. At this action the largest and most ferocious of the beastmen made up his mind and leaped after them. Ben could not fire for fear of hitting the women but Dave and Clay Churchill fired simultaneously and with good effect as the creature screamed and fell lifeless. This ended the indecision of the other three beastmen; they turned and raced into the darkness on the other side of the clearing.

Dave moved quickly past Ben and the frightened women to the spot on the far side of the clearing where they had disappeared. The Englishman moved

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with him cautiously into the shadows to ascertain that their enemies were not still lurking there under cover of the overhanging foliage. Satisfied that they had not tarried there the two earthmen retraced their steps to join the others.

Clay Churchill pointed out signs en route that indicated that this was a well used gathering place for the primitive species and indicated that there were probably many more of the creatures in the vicinity.

The two women had recovered somewhat from their fright and now, in the tradition of their sisters from the beginning of time, were concerned with salvaging enough of their torn clothing to satisfy their sense of modesty and decorum. They protested when they were admonished to hurry.

“You can’t expect us to go back to the others dressed just in our birthday suits,” Diana Hunter complained.

“Pick up what you can quickly,” Churchill advised. “Modesty is a luxury we can’t afford right now unless you want to wait around for your hippie friends to return with company.”

“And I for one have seen all of those gargoyles I want,” Dave added.

No further encouragement was needed to get the women under way. Their jury-rigged attire would not have gained them admittance to a formal affair back on Earth, but it was adequate for a strategic withdrawal from the strange treetop plaza.

Due to the possibility of pursuit it was their intent to continue steadily on until they encountered their comrades. They picked their way cautiously along the path they had come up just a short time before.

Before they had been on the trail for an hour though, the moonlight was blotted out and it became pitch dark except for the strange, faint light with which some Jovian forests were filled. This glow evidently emanated from certain types of plants. Though it faintly outlined trees and other objects it was not sufficient to allow them to continue safely. In any event they knew that the blotting out of the moonlight heralded the approach of a storm.

In their short stay on the giant planet they had discovered that the larger moons apparently had significant effect on the weather. Rain and storms were much more likely during the twenty-hour period immediately before and after the conjunction of the nearer of Jupiter’s four largest moons. This occurred approximately every eight and one-half days. This did not mean of course that bad weather always occurred at this period or that it never occurred at other times but the likelihood seemed greater at these times.

The five humans moved off of the main trail and sought shelter wherever they could find it against the approaching storm. They found it none too soon

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and huddled together in a crude natural shelter on a broad limb protected by a large overhanging limb and the massive trunk of the tree they sat on.

The storm which buffeted them far exceeded in ferocity anything that they had experienced since their arrival. The wind whipped through the forest ripping huge branches from the trees and driving the rain against their shivering bodies with the force of a firehose. Despite the protection afforded them by their natural shelter it threatened to dislodge them. They were forced to take the stout nylon climbing ropes they still carried with them and secure themselves to the tree.

The storm continued on through the remainder of the night and most of the following day. The five huddled people were as miserable as any of the beasts of the forest. It was a great relief to them when the wind and rain at last abated and the tiny sun shone through the clouds.

When at last they were able to resume their journey they found the going difficult. In many places the avenue through the treetops had been broken where limbs had been torn off the trees leaving a gap or branches had fallen from above to form a tangle that blocked their progress. They found it necessary to descend the trees several times to detour around these obstacles. They would have completely abandoned the tree route if they had not been afraid of missing the anticipated rescue party.

It was a tired and hungry group that finally met the would be rescuers led by Dan Owens very near the spot where they had left Matt and Jack Hardin the day before. They gladly retraced their steps and made their way back to the main camp that they had left what seemed like an eternity before.

On the way to camp Owens related how they had been caught by first darkness and then the storm soon after setting out on the trail. As a result they had made almost no progress along the unfamiliar pathway. Dave could well imagine this to be so. He knew that they would have been lost without the Englishman's expert guidance.

As the group satisfied their hunger they recounted their adventures of the previous night ending with Churchill's assessments of the possibility that there were a great many more of the beastmen in the vicinity. They decided to end their stay at the campsite and move on to the pass the scouting party had found as soon as Hardin and Bell could travel. Since they both stated that they would be able to do so on the next day plans were made accordingly.

Talk then turned to the nature of the creatures they had found, or rather the creatures who had found them, and Dr. Monroe told them the results of his examination of the body of one of the beastmen, or gargoyles as Dave had inadvertently named them. According to him although the creatures had many

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human characteristics and might be referred to as such they also had many of the characteristics of apes and other creatures of the forest. They had six digits on their hands and feet two of which opposed the rest and the hands were unusually large and strong for their size. This was a characteristic of several of the creatures they had encountered although most had five digits or less. It was ideally suited to arboreal life for it gave the possessor a tremendous gripping ability. Another of the creatures' characteristics was the presence of a very short tail, one so short that it was not obvious at first glance.

By far the most significant features were those to be found around the head and skull. Their heads were very round and their ears were pointed and tufted. This gave them a peculiarly feline appearance around the face. This impression was heightened by the fact that their eyes had elliptical pupils and the eyes were somewhat slanted in their positioning.

When he had opened the skull of one of the creatures Dr. Monroe had found a brain very large in proportion to their size although still somewhat smaller than that of a human. Nevertheless they were obviously quite intelligent in comparison to the animals around them and could communicate with each other to judge by the jabbering they had heard the creatures do. They were intelligent enough to grasp the usefulness of clubs and stones as weapons and apparently had built the treetop freeway. This last not only implied intelligence but the cooperation of large number of them which reinforced the resolve of the intruders to leave the area as quickly as possible.



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They broke camp early the next morning and started down the river. The day's journey was uneventful and that evening saw them camping at the foot of the waterfalls which were swollen with the runoff from the recent storm. Fortunately for them they did not need to cross the roaring stream.

As they sat around the campfire that evening, talk drifted to all the strange things that they had come into contact with since they had landed on this strange planet. Possibly the strangest thing about it was the many similarities between the plant and animal life they had encountered here and that which now flourished or had once flourished back on Earth. Both the scientists and laymen had many theories about this.

Paula Taylor had the best scientific credentials in this field.

"It probably shouldn't surprise us too much that the plant and animal life here are so similar in many respects to our own," she said. "Since the conditions here are very similar one could expect that there would be many similarities in form and function among the creatures that inhabit this place. Back on Earth, during past geological eras when the continents were separated for long periods of time creatures were independently evolved to fill the same roles in the scheme of things and were even very similar in form in many cases even though this similarity was often little more than skin deep."

"That would explain the roles they play," Dave said slowly. "That is to say, predator and prey, but how do you explain the apparent similarity as to type of animal? By that I mean mammal, bird and so forth."

"And also the fact that they are all quadrupeds," Jim West added.

At this point the Englishman interrupted to say, "Most of them are quadrupeds, but in the swampy areas I have caught glimpses of some creatures that appear to have six or eight. The only sure fire rule seems to be that there will be an even number of legs."

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“The quadrupedal form seems to have proven more efficient,” the dark-haired biologist said. “I haven’t seen any of these multi-legged creatures you speak of, but I would be most interested to see what their nature is.”

“Nasty, I would suspect,” Dave interjected.

“The eternal pessimist speaks again,” Don Dale put in with an amused smile.

“From what I have seen that’s the safest position to take here,” Dave replied defensively. “Assume whatever you meet intends to eat you. You can always be pleasantly surprised if it doesn’t try, but my experience here is that a significant number of them are going to.”

“What do you consider a significant number,” Diana Hunter teased, “one?”

“It is if it succeeds,” Dave retorted.

Dr. Taylor brought the conversation back to its original track as she continued, “As to the similarity in form and function there are many examples of this in the history of our planet. As I mentioned before, when South America was cut off from the rest of the world early in the Age of Mammals it was inhabited chiefly by marsupials for a long time. In spite of this basic difference they evolved in lines very similar to the more advanced types of mammals in the rest of the world. One of the most striking examples I can think of is the fact that we find fossils there which very closely resemble the saber-toothed cats which were coming into prominence elsewhere but which were marsupial in nature in South America.”

“The resemblance of many of the animals we see here is closer than that,” Pamela Monroe interrupted to say. “These animals that look like mammals are warm-blooded and very closely resemble them in method of reproduction and other ways.”

Dr. Taylor nodded her head in agreement and added, “This planet will be a biologist’s wonderland of a laboratory. I could stay busy here for several lifetimes and still not scratch the surface.”

“It’s not only a biologist’s dreamworld,” Dr. Werner said. “I am sure that the physicists will be more than a little interested in that mysterious force field which seems to make this all possible.”

“And the astronomers may be interested to know how right they weren’t about conditions here,” Dave added ironically.

“That’s true,” Owens said. “It might be more accurate to describe this place as a physicist’s nightmare rather than a dreamworld. Many of his holy truths don’t seem to apply here.”

Later Dave, Clay Churchill and Dan Owens were quietly discussing the next day’s problems when the Englishman stopped and held up a hand for quiet.

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“Listen,” he said and cocked his head to one side as if to funnel the sound he was listening for into his brain.

His two companions listened intently. At first Dave could hear nothing and then he detected a very faint rhythmic sound on the very threshold of his ability to hear. He could not identify the sound but it was like nothing he had heard before in this wild country. As the men listened the sound continued very faintly, sometimes fading away completely with a shift in the wind, but always returning.

“What do you make of it, Clay?” Owens asked.

The Englishman shook his head. “I don’t know,” he replied. “It’s something new to me. It could perhaps be caused by the wind banging a tree limb against something but I doubt it. It’s too regular for that.”

“Whatever it is it’s far away,” Dave put in, “and that suits me fine. I’ve had enough excitement for a while.”

“At any rate there is very little we can do about it,” Owens said, rising to his feet. “I suggest we all get some sleep. We have a hard day ahead of us tomorrow.”

With this remark the greying astronaut moved away and proceeded to act on his suggestion. Dave and the Englishman soon followed suit.

When Dave was shaken awake the next morning by Don Dale the first thing he did, after he had cleared his head of a little of the usual morning fog which always filled it, was to listen for the strange sound of the previous night but it was not to be heard. He intended to ask Churchill about it but he was soon too busy to remember.

Don handed him a plate and utensils with what passed for fish on Jupiter in it, taken from the cold stream they had camped beside. It was really quite good but he noticed that his friend had little enthusiasm for it.

“What’s the matter, Don?” Dave asked. “Are you under the weather?”

“Yes, I guess I’ve got the first case of the Jovian flu,” Don replied as he emptied his meal, mostly uneaten, and rinsed his kit.

Dave watched him walk away with some concern, not only because he was his close friend, but because of the possible implications of Jovian microorganisms attacking the visitors from Earth. He meant to talk to John Monroe about it but before he could Dan Owens called upon them to get under way.

They were in the dead end of a box canyon with the waterfalls spilling over the three-hundred-foot cliff closing it in. The ascent was steep but they were able to walk most of the way up although Clay Churchill strung some ropes along the upper reaches to provide handholds.

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Forty feet from the top it was impossible to continue further carrying the packs of supplies so Churchill and Jack Hardin negotiated this difficult portion of the climb, and once on top, lowered ropes and hauled up first the packs and then the rest of the people.

From this point it was only a short, easy climb to the top of the divide. The view from there was somewhat disheartening as it showed before them still another range of mountains even higher and steeper than the one they had just conquered. It was even more forbidding too in that no point was visible to them where they could cross it without climbing above the snow line adding another adverse element with which they had to contend.

They were relieved, however, as they made the typically easy descent toward the valley below, to be leaving behind the valley where they had the unpleasant encounter with the gargoyles.

They camped on the slope that night and completed their descent into the valley the next morning and then for the next two days continued down this new valley looking for a pass in the range towering in front of them and also looking for promising ore samples.

They were more relaxed and their pace had become more leisurely as they put more distance between them and the valley of the gargoyles. They stopped frequently to take samples of rock although their calculations showed them to still be some distance from the area shown as most promising by the ship's instruments.

The morning of the third day found them in an area which contained many outcroppings which they wished to sample. They dropped their packs and leaving a few people to guard them from wild animals split up into several groups to check out the different locations.

Dave was in a group with Paula Taylor and Diana Hunter. Don Dale was also along mostly as a guard. Dr. Taylor, acting as the geologist of the group, was doing most of the prospecting. The area they moved through was sparsely wooded and hilly.

The geologist had stopped to examine an outcropping when Dave thought he saw some game ahead and moved somewhat leisurely in its direction. Diana Hunter trailed along behind him with her video camera. The wind changed and the animals bolted before he had approached close enough to get a shot at them and he had drawn up in disappointment when suddenly the silence was broken by an earsplitting scream from behind him.

Startled, Dave was momentarily paralyzed by the shock of the terrible sound. Then he whirled about to face the direction from which it had come, remembering as he did that he had heard it once before, on the night they had

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first landed. That night it had almost cost him his life when he had stumbled at the edge of the great precipice the ship had landed beside. Now for the first time he was to see the author of the bloodcurdling shriek.

The sight that met his eyes as he turned, gun in hand, sent chills up his spine and caused him to involuntarily retreat several steps. It was straight out of the Mesozoic. A hundred yards away from him, having just emerged from some trees was a huge monster that could have just stepped out of a paleontology book. A reptile-like biped, it looked like one of the large carnivorous dinosaurs that had roamed the earth eons ago. It walked upright on two legs with a long tail behind that served to balance it as it moved. It towered at least twenty-five feet in the air when it stood upright. Its head was fully five feet in length. Any thought that it might be a plant eater was dispelled as it opened its mouth once more to utter another tremendous shriek, in the process revealing the most terrible cutting weapons Dave had ever seen in an animal's mouth, or out of them, either, for that matter. All in all it could have been old Tyrannosaurus Rex himself back from a Rip Van Winkle sleep except for a couple of minor things. The creature's front legs were much longer in proportion to its body than Earth's version and the tail seemed somewhat thicker and longer. There also seemed to be some bony projections on his head which gave a curious halo or crown like effect. In addition there was a short mane of hair running down its spine being perhaps a foot in length at its head and decreasing in length until it completely disappeared on its tail. This was the only hair the animal seemed to have.

Dave did not have time for lengthy comparisons, however, for just as he turned to face it the beast was moving with surprising speed toward the rest of the group. Don Dale had already fired at the creature with his carbine with no visible effect. Dave did not think his little popgun would faze the monster either as he forced himself, against every instinct in his body, to run toward the tableau.

The little group of humans scattered as the monster bore down on them and then to his horror Dave saw Diana Hunter, trying to film the creature as she fled, stumble and the animal, with amazing agility for its bulk, scoop her up off of the ground with its "hands". Dave raised his gun and then lowered it with a sinking feeling as he could not fire for fear of hitting the struggling woman. Vaguely he noticed that Clay Churchill, Jack Hardin and some others were running toward them from where they had been guarding another group some distance away.

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“Fire at his legs, back or anything,” Dave yelled at Don Dale. “We’ve got to distract him. Don’t let him concentrate on Diana.”

Dale nodded understanding and emptied the rest of his clip into the creature’s hindquarters. This caused it to hiss loudly and turn to face that direction, but it was obviously only annoyed for it quickly turned its attention back to Diana.

Desperately Dave ran to within a few feet of the beast directly in front of him and fired at point-blank range scoring several hits in its presumably tender belly and then was forced to scurry back barely evading the monster’s gaping mouth. Now he knew what terror *really* felt like.

By this time others had arrived and were firing at the monster, taking care to do so very carefully, without hitting the struggling woman. But even the heavy rifles used by Dan Owens and Jack Hardin could do little but annoy the creature since they could not fire at any vital spot. Finally the creature seemed to decide to get away from these petty annoyances to some spot where it could enjoy its lunch without disturbance. It turned toward the woods from which it had come still firmly grasping the earthwoman in its talons.

Dave felt a wave of despair as he saw the move and rushing up close to the beast, emptied the remainder of his clip into the creature’s back as it was momentarily distracted by one of the other men. The barrage of bullets had no more visible effect on the beast than so many raindrops. It was obvious that the skin on his back and sides was too thick and insensitive to be harmed in this manner. Some more vulnerable spot would have to be found.

A sense of futility and frustration mixed with despair at the realization that the dark-haired journalist’s fate was certain gripped Dave. He seized the useless weapon by the barrel and hurled it against the creature’s back and, his hand closing on the hatchet he was carrying in his belt, he gripped it in one hand and leaped onto the monster’s back. Grasping the mane of hair as he went, he clambered up its back until he reached its neck.

The giant beast reacted at this attack from a new direction, of course, rearing high on his legs and trying to reach the enemy now clinging stubbornly to the fringe of hair on his head, shaking with all his might to dislodge it. But still the beast stubbornly held onto its intended snack.

Hanging on desperately, a slip now would undoubtedly cost his life as well as Diana’s, Dave twisted his left hand into the mane of hair and inching himself higher he raised the puny hatchet and drove it into the only vulnerable spot he could see, the monster’s right eye.

The previous screams of the beast, which had almost literally shaken the trees, paled into insignificance at the sounds which now issued from the terrible jaws of this prehistoric dragon as Dave brought the weapon down again and

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again into the vulnerable eye. The creature's actions now became frenzied as it finally dropped Diana and turned its full attention to the source of its pain.

The wound Dave had inflicted was painful and blood ran down the creature's side and covered Dave but it was by no means fatal. The monster shook its head vigorously and tried to reach Dave with the claws of its forelimbs. Dave clung desperately to his position. To fall would mean almost certain death. When he was low on its back the creature could not reach him with its short forelimbs but now it could. Dave was stunned as the monster tried to scrape him off against a tree and lost his grip on the mane as one of the terrible, clawed hands grasped him. He felt himself being dragged downward and saw the awful jaws agape waiting for him.

Still half stunned he felt the sharp teeth as he was dragged between the jaws and in a last desperate move he tried to wedge the now useless hatchet in the creature's mouth to prevent the inevitable. Miraculously, the tough plastic handle did not snap as the jaws closed on it and it kept them, for the moment at least, from completely closing and ending his life at once.

Though it seemed futile Dave managed to loosen his pistol and empty it into the monster's mouth and throat as a last gesture. Then he struggled against the pain and tried feebly to extricate himself from the terrible jaws that held him. Boy, does this thing have bad breath! a detached part of him noted.

His senses reeled and he had a sensation like he was falling and then he received a great blow and surrendered to the darkness. Miraculously he found himself lying on the ground free of the reptile's grip. With a sense of unreality he found himself standing looking into the hideous face of the monster. As if in slow motion he saw himself raise the pistol he still clutched, point it towards the grinning apparition and pull the trigger, wondering detachedly why it did not finish him off. Perhaps, he thought, it was playing with him like a cat. Someone clutched his shoulder and he pulled away. Then he was kneeling rather than standing, meticulously thumbing back the hammer of the revolver and snapping it on empty chambers over and over at the monster which lay dead on its side on the ground. And then he noticed that his hand, still continuing to fire the empty pistol as if it had a life of its own, was shaking so badly that it was questionable that he would have hit the huge beast even if the gun had been loaded. Then he ceased fighting and the darkness triumphed.

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Dave seemed to be floating in a foggy sea of dull pain and discomfort and the faces were at first obscured by this fog. Then the fog cleared enough for him to determine that they belonged to John and Pam Monroe.

“May I assume that I’m not dead after all?” he asked with an effort at lightness that he did not really feel.

“If you are, some undertaker has sure done a lousy job,” the doctor replied with a slight smile, “for I cut up cadavers in medical school that looked better than you.”

“Well, I’m relieved to hear that I’m not dead,” Dave countered, “because if I were the presence of you all implied something about my whereabouts that I didn’t particularly care for since I sure didn’t figure that you were angels.”

Pamela Monroe laughed. “I doubt that either of us would pass the entrance examinations,” she said and added seriously, “How do you feel?”

Dave grinned wryly and replied, “I’ll have to confess to having felt better. But I really don’t feel much of anything except numb.” He winced as he tried to shift to a more upright position.

John Monroe pushed him firmly back down. “Don’t try to sit up,” the doctor admonished. “I’ve given you a shot that will keep you from feeling much of anything for a while but you must stay still or it won’t do any good. Both of you were lucky, no bones broken and no major arteries severed. Nevertheless, Dave you’ve got some deep cuts on the legs and back and you’ll have to stay quiet while the wounds heal or risk reopening them and getting them infected.”

“And I wouldn’t want my stitching job messed up,” his wife said, adding, “Now you can tell everyone that you were operated on by a veterinarian.”

“I know people who would tell you that’s appropriate,” Dave responded. “At any rate I’ve always heard that it’s harder to get into vet school than med school.”

“That’s something you wouldn’t normally get to experience on Earth,” John Monroe commented. “At any rate she sews a better stitch than I do.”

Dave was glad to follow the doctor’s orders. As he lay back he noticed his surroundings. They were in a cave of some sort.

“Where are we?” he asked.

“We thought we’d better find some shelter,” the medic said. “That overgrown lizard you all found had relatives, and they’ve all come to the funeral. We’ve seen half a dozen others of the same or similar types, so we moved up here into the rocks. Jim West found this cave although we had to take it away from a previous occupant. There is another one nearby and plenty of big rocks and trees to give us some protection against those big things. They are a little too large to fit in here and don’t seem to be able to climb around too easily.”

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“Speaking of the devil, what happened to that thing that attacked us? I thought I was a goner for sure.”

“We’re not absolutely sure just what did him in,” Monroe said. “After he dropped Diana, Dan and Jack ran in real close and pumped his belly and chest full of .44 magnum bullets. These may have found his heart and killed him or one or more of those .22 magnums may have reached his brain when you emptied it into his mouth. His brain would probably have less protection from that angle although I wouldn’t want to recommend that strategy,” he added.

“Or maybe,” he suggested facetiously, “he developed toxic poisoning from all the lead he had taken, which was enough to have kept a small war going. The important thing is that you all are here, and he lies out there on the ground furnishing a feast for his former friends.”

“I don’t know whether friends is the proper word or not,” Dave said. “He didn’t impress me as the Dale Carnegie type. Though, from what you say, he is apparently furnishing the refreshments at his wake.”

A noise came from outside and a moment later Diana Hunter, Nellie Hall, Don Dale and Clay Churchill entered. They expressed pleasure at seeing him aware of his surroundings, but after a few moments the doctor asked them all to leave and let him rest. Diana lingered as they moved to leave.

“I want to thank you for what you did, Dave,” she said. “I thought I was dead, and I would have been except for what you did.”

Dave was rarely without a rejoinder but now could think of nothing to say. Finally he made some lame remark about being stricken with temporary insanity.

After they had gone Dave was left with the uncomfortable but familiar feeling of knowing that he had handled the situation badly. But he was not really being self-deprecating or indulging in false modesty for he really did not know exactly why he had taken it upon himself to attack such a monster with a hatchet. He had acted without thinking about it. He knew that every instinct had dictated otherwise. As he puzzled over this paradox he drifted off into a drugged sleep.

Periodically over the next few days he would return to the question. It might, he concluded, have had something to do with the fact that she was a very pretty and sexy woman. It might have a lot to do with that fact.

Dave was still confused about women. (Some things never change.) The only things that were constant in his relationships with women were awkwardness and brevity. One of his friends had been through two divorces and three marriages by the time he was twenty-five whereas Dave, now in his early thirties, thought that his experience with the opposite sex was only slightly

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more exciting than that of the average inmate of a monastery, maybe less so. He seemed to have been held back in the seventh grade as far as women were concerned.

He had been greatly attracted by Paula Taylor, the dark-haired, dark-eyed scientist. Then along came Diana Hunter. The friendly Midwestern journalist rated high on his charts, and most everyone else's too, for that matter. He had always found brunettes most attractive. As a matter-of-fact, growing up in west Texas he had always thought, and still did, that as a group, young Mexican women were the prettiest in the world.

That would bring his thoughts to the Triplets. They were not actually triplets. As a matter-of-fact they weren't actually all sisters. Two of them were Ben Sanchez' sisters and the other a cousin, or was it the other way around? He never could remember. They were all Sanchezes and the two families were extremely close, always being seen together. All Dave could remember for sure was three pretty little girls several years younger than Ben who were always seen together. A dozen years later the young girls were young women attending the same college who had only gotten prettier in the process of maturing.

What was certain was that each of them was prettier than the other until the smallest, though not the youngest one, Jessie, was downright beautiful. (Did Dave mention that he also favored petite women?) However, they also held another thing in common, which was the apparent idea that Dave was some kind of elder statesman. (I'm not *that* old he would tell himself.)

Ben Sanchez contended that Dave's only criterion in a woman was that she be female. Don Dale defended him, as befitted his station as his best friend, saying that she must also be mammalian. Dave silently endured but told himself that this was not true, that he had high standards as to race (human), height (between four and one-half feet and six and one-half feet), weight (less than a Brahma bull), and she had to be prettier than a Sasquatch (and smell better).

However, Dave thought, it was probably irrelevant for, if past experience was any indicator, the Sasquatch would probably dump him for the Brahma bull anyway.

At any rate he was not so dumb or naive that he had not figured out that his irrational behavior in the matter of the carnosaur was at least partly caused by the fact that it was Diana that the carnivore had in mind having for dinner.

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While Dave was unable to do more than hobble painfully about the camp, he was diverted by the attempts of Dr. Werner, Bryan Scott and Jim West to

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successfully concoct a mixture that would pass for gunpowder. They had been concerned over the fact that their supply of ammunition, while quite large, was not inexhaustible. For this reason they had been retrieving all spent cartridges, when possible, with the object of reloading them when they could find and refine the ingredients of gunpowder, devise the other items needed for reloading and also mold some bullets.

Jim West had fashioned some makeshift reloading equipment but they had not as yet discovered any metal that they could refine to a point that it would be usable for bullets. They had, however, discovered deposits of saltpeter near the landing site of a quality that Dr. Werner thought he could utilize. Since that time they had been looking for the other necessary ingredients of gunpowder. They had found deposits of these in quantities limited both as to quality and quantity and were now trying to put them together in a usable form.

Dave was at first interested, then amused and finally somewhat alarmed at the outcome of these experiments. Finally he decided it would be safer to remove himself, sore leg and all, some distance from the open-air laboratory. At least, he thought, the noise their efforts made seemed to keep predators away.

Another incident occurred while he was still hobbling around. The women had discovered a stream nearby with a pool suitable for swimming and they bathed in it every day. Dave argued that since the days were only ten hours long this amounted to two and one-half baths per day and that they were going to exhaust their skin's supply of oil by this habit but they insisted on it and Dan insisted that someone stand guard with a rifle while they did so. They could have done this themselves but they latched on to him and pulled him hobbling and protesting along to do the job so that no one would lose any water time.

They insisted that it was all right.

"You can look the other way when we get into and out of the water if it embarrasses you," Cindy West said.

"Besides there aren't any croctiles in this stream, not this far up it anyway," Jessie said.

"And you can't see anything to turn your face red while we are in the water," Linda Sanchez added.

The last statement was not entirely true Dave found out, especially since all of their bodies did not always stay in the water. He thought that although most of them were reasonably modest about the arrangement some of them were not above teasing him a bit.

They probably just like to see me turn red, he thought. Nevertheless, he did not try to get anyone to take over his guard duties although he did threaten to after one particular day's incident.

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They informed him that they were ready to get out so he turned his back and looked downstream trying not to think about what was going on behind him when suddenly he heard a shriek and a splash which sounded like a crocodile slapping his tail in the water which they often did when attacking a prey animal and rolling with it.

He whirled around raising his rifle to see eight nude, wet females with mouths agape standing on the far shore and floating downstream in front of him a tree trunk which had previously been on the edge of the riverbank beside them.

For a few brief seconds all nine of them were frozen like figures in a tableau then he whirled back around, breaking his blushing record to sounds of shrieks and laughter from behind him.

He told them after they had dressed that it was his last guard duty, and it took a considerable amount of cajoling and bribing him with choice tidbits of food before he relented and returned the next day. But, unfortunately, there were no more such incidents.

When both Dave and Diana were able to continue they moved on to again attack the ever more formidable mountains. Their trek down the valley was not uneventful for they several times found it necessary to fend off attacks by the giant lizards or other predators.

They followed the valley for several days without finding a break in the wall. Then one morning the terrain changed suddenly. The stream grew swifter and the channel deepened until it soon ran between high cliffs. As they came over a low rise they saw the ground fall away steeply in front of them. Drawing nearer, they saw a rift that was truly incredible. It was several miles in width and the depths were lost in haze. They stood in awe gazing down into this chasm that would swallow the Grand Canyon of the Colorado many times over. Runoff from these mighty snow-capped peaks had done an incredible sculpting job. The stream that they had been following which had already carved a deep channel now plummeted downward in a series of rapids and great falls.

The canyon effectively blocked their path in the direction that they had been traveling. After they had spent some time gaping at this natural wonder like a bunch of tourists, which in effect they were, they returned to more practical matters. The canyon might gain them the passage through the mountain range that they had been seeking. To find out if this was the case a scouting party was sent out to seek a route while the remainder of the party settled down to wait. Dave was disappointed to be among the latter but thought it probably for the best as his legs were still not completely up to par.

## A FIT OF TEMPORARY INSANITY

It was four days before the scouts returned with news of a difficult but negotiable passage through the mountains along the edge of the great canyon. During this time the others explored the vicinity of their camp, hunting and prospecting. This area was more desert like and game was scarcer here than anywhere they had previously been. Dave spent most of his time trying to keep the larder filled. On the last day, while in quest of game, he and Ben Sanchez discovered a trail leading down the side of the canyon wall. It seemed to be not too well traveled but still was clear and distinct. They followed it for a considerable distance down into the canyon, passing beneath one of the spectacular falls before turning back. Never did they see any of the creatures that must use it. At times it was broad and at an easy angle while at others it was very steep and narrow and perched so precariously on the edge of sheer cliffs that it made alarm bells of acrophobia go off inside Dave's soul.

The small sun was sinking rapidly as they regained the top of the cliff and made their way back to camp. There they found plans were already being made to retrace the path the returned scouting party had just taken.

The report the Englishman had given of the route they were to take indicated it would be very rough and the next few days bore this out. It took them six full Jovian days to reach the summit. In this time they faced difficulties both familiar and unfamiliar. They had the old problems encountered in crossing previous ranges plus, as they neared the top, ice and snow to multiply the hazards. Along with this new dimension came new forms of savage beasts that had to be overcome. There were the Jovian equivalent of bears, mountain cats whose ferocity moved the party to give them the name of devilcats and other predators harder to classify. If they had been faced with these obstacles immediately upon their arrival many of them would have been unable to make it, but the experience of the past few weeks had toughened them and increased their endurance to an extent few would have believed possible only a short time before.

When at last they stood on the summit they felt a bone-deep weariness but also a sense of accomplishment. Facing the direction from which they had come they had a panoramic view of all the territory that they had traversed since they had left the ship plus a view of the distant valley to the west of their landing site. In addition they had a bird's eye view of the great canyon which gave the appearance from this viewpoint of a deep slash into the very heart of this wild land. How deep it was they could only guess but Jim West and Brad Patman guessed that it was at least three miles deep and maybe more. Dave shook his head in wonderment.

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They did not spend any more time at this spot than was necessary because of the fact that their clothing was not suited for the snow and cold in spite of its augmentation by animal furs and hides that they had accumulated along the way for this purpose.

The valley that they were now entering was heavily wooded and closely resembled those that they had already traversed. As soon as they were below the snow line and found a suitable spot, they camped to rest from their exertions for a day.

Rested, the earthmen pushed on into the lush valley. They were in no hurry now and the woodland and its inhabitants were in the main familiar to them, although a little more alpine in nature than those of Kyle Field.

As they took a mid-day break Brad Patman and Jim West pointed out to Dave on their improvised map where they thought they were and told him that their best guess was that the prime area for prospecting lay either in the next range of mountains confronting them or just beyond in the next, even loftier range which they could barely see when they had been on the summit earlier. As they speculated on the best area to start looking the short break ended and the call came to resume their trek.

They formed a line and started off once more through the dense, shadowy woods. Dave had started to make his way up to the head of the line to help the Englishman scout ahead when he thought he heard a slight noise above and behind him. He started to turn in the direction of the noise when one of the women screamed and he was borne to the ground by a heavy weight hitting him from behind. Simultaneously his ears were assaulted by a savage snarl close at hand and he was gripped by powerful, hairy hands.

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Dave did not know the exact nature of the beast that clung to his back but that he was in a fight for his life he had no doubt for here on this world there seemed to be no exhibition matches. Every fight was for real and the loser usually wound up in the belly of the winner.

They rolled on the ground with Dave using every trick that he had ever learned on Earth or in their friendly campground contests to dislodge his attacker from its advantageous position. He hoped desperately for help from his companions, but when he was finally successful, he saw that they were too busy defending themselves from a veritable army of attackers who were, Dave saw now, identical with the beastmen that they had previously encountered.

He had no time to speculate as to whether they had followed them from the Valley of Gargoyles or were denizens of this forest for the one facing him resumed the attack with a snarl and they rolled on the ground in a death struggle, the gargoyle trying to sink his fangs into Dave's throat and Dave trying to sink his knife into a vulnerable spot. He was reduced to a battle on these terms since he could not have used his rifle for fear of hitting his companions even if it had not been knocked from his grasp at the outset.

Dave finally succeeded after repeated attempts in driving the blade of his knife under his assailant's ribs and having him collapsed lifeless on top of him. Even as he pushed the lifeless body off of him he was attacked simultaneously by two more of the hideous creatures. In the brief instant he had before this happened he saw enough to make his heart sink. The surprise had been so complete that not a shot had been fired and the members of the expedition were now locked in hand-to-hand combat with the foe on his own terms. The overwhelming numbers and strength of the beastmen could leave little doubt as to the eventual outcome.

Be that as it may, the same tenacity that had helped lift man above the creatures such as these back on Earth kept them grimly in the unequal struggle. Running was not an option. To run would be to die. And even if you somehow

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succeeded in escaping, he did not think it would be much of a survival to have to live forever, however long forever might be alone on this savage planet, knowing that you lived solely because these beasts were too busy killing your friends and fellow humans to stop your flight of desperation.

More than that, as Dave continued what he believed was a hopeless struggle, he felt rise within him an almost primeval fury he had never before felt, leaping backwards perhaps a hundred generations or five hundred, to a time when his ancestors had perhaps struggled with similar savage species for survival and dominance. It was more than a reasoned response to an attack on himself. It was more than mere individual survival, cherished though that was to him, but it was now also an unthinking, raging struggle for the survival of the species, on this planet at least. He resolved inwardly, without words, to sell his life as dearly as possible and take as many of these hideous creatures as possible along with him to whatever kind of final reward they might envision.

He finally succeeded in plunging his knife to the hilt in the chest of a second opponent but then felt it wrenched out of his grasp as the creature fell to the ground, half pinning him in the process. With a scream of triumph the remaining beastman loomed over him and raised a large rock on high to bring it down on Dave's head. Dave could only lie helpless and scream back at the savage face in the brief time he had before the rock would come down on him. He had a fleeting regret that he had come so far only to come to such an untimely (he thought) end when the creature above him suddenly seemed to grow a foot long horn from the middle of his chest. Then the protuberance disappeared and the rock fell harmlessly to the ground as the beastman fell on top of Dave, showering him with blood.

The sight which now greeted Dave as he struggled out from under the dead weight holding him down was perhaps the strangest yet in the long line of surprises that had confronted him since landing on this primitive world. The beastmen were now on the defensive against a new foe. Thirty or forty bronze-skinned giants engaged them in battle everywhere and strangest of all these new players were humans, or at least had the appearance of such. They were huge men who fought mainly with long-bladed swords though a few wielded short-bladed swords and still others used long-bladed, short-handled spears. One thing which they all had in common however was the deadly efficiency with which they fought. Even as Dave got to his feet the few remaining beastmen were taking flight.

The giants did not attempt to follow their fleeing foe into the trees. Seeing Clay Churchill on the ground nearby Dave went to assist him to his feet. He

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noted that there were three gargoyles lying lifeless on the ground near the Englishman testifying to his skills.

“Thank God they showed up, whoever they are,” Dave said as he helped Clay up.

“We would certainly all be dead if they hadn’t,” the Englishman conceded. “I just hope we keep on thinking we’re better off,” he said as he eyed their rescuers speculatively.

As Dave followed his gaze he saw that their rescuers were going around methodically dispatching any wounded foes with their blades. He now had an opportunity to look them over more carefully. They were very tall. He guessed that they would average seven feet in height and some were six inches or more taller and all were well built. Their skin was a deep bronze, almost red and their features were quite human. The only non-human things about them that Dave could see were that their hair had a greenish-brown tint to it and their ears had no lobes, were pointed at the top and seemed to be crowned with slight tufts of the greenish-brown hair. Also, he noted, if their eyes had irises at all they must be jet black.

All of the big men were similarly armed. Dave noticed that the spears and long swords he had seen were, remarkably, one and the same. He saw one of the men carrying a spear take it in both hands and twist. Two feet of the handle came off and Dave saw the man hang this by a ring on his belt, leaving him holding a long-bladed sword. The sword he sheathed also on his belt. The handle he was soon to learn first hand was often used much like a policeman’s nightstick. The long blades were three to three and one-half feet in length. All of the men likewise carried a second sword with a blade eighteen to twenty-four inches in length. In addition, some of the men carried javelins or longbows. A few also carried short-handled axes.

Two of the giants approached them with drawn swords and Dave found himself with the bloody point of a weapon poised at his chest looking into the stern visage of the man wielding it.

“*Ofak ih,*” the giant said peremptorily, then repeated it sharply as Dave stood indecisive. He jerked his head in a unmistakable manner toward Dave’s right hand which still held the knife he had retrieved.

“Let go of the knife, Dave,” Churchill said quietly. “We have less of a chance against them than we did against the apes. This is not the time to contest it.”

Dave let the knife slip to the ground. His captor jerked his head unmistakably ordering them to join the other earthlings who were being herded together a few yards away. They complied.

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“It looks like we’ve jumped out of the fire into the frying pan,” Dave muttered darkly as they stood helplessly under the eyes of their watchful guards. His attention was diverted by the activity near him as John Monroe tended their wounded. He was relieved to see that apparently no one had sustained any crippling injuries. The intervention of the bronze giants had undoubtedly come none too soon in this regard.

Owens and the Englishman were conversing quietly as Dave joined them.

“Pass the word to everyone not to do anything rash,” Owens cautioned needlessly, “also, salvage anything you can that they will allow you to.”

“Don’t worry, we’ve seen these guys operate with those knives,” Matthew Bell said from behind them.

“If we could just get our hands on a couple of those rifles—” Dave said eyeing the weapons half hidden in the underbrush.

Churchill nodded affirmation. “They don’t know what they are. They think they are clubs. But all the same they’re not likely to allow us within reach of them.” He pointed to where one of their captors picked up a rifle by the barrel, examined it curiously, and then threw it aside.

“But they do know a good knife when they see one,” the Englishman added, nodding toward the new steel knives now sported by several of the bronze giants.

Their captors had torn all their packs apart and taken whatever caught their fancy. Anything that looked like a weapon they threw into the bushes well out of the prisoners’ reach.

One of the giants who seemed to be one of the leaders came over and walked slowly down the line looking them over closely. As he paused in front of Dave and looked him in the eyes, Dave shivered inwardly as he took note of something he had not noticed before. The man had pupils like a cat with black irises surrounding them giving the appearance of round black eyes from a distance. Perhaps it was this bit of difference that made Dave instantly distrust and dislike the man. Whatever the cause he did not like the idea of their being in his power. Of course, he did not like the idea of their being in anyone’s power.

As the man walked on down the line he paused in front of some of the women and the cold look on his face changed slowly into a smile. Reaching out he seized Nellie by the hair and tilted her head back to peer into her face. Dave took a deep breath and felt someone’s hand clamping warningly onto his arm.

The man holding the girl and another conversed for a minute perhaps commenting on the differences in ears, eyes, hair and skin color. Dave thought that for the sake of his tenuous grip on his temper it probably was just as well that he did not know what they were saying. Just as Dave was relaxing slightly, the cold-eyed man reached out and tore the girl’s shirt open to the waist.

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Several things then happened simultaneously. Nellie screamed and crossed her arms across her bared breasts and both Dave and Matthew Bell leaped toward the man holding her. Two more of the big men leaped between them and grappled with Matt while another grabbed Dave from behind. Dave was then a captive witness to what followed as several more bronze giants sprang in with ready spears to hold back the rest of the earthmen.

The two men facing Matthew Bell obviously did not expect to experience difficulty in handling him for they drew no weapons but tried to grapple with him and hold him back. There was no reason for them to anticipate a problem because in spite of the fact that he was by far the biggest of the earthmen they were at least six inches and fifty or more pounds heavier than he was.

The first man's face held a look of amazement as the big Olympian literally picked him up as if he were a child and threw him into the other. At this turn of events several others quickly recovered from their surprise and converged on him, finally subduing him with a blow from one of the spear-handle clubs.

The man who had precipitated the whole affair walked over to where Matt lay on the ground and raised his sword high ready to drive it into his prone figure when his arm was seized roughly by the man who had confronted Dave about his knife. The two then had some angry words. Although the earthlings could not understand the language it was obvious from the fact that the other did not molest them further that this was the subject of the argument and Dave's "friend" appeared to have the authority.

"It looks like we might have one friend here at least," Don Dale said under his breath.

"Maybe," the Englishman replied, "or it might just be that we are more valuable to him alive than dead."

"You may well be right," Ben Sanchez said, "but all the same I'm glad that fellow seems to be the big honcho around here rather than ice-eyes over there."

"Amen to that, brother Ben," Owens said with conviction.

Some of the Jovians had sustained wounds in the battle with the apemen. They now turned their attention to treating them. Their method of doing so was of special interest to John Monroe as they hunted around until they found a small, broad-leafed shrub that, while not common in the forest, was not rare either. Upon finding a specimen they would cut the stem just behind one of the broad leaves and hold it over the wound. A milky substance flowed freely from the severed stem. When it ceased to flow they would then make numerous shallow cuts in the leaf and lay the leaf itself over the wound and fasten it in place. Seeing the wounded among their prisoners they did the same for those people John Monroe had not already attended. They stared curiously at his

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bandages but did not remove them, assessing Dr. Monroe correctly for his status. In the next few days they were to see that the curative powers of the rather common plant were remarkable, and their worries about running out of medical supplies were partially relieved.

When all the wounds had been tended their captors made it clear that they were to fall in line and go with them, pushing and shoving them when they were slow to obey the commands barked in the incomprehensible language. They were able to salvage very little of their supplies and equipment with the exception of John Monroe's medical supplies and, of course, none of their weapons. None, that is, except for Dave's pistol and when one of the giants spied it they no longer had it as it was snatched from his belt.

The Jovian examined the pistol curiously. He obviously had not the faintest idea of its purpose. Dave held his breath, hoping he would not accidentally discharge it as he did not know what kind of reaction this might bring. However, the revolver being a single-action weapon would not fire until the hammer was first manually cocked and fortunately for all concerned its new owner did not accidentally do this. Finally he apparently decided it was an interesting curio, if of uncertain purpose, and thrust it into his belt.

Their captors were not as a rule harsh or unnecessarily cruel in their treatment, but on the other hand, brooked no nonsense from them. The pace was not any faster than the one that they had been setting so the trip they now began was made unpleasant mainly by the uncertainty of their fate. The sensation of not having control of their own destiny was unsettling in the extreme for these people who were used to the full exercise of freedom.

The bronze giants were good hunters and when they made camp that night the prisoners were well fed as well as well guarded. They drafted some of the female captives to help with the cooking and distribution of the meat, which led Diana Hunter to make some grumbling remarks about having come half a billion miles to deal with the same old stereotypes. This brought a little laughter to those earthlings who heard it, but not much.

"I'll cook it for you," Dave offered.

Diana looked up to see who had offered.

"You better not take his offer, Diana," the Englishman advised. "They might be annoyed when he turned their meat into charcoal."

Someone snickered, but Dave had to admit that he was particular about seeing that his meat had no trace of rawness in it.

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“It’s just that I grew up on a farm,” Dave retorted, “and I’ve seen what our food animals are like alive, and I want to make sure they are thoroughly sterilized before I put them in my system.”

“Perhaps,” Churchill said, “but you have taken most of the flavor out of them, as well.”

“And all the time I thought it was fat that put the flavor in food,” the Texan replied. “I guess it’s the germs and parasites that are tasty.”

“Perhaps so,” the Englishman said, smiling at his younger friend.

The next day they resumed their march turning now to the south in the direction of the great canyon. They turned once again to the east before they reached it and entered the mountains. A long and arduous journey now began to unfold. It was not so long in the horizontal miles but the character of the land over which they traveled made it seem to be many hundreds of miles.

Since it was imperative that they learn to communicate with their strange captors they began to try to learn their language<sup>1</sup>. The bulk of this fell on Clay Churchill who could speak at least four western languages besides English, several African tribal dialects (“—and American,” he would usually add with a smile), on Ben Sanchez whose bilingualism made him a candidate and on Dave whom Don Dale volunteered because of his facility with Spanish. Actually Dave was far from fluent in the language because he had no opportunity to speak it daily, but he had found it a very easy language and he seemed in his own mind to have some facility with languages. They were frustrated in their efforts, however, since their guards were uncommunicative except for the necessary commands which they had to make and they made these quite clear without the benefit of vocal communication. This situation continued until one day an incident occurred and changed it.

They made camp in open country a short distance from a water hole. As they needed water some of the prisoners were dispatched to fetch it under guard. Dave, the Englishman and Jack Hardin were the “volunteers.” They were guarded by the man who had saved Matthew Bell’s life. They conjectured, from the conversations they overheard, that his name must be ToNas. They were also guarded by the man the Earthmen had officially christened as Ice Eyes and a third man.

Things proceeded routinely until they had filled the water bags and were on their way back. As they retraced their path back to the camp they passed near a small clump of trees. There was a loud roar and a flurry of movement and they found themselves being attacked by one of the large cat-like creatures they had christened “devilcats” because of their ferocity and armament. This was not

1. Lists of alien words and names are provided at the end of the novel.

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an uncommon occurrence and normally they would have considered discretion the better part of valor and retreated in good order, fighting only as a last resort. This time, however, the Earthmen, burdened with water, were unable to move fast enough to do this. Two of the Jovians continued to retreat warily, leaving them to their fate but ToNas, seeing their plight, moved back to them spear at the ready. When he did so the other two returned also although Ice Eyes held back a little, not displaying any enthusiasm for risking his skin for mere slaves.

The two Jovians held their own against the big cat but were unable to land any telling blows on the nimble creature when the cat suddenly darted in and caught the second Jovian with a single blow to the head, killing him instantly. When ToNas rushed to help him he was knocked sprawling himself by a glancing blow and rolled over and over on the ground coming to rest some distance away, stunned. The Earthmen, meanwhile, had dropped their water and had been forced spectators of the melee. Ice Eyes still hung back, perhaps thinking to let the cat settle the grudge he obviously held against ToNas.

Having satisfied himself with a shake that his first victim was dead the big cat advanced on the stunned giant. As he did so Dave saw the Englishman dart in and retrieve the dead Jovian's spear. Galvanized into action by this, Dave rushed in and picked up ToNas' weapon. Grasping the unfamiliar weapon he stationed himself between ToNas and the cat, heart pounding at what confronted him, while Churchill advanced on the cat cautiously from the side. The animal hesitated at this turn of events, undecided as to what to do, tail twitching nervously.

With an earsplitting roar the great beast made up his mind and charged straight at Dave and the groggy Jovian. Dave was not schooled in the use of the weapon he held and did not try to thrust at the cat but just braced the haft of the spear on the ground and waited, all the time wishing the handle was longer. As he did so out of the corner of his eye he saw the Englishman racing swiftly in from his left with his spear drawn back poised to strike.

Churchill plunged the spear home at just about the moment that the cat bowled Dave over impaling himself on the fallen Jovian's weapon in the process. As he went down Dave saw the third Jovian belatedly join the action and drive his spear home also. The big cat sprawled lifeless on the ground beside the two men.

There was a moment of tension as Churchill and the Jovian stood facing each other, spears in hand. It was only temporary though as the Englishman moved to hand his weapon to ToNas who had regained his feet. ToNas' spear had been driven completely through the body of the animal by the force of his charge and Dave could not dislodge it. ToNas accepted the spear from Clay

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Churchill as several more of the Jovians, attracted by the sound of the battle arrived at the scene. ToNas first moved to see that his fallen comrade was dead and then turned and spoke sharply to the other man. Ice Eyes simply shrugged his shoulders, making no reply, and then turned and strode off toward the approaching men. ToNas' eyes flashed in anger at this but he quickly controlled himself as his companions arrived excitedly on the scene.

ToNas quickly explained to his companions what had transpired and they bore the body of their slain comrade back to their camp. When ToNas turned to the Earthmen he eyed them quizzically for a moment and then started to motion for them to retrieve the water bags and make their way back to camp when he noticed that Dave had not gotten off scot-free. When Dave followed his eyes he saw that his left shoulder was covered with blood. To that point he had felt nothing but it immediately began to hurt. ToNas called one of the others back and motioned for him to get Dave's water bags and return to camp. The man did so showing just a hint of annoyance at having to do a slave's work. Nothing more was said between the earthmen and the Jovians, not that either party would have understood it if it had been.

When they reached camp an older man came over to where John Monroe was looking at Dave's shoulder which had some deep lacerations on it from the cat's claws. He set down a leather shoulder bag he carried and removed a pouch and several of what seemed to be the medicinal leaves they had previously seen them use. But these, while not completely dried out, were not fresh since it had been several days since they had been at an altitude at which they grew. Then he motioned to Monroe as if he wished him to move back, arching an eyebrow quizzically as if to indicated it was a request from one professional man to another.

Dave eyed the older man somewhat apprehensively as his former roommate complied. The Jovian medic, if such he was, laid his things in order in front of him and then took Dave's arm and turned him to where he could see the wound better. He said something incomprehensible to the earthlings. Whether he was saying it was just a scratch or that the arm would have to come off Dave had not the slightest clue.

Dr. Quack, as Dave called him in his mind, then took a bowl of water and washed the blood off of the shoulder. Dave winced at this as the doctor said something else equally unintelligible and then picked the pouch up, opened the mouth of it, and slowly began to spread a pinkish-grey powder from it on the lacerations. He then closed the pouch and picked up some of the semi-dried leaves. Dave guessed he was about to get a leaf bandage too, in the best Jovian medical tradition.

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As he twisted his head and looked down at his shoulder he was somewhat relieved that the treatment had at least been relatively painless. It was not what he would call an esthetic success, though, he thought as he looked down at a Technicolor mess on his shoulder. Apparently the pinkish-grey powder went through chemical reactions when it contacted water and possibly blood and/or skin because his shoulder looked like something you might see in a modern art museum. So long as it's not Salvador Dali, Dave thought.

It was at about this time, as the Jovian doctor turned to him with the leaf bandage, that he felt a slight tingling sensation in the shoulder then an itching and then a burning sensation set in and grew rapidly worse until Dave grasped and clenched his teeth. He must have let out a yelp he thought, since he heard one. As the temperature rapidly approached that of the surface of the sun he had a burning desire to try to reach high C but, noticing that, in addition to several of his companions, there were a half-dozen or so Jovians gathered curiously around him, he continued to clench his teeth and anything else that would clench. He had after all, he supposed, to uphold the honor of the human race.

As the medic wrapped his shoulder, with help now from his old roomie, and the temperature passed the surface of the sun and rapidly worked toward the interior temperatures, he did not think it would be long before the human race's honor got dropped with a thud, or an Olympic class yell, anyway.

Fortunately, just before this threshold was reached Dave guessed, the temperature slowly began to drop and he could breathe a little easier. It's amazing how nice "hurts like hell" can feel when you have previously been sampling the interior temperature of a star.

Most of the Jovians wandered off. Dr. Quack patted Dave on his good shoulder, smiling and putting forth, Dave was sure, all kinds of good Jovian bedside manner. Dr. Quack then moved off. Dr. Monroe accompanied him for a short distance then return to Dave.

As the pain dropped to a slow, throbbing ache he unclenched his hands, discovering in the process that his right one had something in it. He turned to see his niece holding her cupped left hand in her right.

"What happened?" he asked guiltily, although he knew full well what it was.

"You nearly broke my hand is what happened," she replied, with feeling. He noticed there were beads of sweat on her forehead. "Give me a little warning next time you decide to go into your macho act so that I can at least clench my own fist," she added in a more conciliatory tone.

"I'm sorry," he said sheepishly. "I didn't even realize that I had hold of your hand."

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He tried to look at the hand in question, but she pulled it away as if to say that he had already done enough damage to that hand for one day. She did allow John Monroe to look at it. He ascertained that there did not appear to be any broken fingers. There would probably be bruises, though, and it was not beyond the realm of possibility that there might be a broken bone in the upper part of the hand, but that would, in the absence of x-rays, have to await the passage of time to tell. In any case the only treatment available would be to just use it as little as possible while it healed itself.

That evening they witnessed the burial of the slain man. His companions dug a shallow grave three or four feet deep with their swords and placed him in it with some of his possessions and covered him with dirt. They then took several large rocks that they had their prisoners gather and built a small protective covering over it to discourage scavengers. Then drawing themselves up in a line they drew their swords and held them out in salute while the doctor, who by the distinctive attire he now donned might have been a witch doctor or shaman ("or chaplain," one of the humans said; "Padre Quack," Dave thought), made a speech which by its cadence Dave guessed was a chant or ritualized prayer of some kind. Then ToNas, who was apparently the leader of the group, said a few words and then took the slain man's spear, saluted the mound with it and then placed the blade in the fork of a tree and snapped it with a mighty effort. He then drove the upper half into the ground and placed the broken tip in a pouch, apparently to return to the fallen man's family or friends. All in all it was an impressive ceremony for a group of people the earthlings had considered primitive savages.

When they made camp that night the prisoners were placed in the center of the encampment and their captors bedded down in a larger circle around them with half a dozen men always on guard, as usual. To discourage anyone from trying to escape they were separated into pairs and had their right ankles tethered loosely together on a short rope so that while they were not uncomfortably bound they found it impossible to move swiftly. Any attempt to tamper with the hobbles brought instant attention from the guards.

On this night after they had the hobbles put on Dave looked up to see the young leader approaching them. Dave and the Englishman were hobbled together. He stood over them, staring curiously at them then he spoke.

*"Qta ofu yae?"*

Churchill shook his head negatively. The Jovian repeated his question and then changed it several times. To each of these questions the earthmen shook their heads negatively. They really had no idea whether this reply conveyed

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their meaning or not but their expressions probably did. Finally the Englishman pointed to himself and stated his name.

“Clay,” he said and repeated it. Then he placed his finger on Dave’s chest and stated his name.

Taking his cue from the Englishman, Dave repeated the process in reverse order and then pointed his finger at the Jovian’s chest and looked up at him questioningly.

The Jovian looked from one to the other of them and then smiled, placed his finger on his own chest and said, “ToNas.”

Interplanetary communications had begun.

## PROBLEMS WITH THE *INMIGRO*

The language lessons progressed rapidly during the next few days which they spent making the climb up a final fantastic mountain range to an icy pass. ToNas walked with them as they traveled. They rapidly used up the names of all objects around them and progressed to easy verbs. Adjectives and adverbs were as usual harder to learn and use because of the difficulty of illustration and as for those other minor forms of speech such as prepositions, conjunctions, etcetera, they quite often served mainly to confuse matters. Fortunately, though, the Jovians seemed never to have heard of the subjunctive mode.

After many days they had reached a point where they could converse imperfectly and ToNas repeated his question in a form that they now understood.

“Who are you?” he asked as they shivered around an inadequate campfire far above the snow line while enduring one of the periodic storms. It was not of course the first time since they had begun their lessons that he had attempted to ask it, but each time he had given up the interrogation when it became apparent that they did not yet possess the ability to communicate adequately. “Where do you come from?” he continued.

“I am Clay Churchill,” Churchill said with a hint of a smile, “and he is Dave Hall.” The Englishman was not without his own dry brand of humor.

Then as ToNas protested they told him where they were from. It was not easy as they had difficulty explaining this since they had no words for Earth or planet and ToNas had difficulty in understanding as they tried to point out the Earth and identify it as their point of origin. At first ToNas thought they were still joking as he comprehended the meaning of their awkward speech. When he saw that they were not, he was at first incredulous and then suspicious. After all they were foreigners who were by definition not to be trusted. What kind of fool did they think he was to put forth such a palpable lie? Then it occurred to him that they simply did not wish to reveal their homeland for fear that he would lead back an army to conquer it. It would surely not take a very large army since they were so poorly armed when they had first rescued them from

## VAJU: THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM

the *ocuzob*<sup>1</sup> and they had submitted so meekly since. On the other hand, he thought, when he looked deeply into the peculiarly formed and colored eyes of these strange, small men, they did not betray weakness or cowardice. And the big one that first day as well as these two had displayed a courage and strength that had impressed all his men.

Turning his attention back to the Earthmen before him ToNas considered them. These two men, puny though they were in stature, had faced the *qujyxpoh*<sup>2</sup> without flinching (Dave could have disputed this since he knew he had flinched a lot) and had bested him. This did not indicate weakness and raised the questions to which he gave voice. It might be well at this point to mention that the Jovian language sometimes translates in a manner rather reminiscent of the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries. But this is appropriate since *Vajuvians* (as they call themselves) tend to talk, especially in more formal conditions, in a manner which would perhaps be more representative of the Continental Congress than the Six O’Clock News.

“We captured you in fair fight. You are our prisoners and will be sold as slaves when we reach *Pyhoqux*, except possibly for some of your females whom our free warriors might choose for themselves,” he said. “Why then since you must know these things did you risk your lives against the *qujyxpoh* to save the life of me, your master?”

“You must not think that by this action you will buy mercy or your freedom,” he hastened to add. “I am ToNas. My father is *ZaSox*, the king of *Pyhoqux* and I, above all men, must abide by the laws and time-honored customs of our people.”

The Earthmen exchanged glances at this revelation of their captor’s identity and importance.

“We did not come to your defense seeking a reward,” the Englishman said. “You had shown us kindness when you saved Matt from the man with the cold eyes and also when you stayed to defend us from the *poh*<sup>3</sup>. Besides it is not the custom in our land to stand idly by while men die.”

Dave thought that the Englishman must not be as familiar with the current customs of our civilized society as he had supposed or else he was not as truthful as Dave had thought.

Dave had a sudden idea which he considered then reconsidered then went on boldly with before he could have another change of mind.

1. Vicious fighters, the hairy beast men.

2. Devilcat.

3. Cat.

## PROBLEMS WITH THE *INMIGRO*

“Our country also has a tradition of freedom,” he said. “We have had no slaves since a great war was fought more than a hundred years ago to free them. Though you may hold us captive now we are not slaves, nor shall we ever be. We will eventually regain our freedom through your action or our own.”

ToNas drew back slightly at this and looked squarely and thoughtfully at Dave.

“It is as he says,” the Englishman interposed. “We came here in peace as free representatives of our people meaning no harm to your people. You seem to be a man of honor. You should have received us as such instead of treating us as enemies or criminals. It does no honor to yourself or to your city.”

“I honor our laws and traditions by obeying them,” the bronze giant snapped. “That is the only honor I seek. Already IpuZob complains that I have shown weakness unbecoming a *sfiq*<sup>4</sup> in handling you and have not honored our traditions.”

“IpuZob is the one who stood by as we fought the *poh*?” Dave asked. At ToNas affirmation he asked, “Why?”

“That is no concern of foreigners and slaves. He is no coward,” ToNas replied brusquely. “He has his own reasons. But it does not concern you,” he added in a more conciliatory tone.

“It does if it costs us our freedom or our lives,” Churchill said pointedly.

ToNas did not reply, casting them a final troubled look as he moved away to join his comrades.

Dan Owens, who had been listening to the conversation but whose grasp of the language was very slight, asked them for an interpretation. After they told him he sat silent in thought for a few moments. The astronaut was still recognized by all concerned as the rightful head of the expedition.

“That’s about as we figured except that we didn’t know that ToNas was quite so much of a VIP,” he finally said. “Perhaps that fact will help us later, but for the time being I think we better be careful what we tell them. For instance, let’s stick with the story that we were lost, which is true, and under no circumstances let them know the location of our ship. Also, don’t reveal anything about our rifles or their value. I only wish that we could get that pistol back from that big fellow before it is accidentally discharged.”

“I’ve been trying to think of a way to get it back, Dan, but so far I’ve drawn a blank,” Dave replied.

“Sooner or later we are going to have to try to escape if we can’t persuade ToNas or his father to release us,” Churchill said. “In that event it could be the difference between success or failure.”

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4. Prince.

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There was a moment of silence and then Dave grunted, “Six shots.”

“‘For lack of a nail a shoe was lost—’” Owens replied, quoting the first line of an old proverb.

They all fell silent for a time as the wind howled about them driving drifts of snow with it. Finally the Englishman broke the silence.

“By the way, did you notice what our cold-eyed friend’s name is?”

Dave smiled at the reminder and replied, “Yes, I sure did: IpuZob.”

Owens looked from one to the other of his companions and finally asked, “Well? What is the significance of that?”

“Well, not much I guess really, but since *zob* means man,” the Texan replied, “and *ipu* means ice or snow, our not so friendly acquaintance’s name translates roughly as Ice-Man or maybe Man of Ice, but most probably not Frosty the Snowman.”

During the remainder of their journey they continued a crash course in the Jovian language trying to impart as much as possible to all the other earthlings but especially to Dan Owens. This was complicated by the nature of the terrain. John Monroe was eager to learn the Jovian language and tried to use it to communicate with the Jovian doctor with limited success. But he persisted since he believed that it was vital that he learn as much as possible about the medications available. The Jovians apparently were big in herbal remedies.

They were crossing over the shoulder of a spectacular mountain range which dwarfed all those that they had previously encountered. It towered literally miles over the surrounding countryside. There were of course many sub-peaks but it was essentially one gigantic mountain. It impressed upon the terrestrials the magnified proportions of this world.

Shivering around a campfire on the very summit of the divide they discussed the matter with the scientists of the expedition since it was too cold for them to get much sleep anyway. To someone’s expressed thought that it seemed that the gravity of the giant planet should make such heights impossible Dr. Werner replied, “That’s a reasonable hypothesis, but the other side of the argument is that the size of the planet also means that the pressures exerted on the crust must also be magnified almost exponentially as compared with those on the Earth’s surface so that new mountains must be formed and pushed up to great heights even as old ones are pulled down. Remember too that the gravity we feel is not at all the two and one-half times Earth’s that we could have expected, so there is something else at work here that we can’t satisfactorily explain yet. I would theorize, though I can’t prove it scientifically as yet, that it is affected in some way by the unusual magnetic field, if that is the proper term for it. As to the exact nature of that field, I can’t satisfactorily explain that either at this time.

## PROBLEMS WITH THE *INMIGRO*

My background is not in physics, and I can't postulate all the inter-working forces involved, but I am inclined to agree with Dr. Churchill here that we are forced to believe the evidence our senses present to us."

The Englishman smiled at his academic promotion by Dr. Werner. He had no academic degrees, but he had an all encompassing curiosity worthy of the great men of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

"I'm not sure what good a physics background would do," Paula Taylor said between chattering teeth, "since the conventional laws of the physics I studied in college have been violated many times since we left Texas."

"That's for sure," came a muffled comment from the depths of the furry pelt almost completely hiding Dave Hall from view, "but it's all going to be academic to me for one after I've frozen to death which event I anticipate any minute now."

Dr. Werner, who did not seem to be bothered by the intense cold laughed heartily. "How can anyone who claims to be descended from Vikings as you do be so susceptible to a little chilly weather?"

"*Chilly?*" Dave asked incredulously. "This weather is enough to give a musk ox pneumonia. Besides," he added, "didn't you know that all the smart Vikings left Scandinavia a long time ago for warmer climes? That's what caused all the trouble."

"I've got to admit that a little of that Texas heat we northern—"

"Yankee," came out of the fur pile.

"—members on the project used to complain about so much would feel good right now," Paula Taylor agreed while ignoring Dave's editorial comment.

They all watched Dr. Werner contentedly filling his pipe with some of the precious tobacco he had been hoarding. The movement in the mound of furs indicated that Dave Hall was shaking his head in disbelief at the sight.

Winding their way down the back side of the mountain across seemingly endless ridges and across a high *altiplano*<sup>5</sup> then around a final great peak they finally emerged on the summit of a pass guarded by a small group of Vajuvians. They looked out over the wide valley spread out before them. Directly before them some eight or ten miles away stood a walled city surrounded by cultivated fields. At the sight of this the Jovians erupted in cheers.

"Pyhoqux," said ToNas simply to Dave. He was smiling the smile of a homesick traveler. When Dave looked at the city, though, he saw nothing but trouble.

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5. High plateau, tableland.

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As they came down out of the pass they were soon greeted by another band like the one which had captured them. The two groups greeted each other enthusiastically as they passed and the new warriors examined the captives with curiosity.

As they neared the gate of the low-walled city others came forward to greet them. Most of these did not wear the trappings of warriors. Among them were the first Jovian women that they had seen. They were tall, well-formed women as a rule with good, regular features. They probably averaged close to six feet in height. The only difference Dave could see between them and the men, other than the obvious attributes of sex which were evidently the same as on Earth, was that their ears, though without lobes and pointed on top, did not have the tufts featured by the male of the species. Also, their hair varied more than the men's. There were some with brownish or black hair among them.

The clothing the people wore varied considerably in type and quality among both sexes. The men generally wore short kilts with or without a tunic or shirt covering the upper half of the body but some wore what amounted to shorts, similarly worn both with or without a tunic, and some of the more poorly dressed men who had come from working in the fields wore only breechcloths.

The women, as on Earth, were generally more ornately dressed. Most wore short-sleeved or sleeveless tunics reaching to around the knees, though varying considerably in length seemingly according to the age and/or the attractiveness of the individual. Some, however, wore what seemed to be a wrap-around gown similar to a sari. Others, almost entirely among those more plainly dressed, wore garments reaching only to the knees and covering only one shoulder and breast while a few others of this group wore only short skirts and nothing above the waist.

Dave noticed that many of the more poorly dressed of both sexes wore armbands around their upper arms with different sorts of designs on them and many wore what appeared to be iron bracelets. When Owens made a comment about these one of the guards said that these indicated that their wearers were slaves. The designs on them indicated their owners.

The crowds grew denser as they neared the gate and news of their approach apparently spread. The prisoners found themselves being jostled, pinched and pummeled by some of those in the crowd. Their guards wedged them through the throng, protecting them as best they could but the strangeness of their appearance and stature as compared to that of their captors seemed to excite what was rapidly becoming a mob and prevented the protection from being very effective. Most of the crowd were merely curious and wished only to touch the strange beings or finger their equally strange attire but there were also

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some there, as there would have been in any similar situation on Earth, who could not or would not pass up this opportunity to take out their frustrations and baser yearnings upon helpless victims who could not resist. One particularly persistent fellow reached over the spears of the guards to paw at the breasts of one of the Triplets to his own and his fellows' vast amusement. His laughter stopped short, however, when Matthew Bell, who was immediately behind her, reached out over the horizontally held spear of a guard to grasp him by the neck and haul him bodily out of the crowd knocking over the guard and others in the crowd nearby in the process.

The man's amusement turned to terror as he struggled unsuccessfully in the smaller Earthman's grasp and then as other guards pushed their way to the scene Bell released his hold and with a mighty shove sent the larger Jovian sprawling into the crowd tumbling other onlookers like tenpins. Dave thought he saw surreptitious smiles at the man's discomfiture on the faces of some of the guards who moved into the area to separate them and well they might for at this unexpected display of strength on the part of the seemingly small and weak captives the crowd henceforth kept back a little more and made the guards' job easier.

Most of the buildings bordering the narrow streets through which they went seemed to be made of an adobe-like material sometimes covered with a plaster-like material. There were some, however, as they neared the center of the city which were built of stone. Many of the latter seemed to be public buildings. There were also several of these in the process of construction.

Finally they emerged into a plaza immediately across from the most imposing building they had seen. Dave guessed that it must be their destination for it seemed a likely candidate for the royal residence. It was made of stone and surrounded by a higher wall of stone with guards at the gate.

They went directly to this gate, and after ToNas had conferred with the guards and an officer whom they summoned, they entered into a courtyard which contained trees and grass and a path leading to a guarded door of the main building. They did not approach this door, however, but turned aside and went through a series of doors and gates and along corridors until finally they entered an open courtyard completely surrounded by a wall about fifteen feet high on three sides and the wall of the palace, if that was the proper word to describe the building, on the fourth. There were some small doors along that wall which, they were to later learn, led to small rooms with no other exit. It looked like a prison which was quite appropriate since that is exactly what it was.

The earthlings looked at each other and at the walls and their hearts sank. They had every reason to expect something just like this but nevertheless it had

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seemed somehow unreal before. Now the walls brought the reality of it home to each of them. Dave heard a sob from one of the women and saw Dan Owens turn and approach him with a grim look on his face. Motioning for him to follow he beckoned to Churchill and drew him aside.

Dan said to Dave and Clay, "You two speak the language better than I do and ToNas has more reason to listen to you. I think we'd better have another talk with him."

They nodded silently and accompanied him. They confronted the young prince who was supervising the carrying in of supplies. He turned a troubled countenance toward them.

"We must speak to you, ToNas," the astronaut said in his labored Jovian.

"It will do you no good DaNowns," the Jovian replied sadly, slurring the astronaut's name in the Vajuvian fashion. "You are prizes of war by the customs of our people, and I as a leader must obey them. I go now to see my father the *ful*<sup>6</sup>."

"We have told you that we did not come to make war on your people," the Englishman said. "We did not even know that we were near your country. As a matter-of-fact, we did not even know that people lived on this world, or could. All of our best information about it showed it to be composed entirely of gas. We came in peace and should have been received accordingly."

The Jovian merely shook his head sadly.

"If this were not so you would not be standing here," Owens said. The need to put his point across seemed to increase his grasp of the language. "If these two men had not risked their own lives to save that of a man who was a perfect stranger and demonstrated enemy your father would have no son now."

ToNas' manner became more agitated. "What you say is true. I do not deny it nor question your truthfulness except for this wild tale you tell me of where you come from. And I believe you do not tell this implausible tale out of malice but as a manner of protecting your home city, which is only what you should do. I will tell my father of the debt we both owe to you and ask him to do whatever it is possible for him to do. I can do no more. Now I must go."

He left abruptly, obviously torn between what he felt duty required him to do and what he felt honor required of him.

As the door shut with a ring of finality the Earthmen looked at each other once more. The Englishman shook his head silently and the three moved away without saying anything. They were soon joined by Don Dale and Matthew Bell. Don looked more haggard from his continuing physical problems, and the

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6. King (Also what the Vajuvians call the carnosaurus).

## PROBLEMS WITH THE *INMIGRO*

resulting hardships he especially had suffered in the gruelling climb across the mountains was not good for his case of 'Jovian flu.'

"This place looks pretty solid," Don said. "There is nothing in those rooms but some bedding and not enough of that to keep us all under cover. In addition to the walls we've got company."

The others followed his pointing finger to the top of the wall surrounding their open-air prison. There were two big Jovian guards to be seen at separate points.

"Even if we somehow got over that we would still be inside the palace grounds. If we somehow got over that we would still be in the middle of a strange city in which we would stick out like a whole fist full of sore thumbs," Matthew Bell put in gloomily.

"And there is another wall and set of guards surrounding the city," the Englishman added uncomfortably.

"Aside from those piddling things we are in great shape, aren't we?" Dave observed.

"Yes," Don Dale commented, "like a bleeding heart at a piranha convention."

"We better hope ToNas comes through or we will be, how do you colonials say it? 'Up a creek without a paddle!'" the Englishman added.

The atmosphere was gloomy in the compound as night approached. Food was delivered at sunset and they built fires with firewood provided for warmth and cooking. Afterwards they clustered around the fire and Dan Owens acquainted everyone with the situation as it stood.

"We don't know how this situation is going to play out," he concluded. "Frankly it looks pretty gloomy right now, but I want to make one thing clear. If we are indeed sold as slaves there will come a time when some of us will find an opportunity to escape and when we do we will work to free every person here. *No one* will be abandoned. You have my word on that." By his grim manner it could be seen that he meant what he said and that he would see that his promise was carried out or die in the attempt. Others quickly added their personal assurances to his.

They were still clustered around the fire when a noise was heard at the door and a moment later ToNas reappeared with two guards. He moved a little way apart from them and motioned the Earthmen forward. Dave Hall, Dan Owens and Clay Churchill moved over to him. In the semi-darkness his face did not reveal anything to them.

"I have seen my father, the *ful*, and told him of what you did for me," he began. "I told him of what you said and pled your case with him."

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“What was his reply?” Owens asked.

“He first reminded me of our laws and customs. He would see you for himself and see these curious appearing foreigners that the whole city is talking about.”

ToNas hesitated irresolutely then making his mind up he continued, “I think I should acquaint you with some of the facts which might affect your fate. Some you may have already guessed to some extent. IpuZob is a distant cousin of mine. His father, JixIb, is of the same royal line as my father. Neither of them are direct descendants of the former *ful*. JixIb’s claim to the title is almost as good as my father’s, some say better. Thus, JixIb is very powerful and ambitious and will seize upon any situation which might work to my father’s disadvantage. That is why IpuZob was not overly anxious to come to my aid against the *qujyxpoh*. The cat would have been doing him a favor. Thus I am afraid that JixIb will try to thwart any move to treat you as anything but slaves.”

“But how can he do that if your father is the *ful*?” the Englishman asked. “Can your father not just pronounce us to be free men and guests and it be so?”

ToNas sighed and shook his head. “He might but his power is not absolute. We have a Grand Council of twenty-five members who have the power to overrule the *ful* if at least twenty of them vote to do so. Our customs dictate that you be enslaved. My father could, I think, interpret your situation to exempt you from this if he would, especially in view of the fact of the service you rendered to me and, hence to the state, but it might offend powerful members of the Grand Council. He is a good and just ruler, but he recognizes that JixIb might just as easily be sitting on the throne. Thus he allows JixIb to influence him too much and even to boldly undermine and thwart him.”

ToNas shook his head once more and said, “If *I* were *ful*—” He did not finish the statement but it was not necessary. It was obvious that JixIb and IpuZob were most fortunate that ToNas was not the ruler.

“I will see that you get to present your case to the *ful*,” he said finally and then turned to go. “He will see you in the morning.”

## **GREETINGS, TAKE ME TO YOUR LEADER**

The next day after the morning meal, a contingent of guards arrived, and they were escorted out of their enclosure through a series of courtyards and corridors into what appeared to be the servants' quarters and finally into what appeared to be a communal bathhouse which they were instructed to use to make themselves more presentable for their appearance before the king. There were no separate facilities for men and women and this was a source of embarrassment for most of the earthlings who promptly segregated themselves into two groups on opposite sides of the pool. Their obvious discomfiture was in turn a source of considerable amusement to the guards. In addition they did not seem averse to satisfying their own curiosity about the earthlings and fully enjoyed the view afforded them. Apparently, Dave decided, communal bathing with no segregation of the sexes was the normal thing here, at least for slaves. As a matter-of-fact, he reflected, there were increasing numbers of places on Earth where it was not considered untoward either. It was frowned upon where he had lived and had grown up and he felt distinctly uncomfortable with it, but there was no choice but to make the best of it.

The removal of the grime accumulated during the preceding few days' hard marching did seem to lift their spirits somewhat and encourage a more optimistic outlook on the upcoming meeting with Jovian royalty than was probably warranted. Unfortunately, there was nothing they could do about their clothing which still carried its share of Jovian dirt. However, the king and his court would want to see the strange garments their prisoners had worn when they were captured so a change into native dress was out of the question anyway.

They then found themselves escorted back to the main part of the palace through various corridors to an anteroom where they were met by ToNas. He proceeded to escort them through a guarded door into the audience chamber itself where they received their first view of Jovian royalty.

They were in a large, high-ceilinged room more elaborately decorated than any that they had seen previously. The floor itself seemed to be composed of

## VAJU: THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM

marble and there were fine draperies on the walls. Carpeting covered the area in front of a raised dais upon which the monarch sat and fine furs and silks were to be seen upon the chairs and benches upon which the Jovians sat or reclined. They had expected something either very crude or barbarically opulent but the effect was one of a rather more restrained elegance.

They were formed into a line facing the raised dais upon which sat ZaSox, the *ful* or king of Pyhoqux. As ToNas stepped forward they received their first good look at the king and his court. He looked much as they might have expected. He was essentially an older version of ToNas appearing to be in a vigorous middle age. The chief sign of age was to be seen in and around his eyes. Here the signs of wear and tear brought on by his responsibilities showed in the lines at the corners of his eyes.

There were quite a few other people of both sexes in the room besides the king. Most of the men, not counting the guards who were present in abundance, were of about the same age as ZaSox himself though there were a few younger nobles present. There were a few men there appreciably older than the king and no one who could be considered ancient which fact seemed mildly surprising since it was to be assumed that most, if not all, of the Grand Council ToNas had mentioned were present. As usual it was harder to ascertain the ages of the women present since it was obvious that women on Jupiter fought the battle against the years just as tenaciously as did their counterparts on Earth and, as on Earth, the rich could afford better weapons with which to carry on that battle which is, in the final analysis, just a delaying action.

A man of approximately the king's age sat directly to his right. It was apparent from the proximity of this seat to the throne that he was a man of great importance. Dave guessed that he was JixIb, the rival of ZaSox. On his right stood IpuZob.

"Why, they're so small!" an unidentified feminine voice exclaimed. A murmur of comment spread through the group of courtiers. It subsided when ToNas stepped forward.

The young prince touched his right hand briefly to his chest then to his forehead and then extended it, palm outward, in front of him in a form of salute toward the throne. ZaSox raised his hand in acknowledgement and then rose and stepped forward.

"Well then ToNas, let us see these curious prisoners the whole city is talking of," he said as he moved down off the dais followed by some of the more favored of his court. He walked to one end of the line and proceeded down it much like a general reviewing his troops. Although the room was abuzz with whispered

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conversations among the rest of the crowd, ZaSox did not utter a word until he had returned to the dais and seated himself upon his throne once more.

“The reports I have heard were not exaggerated. They are indeed unlike any men that I have seen,” he said. He looked thoughtfully at them. “You say two of these puny beings killed a full grown *qujyxpoh* which had already slain one of our warriors? It hardly seems possible!”

“It is true, though,” his son replied. “If they had not intervened when they did I would not stand before you now.”

“And they could not speak our language when first captured?”

“That is true, but some of them have now learned enough of it to make themselves understood,” ToNas replied, “although there is no doubt from their use of it that it is not their native tongue.”

“And what is this strange story that they tell?” his father asked.

“With your permission I will let them tell you.”

At ZaSox’ nod of consent ToNas gestured toward the earthmen and, as prearranged, Dan Owens stepped forward, flanked by Clay Churchill and Dave. Spontaneously, Dave gave a clumsy imitation of ToNas’ salute and taking their cue from him, the other two followed suit. Dave saw a look of approval on ToNas’ face.

“This man is DaNowns, the leader of the Earthlings, as they call themselves,” ToNas stumbled over the English word, “and these are DaVal and ClaChl, the men to whom I owe my life.”

“Why would you save the life of an enemy who held you captive, when you might have escaped?” ZaSox asked. The Jovians at least seemed to have the virtue of directness.

“If I may suggest,” the man they presumed was Jixlb interjected, “they probably hoped to curry favor with us by this act. I have learned that they have since demanded that we release them. It is ludicrous for the conquered to make demands on the conqueror and even more ludicrous for the conqueror to accede. I strongly suggest that this would be a great mistake even if it did not violate our long-standing traditions since they are probably spies sent here by our enemies. In any case, to say that they saved ToNas’ life is an exaggeration since it was my son, IpuZob, who struck the death blow to the *qujyxpoh*.”

“That is not true,” Dave exclaimed. “Far from killing the beast and saving ToNas’ life, IpuZob made no move to intervene until the animal had already been mortally wounded. If it had been up to him ToNas would be dead.”

If looks were arrows, Dave would have died on the spot looking like a pincushion because the glares sent his way by IpuZob and his father were tipped with venom. Any reply that they might have made was prevented by ZaSox

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who raised his hand to forestall any and replied diplomatically, “My son has told me of the role that IpuZob played in the affair and all assistance given by him is deeply appreciated. I am also convinced, however, that without the intervention of these strangers I would have no son today. The customs of your land must be most strange,” he concluded, turning back to the three earthmen.

“You must know that you were captured by a patrol of ours on our territory and by the laws of our people, and those of all the other nations I have any knowledge of, may be executed or enslaved. Unless there has been some other crime committed it is our custom to be humane and sell the intruders as slaves instead of executing them. The proceeds are distributed among the members of the capturing party. In my memory this tradition has never been violated. We are indeed grateful for the service that you have done ToNas and recognize it as a reason to consider mercy in the case of you two as individuals. However, there are many questions which must be answered before such a radical action could even be considered, not the least of which is JixIb’s question as to your origin and purpose in being here. You did not come to us in the conventional manner of envoys from a friendly nation or as *bazeqs’*,” the Jovian monarch added. “The question must be presented to the Grand Council, which advises me and may under certain very unusual circumstances overrule my decisions. Most of the members of the Council are here, so tell us from what country you come and what your purpose here is, and if it is legitimate, why you appeared to be trying to sneak into our land like thieves from the direction of the Valley of the *Fuls*?”

Dan Owens, who had been following the king’s speech with difficulty, stepped forward and replied, “I am Colonel Dan Owens (he used the English title) of the United States of America. I am leader of the party who stand before you. We wandered into your country by mistake, not knowing where we were. I speak little of your language so I ask my friends, Clay Churchill and Dave Hall, to speak for us.”

“Then let them do so,” ZaSox said. He had obviously found it difficult to follow Owens words which were more halting than a written transcription can adequately convey. The former Marine had many virtues, which had earned him the respect his companions showed him in acknowledging him as their leader, but facility with foreign languages was not one of them.

“As Colonel Owens said, our country is known as the United States of America,” Dave said, “although Clay Churchill is from another allied country and was just visiting us when he accomplished this journey. As he said, we were lost and blundered into your country by error as we did not even know of its

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1. Traders.

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existence or even if human life existed on this world.” Dave hesitated, trying to find the words to convincingly inform these strange semicivilized people of the location of the United States. They had seen no signs of scientific advancement except the presence of steel-tipped spears and swords.

“Where is this United States?” the king asked, stumbling over the English words. “I have never heard of any such place. In what direction does it lie?”

Dave could hardly repress an urge to smile at the fact that he was about to have to explain that it was straight up from Pyhoqux.

“It is not on this world which you call Vaju and which we know as Jupiter at all,” Dave replied. This statement elicited murmurs of disbelief and derision from the assembled nobles which is the reaction that he had expected.

“Where does it lie then, if not on Vaju?” asked JixIb derisively. “There is no other place, only a great black sea which *Gax*<sup>2</sup> never favors with a life-giving glance. Perhaps you would tell us that you have come from *Ya*<sup>3</sup> or *Uefaco*<sup>4</sup> or one of their brothers?” he concluded with a sneer. The crowd laughed their appreciation of his humor.

“They could not be from *Uefaco*,” IpuZob said, “which as any small child knows is a great ball of ice from whence comes the snow which covers the great mountains for they cannot stand the cold. Perhaps instead they come from *Gax* himself.” This precipitated more laughter for any schoolboy in Pyhoqux could tell you that the tiny, life-giving ball in the sky was the open door of the great furnace from which Vaju itself had been spewed in a molten mass to be molded by the hand of *Gax* himself into its present form.

The earthmen were not familiar with all the names being thrown at them, but assumed that they referred to the Sun and moons.

“We come from the bright blue star low in the sky you call *Nxeu* and which we call Earth,” the Englishman said.

This was greeted with renewed laughter. If nothing else these strangers were providing great entertainment.

“Why *Nxeu* is higher than even the highest peak and even if you could reach it, it is not large enough for even one person to stand on much less all of you and being of the hottest flame it obviously would burn you to death instantly should you by some inconceivable means reach it,” taunted a thin man to one

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2. A versatile word used for sun, god, heaven, hell and Satan but usually means either sun or god.

3. Io.

4. Europa.

## VAJU: THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM

side, one TorKyh, who obviously considered himself a wit. Dave figured that he was about half right in his self-appraisal.

“Nevertheless, we come from Nxeu, or Earth,” replied Dave doggedly, “which is not what you think it is but a world much as yours, only smaller. The only reason it seems so small is that it is very far away. It is many—” he hesitated for he did not know the proper Vajuvian word and had to settle for the English term, “—millions of *zixus*<sup>5</sup> from here.”

“I do not know how far that is, but if Nxeu is as large as you say and so far away as to seem as tiny as it does how did you get here?” retorted the wit, triumphantly proud of his devastating logic.

The earthmen then tried the impossible task of describing a spaceship and its function but it was hopeless. They did not even know the word for ship and found it impossible to explain rocket power to a people who apparently had no artificial sources of power at all. It only increased their captors’ mirth and skepticism.

“Where then is this great cart?” one of them asked as that was about how their attempted descriptions had come across to them. Not a comparison which would have pleased its constructors, to be sure.

As they had previously agreed, they were evasive on this question, merely saying that they did not know exactly since they had become completely lost and had wandered many days since they had left it and had crossed many mountains, a statement which combined truths and half-truths with outright lies.

“It is obvious that they are lying,” JixIb asserted finally. (He was correct, of course.) “They do not wish to admit that they have come to spy on us. This incredible tale is an insult to our intelligence and, amusing as it may be, does not deserve our attention. If you will allow me to have them properly interrogated we shall find out the truth.”

From the way JixIb said this, Dave knew that the last thing he wanted was for this request to be granted. He rightly suspected that the result of doing so would be most unpleasant for them. At this point ToNas intervened on their behalf.

“I cannot, of course, believe such a wildly implausible story as this,” he said, “but it is my belief that they tell it merely to protect their homeland from being conquered by us for, if the way they were armed when they were taken is an indication, it must be virtually defenseless.”

ZaSox nodded. “That may well be. Wherever they come from must be very strange judging from their manners, customs and attire. But what I am most interested in is why they would risk their lives to save the life of an enemy.

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5. Vajuvian unit of measurement approximately equal to one kilometer.

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Answer me this question, strangers,” he commanded. The noise in the room had subsided when the king began to speak.

It was Churchill who answered. “We do not know your customs but, in our country, no man of honor would stand by and watch another man die without trying to save him. I would have moved to help even IpuZob, whom we had reason to consider a real enemy. As for ToNas, he had shown us no unkindness other than taking us captive and, indeed, had saved the life of one of our companions. It would have been doubly dishonorable not to come to his aid.”

“ToNas had shown himself to be an honorable man,” Dave added. “As a matter-of-fact, he had put himself in this danger by putting himself between us and the great cat while others did nothing. We were sure that if we could but communicate with him we could explain that we were not your enemies and should be welcomed as friends instead of being imprisoned.”

“How long must we listen to these lies?” IpuZob exploded angrily. “They insult us repeatedly with them. They should be standing on the auction block instead of here telling these fairy tales. Those, that is,” he said casting a glance toward Nellie Hall, “who are not claimed by members of the scouting party.”

Dave saw his niece give an involuntary shudder as she caught his glance. Dave felt anger rising inside him as he swung back to face the Jovian who continued to speak in a loud angry tone.

“To even consider anything else is to display a weakness which will tempt our enemies. ToNas has already displayed such weakness unbecoming a leader of our people that the warriors under him grumble and complain.”

IpuZob’s father, JixIb, sat silently listening to his son’s tirade and covertly watching its effect on the people in the room, especially ZaSox and ToNas.

Out of the corner of his eye, Dave caught sight of ToNas moving. He saw that the usually even-tempered, good-natured Jovian was seething, almost white with anger and barely able to restrain himself from drawing his sword and leaping upon his distant cousin on the spot. At a commanding gesture from his father, he subsided but stood tight-lipped with anger glaring at IpuZob from eyes that had become mere slits.

ZaSox himself was visibly angry but he kept it from his voice as he spoke. “That is enough! We are not here to fight among ourselves. If these people are, indeed, enemy spies and agitators it would seem that their mission is already successful if it causes us to quarrel.” He paused a moment to ponder and then continued, “I have decided to postpone a final decision on this matter until these people can be taught more of our language so that we may be sure that we understand each other. Also, it is evident that there are many things we can

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learn from them, whoever they are, since they bring with them some marvelous things such as this.”

ZaSox picked up an object from a low table at his side, and as he raised it into full view, Dave saw that it was the telescope from the compact transit that Brad Patman had brought along to help him plot his map. He was sure that they would find it fascinating, low-powered as it was, and indeed it did cause cries of astonishment as it was passed from person to person.

Suddenly, the sight of the transit brought a chilling thought into Dave’s mind. Where was Brad’s map? Did he have it? Was it still lying back in the forest? Or did one of the Vajuvians have it in a pack he had picked up for a souvenir and not realize what it was? He had better check with Brad later. That map could be a dead giveaway to the location of their ship if the Vajuvians could read it, and he presumed that they could.

“ToNas brought me this just before we came to this room” ZaSox said, bringing silence once more to the room. Turning to the group of earthlings before him, he continued, “You shall not be sent to the auction block for the time being at least. I must consider all aspects of this matter. To violate long-standing tradition is a serious matter in Pyhoqux. You will not be free to come and go as you please, however, pending my decision. You will be barred from leaving these grounds without special permission and then only under guard. You will also be barred from our private quarters in the palace proper. You will, however, be allowed a certain freedom of movement in the other areas of the palace and the grounds, the exact boundaries of which I will leave for ToNas and the commander of the guard to work out. Since Pyhoqux cannot afford to support idle hands we will try to arrange tasks for some of you to perform after you have been taught enough of our language to make it feasible. You three,” he said, pointing to Owens, Dave and the Englishman, “will be put into the custody of ToNas and KiMok, our foremost man of learning, to be taught such of our language, history and customs as is deemed necessary for our purposes and to explain your own and these mysterious objects you bring with you.”

With these words the monarch rose to end the audience and leave the chamber. IpuZob seemed about to protest, but his father put a warning hand on his arm and silenced him with a sharp look. JixIb seemed satisfied with the reaction of the crowd to his son’s outburst and their reaction to the king’s decision, or lack of one. It was evident that he was willing to be patient and undermine his opponent a little at a time if that seemed to be the surest and safest course. IpuZob’s behavior indicated that he lacked his father’s patience and cunning and would have long since tried more direct methods which probably

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would have ended with him dead or in a dungeon if, indeed, Pyhoqux possessed such.

Everyone rose as the king started to leave the room. He stopped for a whispered conversation with ToNas and another man in soldier's garb then he left the room. These two remained talking together and Dave was still watching them when some instinct told him to turn around. When he did he looked up into the face of IpuZob who stood before Dave and the Englishman glaring down at them.

"You will die," he said in a voice filled with hate sharpened on the whetstone of frustration, "and I will kill you."

"Most assuredly we will die," the Englishman said in an even tone, his own face revealing nothing of any emotion he might feel. "All men die, but I doubt that you will have anything to do with it."

"I will kill you both with my own hands," the Vajuvian said malevolently, his voice rising slightly, "but it will not be swift."

The Englishman merely smiled slightly. Dave felt himself hoping that he would be present any time the cold-eyed Jovian tried to fulfill his threat to kill the Englishman. Despite the disparity in height and weight Dave would put his money on Clay.

Further endearments were cut short by the simultaneous arrival of ToNas and JixIb. The older Vajuvian had been a silent witness to the previous exchange. He pulled IpuZob away firmly and with authority after looking into the eyes of the two earthmen. His face did not reveal what he saw, but Dave did not think he would underestimate the Englishman as much as his son. He was obviously used to evaluating people, and most likely, he rarely made mistakes. Dave knew that he was much more dangerous than his truculent son. His emotions did not rule him as IpuZob's did. He would make a bad enemy, or friend either for that matter, probably.

ToNas escorted them back to their courtyard prison where he said they would have to stay until he and BeLin, the commander of the palace guards, worked out the details of their limited freedom. They would, in any case, have to be locked up there at night. Their freedom would be quite limited until ZaSox made up his mind.

When they related to the rest of the earthlings what had occurred, most not being able to understand any of the proceedings, there was a feeling of immediate relief such as a condemned man on death row might feel upon being given an eleventh hour reprieve from execution pending an appeal. The threat was still there and very real and would return to worry them more as the days passed but for the moment there was only relief.

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The next few “weeks” were the most tension filled and at the same time the most interesting of Dave’s life. They were kept extremely busy fulfilling the program ZaSox had outlined.

The morning after the audience ToNas appeared at their quarters. He first took the entire group on a tour of the palace and grounds to show them the limits of their freedom. Essentially, they had the run of the grounds except for the living area of the royal family and the palace guard where weapons were available. This information was relayed to the non-Jovian speaking members of the group.

The routine of the Jovians (or Vajuvians as they called themselves) took over the earthlings’ lives. The Vajuvians arose at about sunrise (before in the case of most servants), ate a meal and then worked until about noon when they took what amounted to a coffee break, although tea would probably be a better word to describe the beverage they favored. No Englishman is more addicted to his tea than these people were to the drink they called *pecco*. It, like tea, was brewed from the dried leaves of a common bush of the same name. They ascertained that it was non-alcoholic and non-addictive (physically, at least) but was extremely invigorating. They were to learn that high-ranking nobles went to great expense to purchase and/or cultivate exotic blends of this plant and almost nothing was so important as to make a Vajuvian skip his noon *pecco*.

Normally this noon break lasted twenty to thirty minutes during which the Vajuvians might take a quick catnap. Surprisingly, for all their great size the Vajuvians showed little endurance, They did, however, recuperate quickly after a cup of *pecco* and just a short rest. Apparently, it all had to do with the fact that their metabolism was attuned to the ten-hour days. They required frequent rest but quickly regained their energy.

After their guided tour, ToNas told Dave Hall and Clay Churchill to accompany him along with Dan Owens. He took them to a good sized room in the palace which contained the first books they had seen since they entered Pyhoqux. The walls were lined with what looked like scrolls and charts and books. In the room was a gray-haired man Dave remembered had been present when they had been presented to ZaSox. He looked up from the scroll he was studying as they entered.

ToNas introduced him as KiMok. Dave remembered ZaSox’ mention of him. KiMok greeted them with obvious interest. He was short of stature for a Vajuvian, being no more than six-feet, six-inches in height but like almost all of the people they had seen since their arrival was well built and could have passed for an athlete or soldier. Only his manner distinguished him as he displayed a

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keen interest in everything about them. It was evident that he wished to learn as much from them as he taught them.

They quickly learned that the earthmen's incomplete grasp of the Vajuvian language was going to hamper this exchange of knowledge so lessons in the language, both spoken and written, were given priority. All the earthlings were to be taught the language. KiMok had two assistants who, along with Ben Sanchez and Don Dale who had the best grasp of the native tongue among the earthlings, presided over the general "crash" course, which described some of the early results pretty well. Dave and the Englishman's instruction, however, was done by KiMok and ToNas.

The Vajuvian language was a relatively simple one to learn although pronunciation was somewhat difficult at times since sounds which could best be represented in English by double consonants abounded and were often difficult for tongues used to English to form. An example of this was the Vajuvian word for hand, "*tobq*" which also, not coincidentally, meant five. These four letters best represent the sounds included in the word. The b sound, however, was almost silent and often the word sounded as if it should be spelled "tok". However, correctly pronounced the b was present to soften the word. The Vajuvian letter represented by q was usually pronounced like our k except when it came on the end of a word when the Vajuvians added a peculiar click almost impossible for the earthlings to duplicate. Usually it came out of their mouths simply as a k which often brought smiles of amusement from Vajuvians at their quaint accent.

As previously mentioned, Ben Sanchez was well on his way to becoming fluent in the use of the language. It came easy for him, no doubt because he had been raised in two languages, having grown up in the west Texas-Mexican border area, like Dave, and of Mexican-American ancestry. This often threw him together with the other two and Don Dale. This suited Dave fine since both Ben and Don were good friends of long standing.

As their mastery of the language increased and KiMok and ToNas began to fill them in on the Vajuvian customs, history and science, these four made an effort to bring those of the Earth party who had a special interest in these fields into the discussions.

One of the first things that they learned about the Vajuvian society was its ambivalent attitude toward learning. Everyone in the society was given elementary schooling so that all of the populace capable of learning at all, including the lowliest slaves, could read and write and handle the curious Vajuvian math well enough to carry on the everyday duties of life in Pyhoqux. Beyond this and the inculcation of certain religious training and a schooling

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in basic local history and geography designed to make loyal, reasonably well-informed citizens out of them, learning was not particularly encouraged in most of the people. They understood this attitude better after they learned more of the history of the city. The Earthlings were something of a curiosity to the Vajuvians simply because the women among them were much better educated than most Vajuvian women, who rarely progressed beyond the rudiments mentioned above.

There were allusions made to the *Pyhoquxian* history that intrigued the curious earthlings, but their mentors would not go into it in any depth until they had introduced them to other practical matters such as Vajuvian mathematics. Though quite different from the numerical system that they had been used to, Dave did not find it to be difficult until he was called upon one day to explain it to a group of his companions.

“Well,” he said in his best academic manner, “to begin with our own decimal system apparently was developed because of early man’s habit of counting on his fingers, of which by coincidence, he had ten. So he grouped his numbers by tens and tens of tens, etc. He could have picked any base for his numerical system but this was the most convenient one so we count in tens, hundreds, and thousands. The Vajuvians also have five fingers on each hand and might easily have adopted the same system. They, however, adopted a system based on fives, possibly from a habit of counting on the fingers of one hand. As a matter of fact, the Vajuvian word for five also means hand.”

Then Dave produced and explained a table he had prepared containing the following information:

Vajuvian Number		Arabic Number
<i>qysi</i>	1	1
<i>hka</i>	2	2
<i>htfu</i>	3	3
<i>raef</i>	4	4
<i>tobq</i>	10	5
<i>vo-tobq</i>	100	25
<i>pubh</i>	1000	125
<i>zixy</i>	1-0000	625
<i>zoli</i>	1-0000-0000	390,625
<i>nyzoli</i>	1-0000-0000-0000	244,140,625

Someone asked why the Vajuvians grouped their digits in groups of four. Dave shrugged his shoulders. “Why not?” he countered. “There is no good reason evident, but then why do we group ours in three? It is as good a method of dividing them up into some good workable order as any.”

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“This leads into the fields of measurements,” Dave continued. “Our hosts’ basic small unit of distance is the *rah* which is slightly longer than a foot. Actually this unit of measure probably was arrived at after they began using the *jofo* which is approximately five feet long and about the length of a Jovian’s stride. It was undoubtedly arrived at in much the same way as the English yard or the Spanish *vara* as the standard step with the *rah* being merely a subdivision of this basic measure. All larger units of measure are derived from the *jofo* with the basic unit of measuring long distances being the *zixu* which is 1-0000 *jofo*s in length or about 3,250 feet or 0.6155 miles or slightly less than one kilometer. For measures of area they simply add the prefix *vo-* in front of a measure of distance which indicates it is squared as *vo-rah* to indicate a square *rah*.”

“What about their measurements of time?” Paula Taylor asked. “I have seen some things which resemble hour glasses and other types of primitive time measuring devices.”

“I know they have some pretty good devices of this sort though I have not examined them too closely,” Dave replied. “They divide each period of daylight into five subdivisions which they call *taefs* and likewise they divide each night into five equal *taefs*. Since the period of rotation of the planet is almost exactly ten hours this makes each *taef* equal to approximately one hour. Incidentally they begin each day at sunrise rather than midnight. Each *taef* is divided into fifths, then twenty-fifths, one hundred twenty-fifths and six hundred twenty-fifths, the names of which I can’t remember at the moment. However, going in the other direction five days, or *gois*, make up a *ku*, five *kus* make a *vo-ku*. Five *vo-kus* make a *zab* and five *zabs* a *vo-zab*. All these measures depend on the rotation of the planet but the other two major measurements of time depend on the moons and the revolving of the planet around the sun. They recognized the travel of the planet around the sun and call it a *yuof* which consists of 10,390 *gois* which is, I think, a day or two off of the exact time it takes but pretty close for the state of development these people seem to be in. We didn’t get any closer than that until a couple of centuries ago.”

Jim West exclaimed after a rapid calculation, “That means their ‘year’ has 83 ‘months’ and fifteen odd days!”

“That’s right,” grinned Ben Sanchez. “Aren’t you glad you had the foresight to be born on a simple little planet with only twelve thirty-day months?”

“From what KiMok tells us,” the Englishman said, “they are very practical about odd days. They just throw them in at the end of the year in a short *zab* which everybody takes as a long celebration, all except the slaves, of course.”



## INTERLUDE

A few days later, in a session including Dave Hall, Ben Sanchez, Clay Churchill and Dan Owens as well as KiMok and ToNas, they finally got into a discussion of the history of Pyhoqux when Ben asked how large an area was controlled by them.

“Only a limited area outside of this valley,” ToNas answered. “There are a few small villages in the mountains to the west and south and some small garrisons in the passes to the east. All in all there are only a few *zixy vo-zixus* now, and more and more we are harassed by our enemies.”

“Who are your enemies,” Owens asked, “those hairy men from whom you rescued us?”

ToNas laughed. “The *ocuzob*? No, we do not fear them, although they are vicious fighters. It is the enemy from which we fled to this remote valley many *yuofs* ago that has once more found us and wishes to completely exterminate us.”

Noting their inquiring looks, KiMok picked up the explanation. “We did not always live here in this valley. For many *vo-tobqs* of *yuofs* our ancestors ruled a vast empire to the east of here beyond the great mountains which guard us in that direction. For *pubhs* of *yuofs* our people had been the greatest warriors on Vaju, at least the known part of it. Our way of life had been simple but fulfilling. Our men were valorous and our women were hardy and virtuous.”

Dave suppressed a smile at this somewhat self-serving description of their virtues.

“As the *yuofs* passed our power grew until finally our boundaries extended for more than *zixy zixus* in every direction. In the beginning our people lived austere and were very industrious. We elected our leaders who then had great power for the duration of their office. Even the king was chosen by election and in the early years his son did not automatically succeed him. But as time passed the election of the son became more and more automatic. Likewise,

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in the early days a king could be removed, and sometimes was under unusual circumstances, by the Grand Council.

“In those days we lived under great discipline. No one was allowed to vote until he had earned this right by service to his country. We expanded vigorously. We became unbelievably wealthy. Then, as our empire increased in size, our discipline slackened and our ambition diminished until our boundaries were finally static. Slaves now did all the work freemen had once done and the freedmen were now largely idle and lived off a dole from the state. Education and culture, or at least what was called culture, flourished. The philosophies and cultures of conquered peoples were adopted so universally that it became unfashionable to espouse our native culture. This was extolled by the philosophers as diversity and diversity was equated with virtue. Unfortunately it is perhaps no coincidence that diversity and division begin with the same syllable. Diversity came to equal division. Our society came to lack cohesiveness. Philosophers argued abstract ideas and implied, if not specifically argued, that no one idea should be valued greater than any other. Then they entered politics as champions of the now idle and dependent masses. They demanded that the right to vote be extended to more and more people with no restrictions of service as a prerequisite. Some of these philosophers now became demagogues who swayed the masses as they wished, often with the best of motives and usually with the worst of results. Slaves were freed in ever-increasing numbers to swell their followings. A society which had become dependent upon slave labor now found it difficult to cope with this turn of events. The state found it increasingly hard to meet the dole while cries mounted demanding its increase and extension.

“Despite the growing problems our strength enabled us to rule for many more *yuofs*. Then we began to lose some of the outlying provinces. In the early days everyone who was able served in the army and in later life was proud of this service. The army was filled mainly with small landowners or merchants and their sons who felt that they were protecting something worth fighting for. In the end the army was made up largely of mercenaries. Service in the army was looked down upon and those who chose to serve were ridiculed. The new leaders were reluctant to send it into the provinces to defend the borders and when they did they more often than not would not give the generals the supplies and men needed to do an adequate job.

“Since the provinces were being squeezed for more and more exorbitant levies of taxes to support the dole and the corruption in office, which was spreading like an incurable disease, and their pleas for protection against outside incursions were largely ignored, they became increasingly troublesome and revolts became common. Consequently tax income from the provinces

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dwindled and there was more trouble in the home provinces as the dependent masses grew more violent. In addition the army, made up of men whose loyalty was now to their generals who paid them often from their own pockets, rather than to the country, became undependable and entered the field of politics.

“There were riots and insurrections in the home provinces and virtual anarchy prevailed. In the end some of the philosopher demagogues who led the large masses of the discontented populace in these troubles made alliance with some of the key generals, who they previously had been pleased to revile, and led a revolt which spread ever closer to the capital city of *Pocihox*.

“As it became evident that even *Pocihox* must fall, the king and a small group of his loyal followers prepared to flee. With only a few *zixy* of his followers and their families who still remained loyal, they fled even as the triumphant rebels sacked the capital city. As the rebels now controlled all of the settled territory there was only one way to retreat, into the great uninhabited desert to the west of the city. The only thing that gave them time to make their escape was that in their triumph the thin discipline the rebels had gave way to chaos as they indulged in an orgy of rape and pillage, and it took their leaders a good while to find out where the fugitives had gone and organize a pursuit. Even then they would have caught the refugees, burdened as they were with their families, except that after several days pursuit into the desert the pursuers turned back, their water nearly gone, convinced that none of their quarry would survive the desert which seemed to be endless. They were very nearly right. Had some of the refugees not known that a little water could be secured from some of the desert plants they would have all died of thirst. As it was their food ran out and only the strong survived. Only a fraction of the number who fled *Pocihox* finally saw these mountains appear on the horizon.”

“And so they built this city?” the Englishman asked.

“It wasn’t quite that easy,” *ToNas* replied. “The mountains presented new obstacles which it seemed that the refugees in their weakened condition would not be able to overcome. The first mountains were as barren as the plains that they had crossed. Then as they reached the wooded mountains beyond they were confronted by a rugged terrain and high mountains, such as they had never seen before, and they were inhabited by savage beasts and the *ocuzob*. They finally reached this valley which, with its rugged barrier mountains and high narrow passes, seemed like the ideal fortress. Also the open grasslands invited cultivation so they determined to settle here or die in the attempt.”

“It was not easy for they had to drive out the *ocuzob* and subdue the savage animals, but they did and eventually built the city you stand in now,” continued

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KiMok. “Most of them were not trained in the tasks they had to perform but they persevered and survived. Through necessity they relearned the virtues of their ancestors and tried to form a society which would keep their ancestors’ weaknesses from destroying them.”

“How long ago did this occur?” Dave asked.

“Not really too long ago,” KiMok replied. “A little less than 30 *yuofs*. There are a few old men and women still alive whose parents were small children on the *Xags Hfu*<sup>1</sup>. Most of the older citizens’ grandparents made that frightful journey and told us of it. Only about 4-0000 people survived the journey.”

“But there seem to be a lot more people than that in the city,” Ben Sanchez said in a puzzled tone.

“That would be about 360 of our years,” Dave said to him before either of the Vajuvians could reply. “That’s ten or twelve generations and time for a lot of natural increase.”

“Our men generally marry at an age of about 3 *yuofs*,” ToNas said. “So 30 *yuofs* would be time for 10 generations to mature. If the population doubled each generation we would the have—” he paused momentarily, “—4000-0000 citizens. Actually it is more than that in this city and a few villages in the mountains to the west and south plus the small garrisons in the eastern passes.”

“This land is very sparsely populated,” KiMok said. “But we have in the past few *yuofs* made contact with other peoples to the north and south of us and swelled our population somewhat both by voluntary association, on a very selective basis, and by the taking of slaves. Since our laws generally stipulate that slaves are to be given a chance to earn their freedom and also that any children born to slaves shall automatically become freedmen at the age of three *yuofs*, and their parents along with them, the free population has increased a bit more rapidly than ToNas’ mathematics would suggest. Also, we have a considerable slave population to increase it even more.”

“Your laws regarding slavery seem to be the most unusual that I have ever heard of for a society that condoned the institution,” Churchill said.

“This was an attempt on the part of our founding fathers to avoid the mistakes of our ancestors,” KiMok replied. “It would be hard for us to prosper without the slaves. On the other hand, we did not want a sizable portion of the population to be without hope. As it is they can see the opportunity to become freedmen and eventually full citizens if they serve faithfully. They and their children are taught to read, write and do simple mathematics just like everyone else.”

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1. Long Trek.

## INTERLUDE

There was a short silence as the earthmen digested this information. Then Clay Churchill asked, "You say that you have had hostile contact with the people of your old country since then?"

KiMok nodded and replied, "Less than half a *yuof* ago we encountered them for the first time since we fled. Rumors had reached them of our existence through our contacts with our neighbors and they sent a scouting expedition around the Great Desert to ascertain the truth of them. A few survivors of that expedition returned to the old country and each side has since taken enough prisoners to learn a little of their opponent."

"Then they still harbor the same enmity?" Dave inquired.

"Yes," the savant replied. "Our very existence is an affront to the leaders of the old state, especially since we thrive and our people have much more freedom than theirs. It is ironic, but true to the lessons of history, that out of the anarchy they created in the name of freedom, arose a tyranny harsher than any dreamed of before. The new leaders of the remnant of our once great empire had to make alliance with some of our bitterest enemies involving great concessions, territorial and otherwise, to survive. They put down any dissent with brutal repression and their successors rule today in much the same manner. They fear for their people to learn of our success here lest it might encourage them to rise in rebellion or to flee here."

After a short silence Dan Owens spoke. "It always seemed to me that the most perilous time in a nation's life is the time just after a revolution has succeeded, for it seems that for a short period there is about an equal chance that it will proceed on into a time of freedom or fall back into a new tyranny presided over by its erstwhile liberators."

"Recently the leaders of our old country have twice attempted to force the eastern passes, but they are high, narrow and well-fortified," ToNas continued. "A few men can hold back an army. To the south it is much the same. A great canyon blocks the way for most of the way and the rest of the frontier is easily defended. Besides, we are on reasonably good terms with the people who populate this area and, while they could not stop a major attack from the *Pocihoxites*, we think we could depend on them for a warning. We would undoubtedly go to their aid if they were attacked by Pocihox. The north is also well defended since we are not on good terms with our neighbors up there."

"What about the western border?" Dave asked.

"As you know," ToNas replied, "that area is the most difficult to reach and is populated with even more savage beasts than roam the wilderness in the other directions, not to mention the *ocuzob*, whom we drove there from this valley."

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“But it can be crossed, as we proved,” Clay Churchill said, “and I do not think that a large army would have much trouble at all.”

ToNas took down a map and unrolled it to help his narrative. “Here,” he said, pointing to a blank area beginning approximately where they had first met, “is the extent of our knowledge of the land to the west. Here we encountered the terrible *hfuls*<sup>2</sup> in great numbers when we tried to explore the area. We do not think any army, no matter how powerful, could cross that valley, but it was on an expedition to further explore the area west of the great mountain that we encountered you. We went mainly to see if a great fireball observed a short time ago hit the ground out there and determine what it was.”

“But we *did* cross it,” the Englishman repeated. When the two Vajuvians looked skeptical, he added, “If we did not cross this impassable obstacle then where did we come from?”

“Why from *Nxeu Ghof*<sup>3</sup>, of course,” ToNas replied, smiling his disbelief of the words his lips formed. Then, a frown crossing his handsome face, he asked, “Just where did you come from, anyway? The canyon is impassable, as is the Valley of the *Fuls*, so you must have come from the north, but we have never before encountered anyone like you from that region, or from anywhere for that matter.”

The Englishman shook his head, smiling sadly, “If you will not believe me when I tell you the truth—” He let his voice trail off.

“Perhaps if you tell us a more believable truth,” suggested KiMok. Both Vajuvians watched the Englishman for his reaction while trying to appear only casually interested. Noting this Dave smiled inwardly for they would be doomed to disappointment. The Englishman’s face showed nothing, as usual. Dave thought to himself that if the Englishman played poker he would like the opportunity to play with him one day. It should be an interesting, though possibly costly, experience.

Dave had been thinking of what the Vajuvian had been saying of the purpose of their mission and asked, “When did you observe this great fireball?”

KiMok looked at him and told him how long it had been since they saw it and inquired, “Did you see it? And if you did, did you see it hit the ground?”

“I think we may have seen it,” Dave replied, “but we did not see it hit the earth.”

When Clay Churchill later teasingly remonstrated with him about lying to the Vajuvians since there was little doubt that they were the “fireball” the Jovians had observed, he replied that he had not lied.

2. The T-Rex of Jupiter.

3. The Blue Star, Earth.

## INTERLUDE

“While we did see the fireball we were trailing across the sky, we could not actually *see* it hit the ground since we were inside it,” he replied, “much less hit the *earth*, so I did not lie.”

The Englishman shook his head, smiling. “I can see that you may have a future in politics when we return home.”

“There’s no need to get insulting,” the Texan replied.

The nature of slavery, Vajuvian style, came up for discussion at night since, under the circumstances, it was very pertinent to all concerned. Dan Owens had Dave and the Englishman explain the system as they understood it. After they had explained the provision for freedom after three Jovian years someone commented that it did not seem so bad, at least in comparison with the version they had read about on Earth.

“You have to remember that one Vajuvian year is equal to about 11.9 Earth years,” Dave said, “so that means it is nearly 36 years we are talking about, which is no picnic.”

“But the Vajuvians live about 10 to 12 Vajuvian years so they would still have considerable time to look forward to,” Dr. Werner said.

“Yes,” Clay Churchill agreed, “and since they are allowed to work extra to earn money to speed up this process they may possibly cut that in half. I must point out that it is still slavery and for the period that it lasts the master owns you body and soul. This means, for instance, that a female slave can be, and if she is desirable may very well be, required to submit to her master sexually and, as far as that goes, to anyone else he or she tells her to submit to. This can literally mean prostitution. Indeed, most of their prostitutes are slaves.”

“I wasn’t aware that they had prostitutes,” Diana Hunter said.

“Oh yes,” the Englishman replied. “They are called *cehos* or *sebs*. They have them for the convenience of such of their men as have no slaves and, for that matter, for slaves who can afford them. I might add that all of this goes for male slaves too.” He hesitated then continued, picking his words carefully for the subject he was getting into was a discussion that he would not normally have been having in mixed company.

“The Vajuvian attitude toward homosexual acts is perhaps a little different than the normal Earthly attitude. The person taking the dominant role is not considered to be committing a deviant act.”

“In other words,” John Monroe offered, “a slave owner can abuse his, or her, slaves without any stigma attaching.”

“Strange,” Diana Hunter said, “but I guess no stranger than a lot of our customs and beliefs on Earth. In any case what you have told us makes it that much more desirable that we manage to stay clear of the status of slave.”

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Especially since the Earth women probably would be, if nothing else, prized as conversation pieces, Dave thought to himself, curiosities to be trotted out at dinner parties and put on display to show off their small size and the other differences between them and Vajuvian women. But he did not express this thought out loud for fear of adding to the uneasiness of the women.

“Nevertheless,” he felt called upon to contribute, “should anyone find themselves in this situation remember that, libraries full of nineteenth century novels to the contrary notwithstanding, there is no fate worse than death. We should all resolve to follow three rules in such a case. Namely: survive, survive, and survive.”

“What he says is true,” the Englishman agreed, though casting a rather bemused glance at Dave for his rather stilted rhetoric. “It is neither a crime nor a sin to submit temporarily to overwhelming force. Remember the old saying that discretion is the better part of valor. Remember also what we have said previously about leaving no one behind. Just stay alive and sooner or later we will be back to free you.”

As soon as Dave had said his little speech and realized the words he had used, he cringed inwardly for it sounded pretentious to him and rang in his ears as totally out of character. Who did he think he was making speeches like that, he thought to himself: Winston Churchill? Oh well, he thought since he had not seen the bemused glance that Clay had given him, maybe no one will notice. Indeed he thought no one had until noon the next day. He was with a group having their mid-day break and Don Dale extended him a cup of *pecco* and asked him if he would like a cup to drink, drink, drink.

It continued like that all day but Dave thought it had subsided that evening when he got through the evening meal unscathed and was just sitting down to relax when the Triplets walked by and Jessie turned back to ask him if he would like to go with them for a jog jog, jog.

By this time it was beginning to get under his skin so he surprised her by accepting the invitation. After they were well underway he began to slowly pick up the pace figuring that they would feel compelled to keep up with him, senior citizen that he was, and by the time they returned to the sleeping quarters he knew that there were three young women who would have no trouble sleeping that night. But then he realized rather sadly that he would probably get no further invitations to run with them either.

The next morning he sought to rebuild his bridges, seeking out Jessie to contritely tell her that he had enjoyed the run and apologized if he set too fast a pace.

## INTERLUDE

She looked up at him then smiled and said, “I guess we may have had it coming.”

They learned many more things about the Vajuvians and their society over the next few weeks which it is not necessary to recount at this juncture. They will be revealed when and if they become necessary to the recounting of the events which followed.

After a short period the earthlings were given tasks to perform as their linguistic ability permitted. These mostly pertained to the chores necessary to maintain themselves, but they also performed jobs pertaining to the maintenance and upkeep of the royal household and the administrative offices housed in the palace.



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Another subject that frequently came up was their chances of a rescue from Earth and what their course of action should be if it became apparent there would be none or that at best it would be in the remote future.

Brad had been carrying his ‘beeper’ in his pocket when they were captured and hence it was one of the things that they had been able to salvage. It indicated that the radio beacon/SOS was working as programmed, but there was no sign that it had been picked up.

They had salvaged anything that the Vajuvians would allow them to when they were captured but this was not a whole lot. Their captors took whatever they fancied and would not let the Earthmen near anything which remotely resembled a weapon. Picking up something almost guaranteed that a Vajuvian would appropriate it for his own, so they managed to salvage only about a third of their stuff, maybe less.

Among the items they salvaged was about half of the printouts they had made of the data recorded by their instruments as they descended. They had two laptop computers with them when they had been captured but were unable to save either of them. Someone, Dave thought it was Linda Sanchez, said she had seen one of the Vajuvians pick up one of them and stuff it into his kit, but she wasn’t positive which Vajuvian it was and didn’t think she had seen him since they reached Pyhoqux. The Englishman said that Vajuvian might be stationed at or work in the mines in the mountains to the southwest, since some of the men in the scouting party had come from there. At any rate, whoever and wherever he was, he was equipped with state-of-art electronic equipment. The other laptop was presumably back there on the forest floor, although it could conceivably be hidden in KiMok’s laboratory. Dave had a suspicion that KiMok had some of their stuff that he was not telling them about while he tried to figure out what it was and how it worked. After Dave mentioned this to Clay Churchill and he thought about it, Clay was inclined to think there might be something to his suspicion.

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In any case, Brad Patman, Dr. Werner and Jim West had been trying to analyze the partial readouts for several days and came to report to Dan Owens as he sat around an evening campfire with Dave, the Englishman, Ben Sanchez and Don Dale.

Owens cocked an eyebrow and asked, "Well? I gather that you gentlemen have something to report about the printouts?"

"Nothing conclusive," Dr. Werner replied. "The data is too sketchy for that. Too much is missing. But we can make some fairly good guesses. Let Brad tell you, since he's the expert in this field."

The astronaut hesitated then laughed. "I'm not sure that I want the ball. As Karl says the data is incomplete and to some extent contradictory, but it seems to identify at least three and probably more separate layers of—" Brad hesitated looking for a word.

"I would just call them areas of interference," Jim West offered. "You *want* to call them mini-magnetic fields, but I don't think we can do that on our incomplete data."

Brad looked at West gratefully and added, "Jim's about right. What I can say is that each of these areas interfered with our instruments and I fear are preventing our signal from getting out."

"Or any getting in from Earth," added Dr. Werner.

Brad nodded agreement.

"So what you are saying in effect is," Dave said, "that as far as Earth is concerned, we suddenly disappeared from their instruments four months ago when we entered the Jovian atmosphere and were crushed into something the size of a spittoon?"

"Colorful, but not inappropriate," Dr. Werner admitted.

"If they didn't detect the shuttle explosion and think that was the *Jules Verne*," West added in his matter-of-fact west Texas accent.

"So then there is no reason to suppose that anyone is even looking for a signal now, even if we could get one out, which we can't?" Dave asked.

Jim West nodded agreement. "It's amazing what a clear insight an Aggie education will give you."

"I wish I was all fogged up," Dave replied glumly.

"Where are these 'areas'?" Owens asked, with his test pilot's pragmatism.

"It's hard to pinpoint them exactly because we have data missing in between some of them but the lowest one is no more than two hundred miles above 'mean sea level', if there is any such thing, and maybe as low as one hundred. There is another out in the area of one thousand miles and another at around five thousand," Brad answered, in his 'Lon Gisland' accent.

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“And there may be others,” Dr. Werner added, “almost like the rings of Saturn. I would guess that there are probably several more.”

“And you remember how wrong we were about the rings of Saturn,” Jim West added laconically.

“If we move the radio up here would there be any chance of getting a signal out?” Don Dale asked.

“*Quién sabe?*<sup>1</sup>” Jim West replied. “Logically, it doesn’t seem likely, but I would sure try it.”

“Could you somehow adjust your signal to penetrate, or somehow wriggle its way through, those belts?” Owens queried.

Brad Patman sort of hunched his shoulders, cocked his head to one side, scrunched up his face and made little circular motions with his hands as if he were trying to pass a kidney stone and said, “Perhaps. We’ve discussed that. There is some data in the ship’s main computer, if we could get to it, that might help us to study the ‘belts’ and adjust the signal to attempt that.”

“But, then there might be no one listening on Earth on those ‘adjusted’ frequencies,” Jim West put in.

“Killjoy,” Don Dale muttered. West shrugged his shoulders.

“Do you want to keep looking at it?” inquired Owens.

“I’m not going anywhere,” West replied. The others concurred.

Don Dale asked if the readouts showed how high the atmosphere went. To this Jim West made a grimace.

“I guess it depends on your definition of atmosphere,” he responded. “There are too many missing pieces of the data to give a definitive answer. We’re thirty miles or so above mean sea level here so it obviously extends this far. But under most any definition it has to go on out at least a couple of hundred miles and I, personally, would say at least five hundred miles and probably more like one thousand. Once again the main computer probably has the data on that. What do you gentlemen think?”

The last was directed at Brad Patman and Dr. Werner who more or less agreed with him. Or probably more accurately could not argue conclusively for any alternate hypothesis.

“That’s a far cry from thirty thousand or so, isn’t it?” Dave asked. “What accounts for the difference between the two?”

“Faulty data I would think, caused probably in the main by the ‘areas of interference’ we’ve previously talked about,” Jim West guessed, “but if you want solid theory to account for the solid ground underneath our feet, don’t look at me. I’m with Clay; I’m just glad it’s there. Tackling that question is going

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1. Spanish phrase meaning: Who knows?

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to be like hunting coyotes with dogs in the Pecos River bottom where you used to live. It won't be long before your pack of physicists are all chasing different coyotes, or theories, and it'll take a week, or years in this case, to just round them all back up."

Dave laughed. "Yeah, I know what you mean about the coyote hunt because we used to have half-dead hounds straggle in to our farm for days every time some rich oilman from Midland would come out to run them."

He added, "I've contrived a theory about Vajuvian physics which I'll tell you all about sometime when everyone needs a good laugh. I call it the Redneck Theory of Time and Gravity. Or you could call it the Alfred E. Newman Theory to distinguish it from the Albert Einstein Theory."

No amount of persuasion could get him to reveal the Redneck Theory of Time and Gravity even after Dr. Werner assured him that he would not steal it and publish a paper on it, at least not without giving him his due credit. All he would tell them was it had to do with the gas volcano which KiMok had confirmed did exist.

After Brad, Karl and Jim had left to go back to their printouts the others sat in silence, each in his own world for a few minutes before the silence was broken.

"Where does that leave us then?" Don Dale finally inquired.

"I've thought a lot about this contingency," Dan Owens said. "We wouldn't have much choice in the matter. We would have to do whatever was necessary to survive and build a viable society that could survive until contact could be reestablished, however many years or generations that might take."

They had faced some decisions bearing on The Question, such as when they buried the *Jules Verne* and embarked on their expedition to search for materials.

They had more random discussions on various questions related to long-time residence on Vaju with little result before Dan Owens and the Englishman approached a table out in the courtyard one day. Dave and Don Dale were seated there, drinking *pecco* and talking. Dave looked up curiously.

"Dave," the colonel said as he arrived, "you know all those question you've been posing about what we will do if it looks like we are long-term or permanent residents on Jupiter?"

Dave nodded.

"Well, Clay and I have solved them," the astronaut continued.

Dave raised an eyebrow. He seemed to recall raising quite a few questions.

"We've appointed you as a committee to handle them." Owens turned and started to leave.

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“Hey, wait!” the surprised Texan said. “What do you mean you’ve appointed me to handle them?”

The Iowan turned and replied with a straight face, “I asked Clay who he thought could handle it, and we both agreed that you were the perfect choice.”

The Englishman nodded his agreement when Dave turned to him with a look of dismay on his face.

“But, do you really think I can come up with answers for all those questions,” Dave asked, “answers that everybody will accept?”

He looked from one to the other of the two older men standing there smiling at him. He could not tell how serious they were though there was obviously a substantial element of teasing.

“Maybe not,” Owens conceded more seriously, “but you can at least sit down and try to think of all the most important questions and organize them, with suggested answers if you have them, so that maybe we can consider them in a more orderly fashion.”

After the other men had gone, Dave looked over to see Don Dale grinning at him.

“You were never in the army, were you?” Don asked. Knowing the answer he continued, “If you had been you would have known that asking too many questions was the equivalent of volunteering.”

“How about making smart remarks, fellow committee member?” Dave rejoined and ignore the protests that resulted. He knew his friend would gladly help him. He also drafted Nellie for a couple of reasons. One was that there might be something that a woman might think of that a man would not. But the main reason was simply that he had found her to be very sharp and well organized.

A few days later, he presented his outline to a group including the astronauts, Clay Churchill, John and Pam Monroe, Don Dale, Nellie Hall, Jim West and Bryan Scott.

Outline:

I. Survival

A. Immediate and short term

1. Food
2. Shelter
3. Protection
  - a. From animals
  - b. From other “humans”
  - c. Medical

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- B. Long term
  - 1. Food
  - 2. Shelter
  - 3. Protection
    - a. From animals
    - b. From other “humans”
    - c. Medical
- C. Future generations, if any
- D. “Prime Directive?”

The first two items, A and B, caused much discussion and many things had to be put on hold. Obviously, whether they were to exist inside a Vajuvian society or on their own was a factor. The finite supply of their ammunition and other Earth supplies was a concern. They also had a finite number (1) of doctors.

Many other items were brought up, things that had to be dealt with on an ongoing basis, but it was the final two items that caused the most concern.

If they could not get off the planet they had a finite amount of another vital item, people. Since the Doctors Monroe and Paula Taylor did not think it likely that they and the Vajuvians could reproduce cross-species, the Earthlings had a very limited gene pool for reproducing.

“Do we have enough people to have a viable population?” Dan Owens asked.

“I seem to remember reading somewhere that you would need a minimum of sixteen people,” Dave said, “and we have twenty-two, fourteen men and eight women. Whether you needed eight of each sex or not I don’t know.”

“John? Paula? Pam?” Owens inquired with uplifted eyebrow.

“I yield to the lady with the PhD in biology,” John Monroe said.

“That’s a cop out if ever I heard one,” Paula Taylor said. “What you are saying is that you don’t remember something you last studied in college any better than I do. I don’t think the figure of sixteen is written in stone, it’s just somebody’s idea of a number that could give you an acceptably low level of inbreeding, whatever may be the definition of acceptable.”

“I plead guilty to the cop out charge,” Dr. Monroe said with a laugh. “It seems I’m a G.P. now but until we lifted off I was a neurosurgeon. I haven’t read much about genetics since I got out of school. But I think Paula is basically right. We have a dangerously small universe of genetic choices, and the eight women would be the most critical number. Would you agree, Pam?”

Pamela Monroe nodded her agreement.

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“Are you saying that every female would have to have children by every man and vice versa?” asked the Englishman with obvious concern infusing his voice with trepidation, furrowing his brow and casting a shadow on his usually unflappable disposition.

“That would get an immediate absolute maximum dispersal of genes,” Paula Taylor replied. “If you don’t want an unacceptable amount of aberrations and birth defects you have to have a lot of diversity. Of course,” she laughed, “I personally would not be thrilled about having fourteen kids, and I’m sure that would be a widely held attitude among the female contingent. But the fact is, we don’t really need an immediate dispersal of the gene pool.”

“I’m glad to hear you say that,” Nellie said. “I like kids, but—”

“There are some other questions or comments I have on that,” Dave put in. “The least of them is that we may have some women who do not have many child-bearing years left. We also have some blood relationships that preclude some pairings. But the biggest stumbling block is that we are dealing with human beings, not cattle. Some of our people are more religious than others, or there may be other cultural considerations.”

“Yes,” Paula Taylor agreed, “what we are delicately dancing around with euphemisms gets right down to the most intimate of relationships.”

“I would never agree to any kind of forced ‘pairing’,” Dan Owens stated.

Dave said, “Many of us were brought up in a very religious atmosphere, and in addition, we have two married couples here. Most of the other men have wives, children and even grandchildren back on Earth.”

“I can’t speak for anyone else,” the Englishman put in, “but I am as monogamous as you can get. This is a very unusual situation, and I think we do need to give some consideration to survival of the species.”

“I think our decision would have to be very carefully presented and everyone would have to understand that some could not in good conscience accept anything but monogamy,” Dave said.

“I think,” the biologist replied, “we need to try to hash this out. Maybe between the three of our dusty Genetics 101 files we can remember enough to give competent advice to ensure survival of our species.”

Don Dale stated, “I think Paula is right. We don’t have to immediately disperse our gene pool, just make sure our meager supply doesn’t lose any of its diversity.”

They all pretty much agreed with this analysis. The greater consideration would be the human factor not the genetic factor, since there was no hurry to procreate. Hopefully a few generations would diversify the gene pool sufficiently to preserve the race.

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Dan Owens then made one of his rare jokes. He stated that he wasn't planning to throw a wife swapping party then added after a cunning pause, at least not any time soon. This brought a tension-easing round of laughter from the entire group.

"As for the 'Prime Directive'," Owens said, "my name is not Kirk, nor is it Picard, and I can't slap myself on my chest and say, 'Beam me up, Scotty,' and suddenly appear one hundred miles away and until I can I'm not going to worry overly much about a 'Prime Directive' I didn't swear to obey. I am going to obey the Prime Directive that is imprinted in my DNA which pertains to the preservation of my species and of this individual."

With that uncustomarily long speech, the colonel adjourned the meeting by getting to his feet and moving away.

"Feel like starting a new world, Dave?" Don Dale asked. "What would we call it?"

"Earth Colony One?" Dave inquiringly answered. "Funny, I don't feel like Adam, or even a Pilgrim."

"Oh, I think you would look cute in a black hat with a buckle on it," someone said behind him. He turned to see Cindy West strolling toward them.

"I usually feel more like the turkey," Dave responded, "especially where women are concerned."

"You may not feel he's so cute when you hear that he has just volunteered to single-handedly populate this world with humans if we are stranded," Paula Taylor teased.

"Oh?" Nellie said, eyebrows going up as she joined into the teasing of her bashful uncle.

"Is that what you were doing back there at the stream that day then, Dave, shopping for a harem?" Cindy West asked him. "And all the time I thought you were just ogling us."

Dave's face began to turn its usual shade of red.

"It seems to me that it's women that are in short supply," Nellie said, going along with the gag. "If there are to be any harems then we ought to be the ones doing the shopping."

"Nellie's right, Dave. Show us your resume, and we'll take your application and call you if we need you," Cindy West said sending Dave into his usual red-faced retreat, this time to another table.

Dave looked up a few minutes later from where he sat alone, silently drinking *pecco*, to see his niece fill her cup.

"*Et tu, Nellie?*" he said.

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She sat down beside him and with a smile patted him on the knee. “Sorry about that. I got carried away. Peer pressure, you know. Anyway, you’re so easy to tease where women are concerned, it’s hard to resist the temptation.”

“I’ve notice that,” he replied, wryly.

With a solemn expression, Nellie said, “I think our species will survive here even if we just let nature take its course. And if it doesn’t, there’s plenty of our species on earth.”

“But I wouldn’t want to be the last surviving member of my species on this planet,” Dave mumbled.

“That would be lonely,” Nellie agreed, “but I don’t think that will happen. Diana likes you, you know.”

Dave raised his eyebrows in disbelief. Nellie nodded.

Dave liked Nellie’s calm, grounded disposition and intelligence. With one soft statement she could bring a sharp focus on the crux of a problem or present a neglected, but relevant, point of view. He also liked talking to her, possibly because of the connections with Earth and possibly because she was about the only pretty woman he could talk to so easily. They sat and talked of not much of anything in a relaxed manner for a few minutes before she got up to go turn in.

“Don’t worry,” she said as she squeezed his knee before she left, “I’ll save a place for you in my harem.”

He could even laugh with her without blushing. It would be ironic if the necessities of the survival of the species on this foreign planet brought about the end of his problems dealing with women, he thought, but that’ll be the day.



## A VAJUVIAN MEDICINE SHOW

The weeks were full and interesting to Dave and his companions, and they nearly forgot the sword hanging over their heads. It seemed to become more remote somehow as they became more acquainted with their captors and their customs. It seemed impossible that these friendly people could, in the end, sell them like so much livestock.

There was a more immediate cause for anxiety, however, and that was the condition of Don Dale's health which was deteriorating at an increasing rate. John Monroe could tell them only that his liver was not functioning properly causing what was the equivalent of chronic dysentery with the accompanying steady deterioration. He could not tell them what was the cause nor could he do anything to stop it nor, seemingly, even slow its pace.

"If I was in a modern hospital with all its equipment and diagnostic capabilities I could probably ascertain the cause pretty quickly, or find someone who could, but under these conditions—" His voice trailed away.

"Is it some kind of germ or virus?" Dave asked anxiously.

"I don't know for sure, Dave," his former roommate told him. "I've tried every kind of antibiotic we've got, and we have a lot, without any effect at all."

"Could it be some kind of Jovian bug?" Owens suggested.

"If it is why hasn't it affected the rest of us?" Monroe countered. "We wouldn't have any more resistance to an alien bug than he does."

"Could he have an immune deficiency, like AIDS, causing him to be vulnerable to some kind of Jovian bug while the rest of us are not?" the Englishman asked.

"I considered that," the doctor replied. "I don't think so. For one thing he's not in one of the high-risk groups for AIDS, which doesn't mean he couldn't get it of course, but he has none of the other symptoms of the disease's profile.

"I'm totally frustrated," Monroe continued. "It's like I've been yanked out of the twentieth century and plopped down a hundred years earlier. I know what

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I need to do to diagnose the problem, but I do not have the tools with which to do the job nor the specialists to lean on.”

It was painful for Dave to watch his friend, undoubtedly the greatest friend he had ever had and one of such a long duration, wasting away before his eyes. It did not help a great deal that Don rarely let it get to him but almost always presented a cheerful face and maintained a lively interest in the events unfolding. As an old science fiction addict he never ceased to revel in the fact that he had in effect been granted the privilege of living it.

Some days later the usual group were in KiMok’s lab with the Vajuvians trying to wheedle, cajole, coax or trick the location of their home state out of the earthlings when a soldier came in and had a brief conversation with ToNas after which ToNas came back and addressed the group.

“Tomorrow you will be treated to one of the great events in our usually uneventful lives,” he said. “We are being visited by a group of *bazeqs*.”

At their blank looks he shook his head. “I could almost believe that you are from another world if you do not know who the *bazeqs* are.”

“That is what we have been trying to tell you for *kus*,” the Englishman said. “We don’t know who these people are although I have heard the word mentioned a time or two.”

“They are the glue that binds Vaju together,” KiMok said. “They are groups of traders who roam at will between the cities and nations of Vaju. War has unfortunately long been the natural state on Vaju. Long ago it was recognized that trade was necessary, even between warring states. The *bazeqs* perform this vital function. As time has passed they have become almost sacrosanct. They have evolved a code of neutrality and no civilized state will violate this nor try to get them to do so. Not that they are defenseless, for there are bandits and semi-civilized tribes that they must be ready to defend themselves against and they are formidable fighters, but no civilized state would attack them for to do so would mean that no *bazeqs* would trade with them and a vital part of their economy would be strangled.”

“What KiMok says is true,” ToNas said, “but they are much more than that. For they also provide a much needed change of pace in the lives of the people. They are legendary traders, but they are also showmen and they carry news and gossip. When they come to a city, especially a smaller one or one as isolated as we, it is like a holiday or a carnival for everyone. But you will see first thing tomorrow morning. You will all be allowed to go and see them make their entrance at the trading center outside the walls.”

“We will look forward to it,” the Englishman said.

## A VAJUVIAN MEDICINE SHOW

ToNas and KiMok arrived at the Earthlings' quarters just as they were finishing the morning meal the following day. They told them that everyone would be allowed to go and see the *bazeqs*. They would go in several groups, each accompanied by guards or other Vajuvian acquaintances. ToNas and KiMok accompanied Dave, the Englishman, Ben Sanchez and Don Dale.

As they moved through the streets of the city they found themselves part of a steady stream of people heading toward the Traders' Gate. There was an air of excitement and anticipation on all sides.

As they went through the Traders' Gate they entered a place set aside for people to set up booths and offer various items for sale or barter, in short, a bazaar or in modern vernacular a flea market. Dave estimated that it was about one hundred yards square. It was bordered on two sides by the city walls, which were some eighteen or twenty feet high. A third side was closed in by permanent booths and the fourth was open.

The area was crowded with spectators and also with vendors who had hastened to set up their wares to try to benefit from the crowds caused by the *bazeqs*' coming. He saw several other groups of earthlings scattered among the crowd and several Vajuvians he knew including, and even the sight of him made him nervous, IpuZob and some of his cronies. It might be said here that IpuZob seemed to prove the old earthly saying that birds of a feather flock together for, with few exceptions, his companions seemed to be of similar character and disposition.

They had been waiting some thirty minutes and the crowd had begun to get impatient when out of the corner of his eye Dave saw something move along the top of the wall to their left. He turned to see what it was but it was gone. Possibly, he thought, they had gone into the tower on the corner. Then he took a couple of involuntary steps backward at the sight of what emerged from behind that tower. It was an animal which he had never seen before, at least not close up, and it was walking on the ground, not along the top of the wall. It was a huge, four-legged, herbivorous (he hoped) animal standing eighteen to twenty feet tall at the shoulder with a neck of perhaps eight feet in length topped by a head fully five feet long so that it could easily browse out of trees twenty-five to thirty feet in height, if it was a browser, and Dave was sure it must be since he did not see how it could feed off of the ground.

Atop this beast mounted in a saddle just in front of the shoulders and looking ridiculously small was a Vajuvian man who was obviously guiding this apparently domesticated beast. He had seen his first *bazeq*.

## VAJU: THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM

After this beast, called a *noxepi* by KiMok, came seven more similar animals and behind, around and in front of them came countless other beasts of a wonderful variety, some beasts of burden and some serving the function of horses, carrying *bazeqs* on their backs. Some of these latter looked similar to horses, some were antelope like and most unusual. Most frightening to Dave was a flightless bird large enough to carry a man on its back armed with a huge beak which proclaimed its carnivorous nature. He noticed that they had their beaks muzzled, apparently so that they could not open them wide enough to attack anyone.

The various beasts' riders were as unusual and colorful to the humans as the beasts themselves. They were almost all similar to the Vajuvians they knew although occasionally were seen some that were shorter and more powerfully built. They were all gaily caparisoned and most were well armed, nearly all with swords of one kind or another, some with spears, lassos, bolo-like weapons and other apparent throwing weapons.

Also in evidence were numerous examples of a kind of Vajuvian crossbow which Dave had never seen before. When he questioned ToNas about it he said the *bazeqs* were masters of this deadly weapon called a *lnak*. ToNas' people did not use it widely, preferring the longbow or *xabhak*, but the *bazeqs* were famous for firing the crossbow with deadly accuracy from the backs of their mounts at a dead run.

As they were ending this conversation they heard someone shout ToNas' name and turned to see a handsome Vajuvian mounted on a likewise handsome horse-like animal come galloping toward them. As he came to a sudden stop right in front of them Dave saw that the "horse," called a *kabi*, had a small horn-like growth on his nose and two similar horns above his eyes.

"MiDar!" ToNas exclaimed in recognition as the other man leaped to the ground even before his mount came to a stop. "I did not know that you were with this group."

"Yes, ToNas," the other replied. "My uncle is the leader of this *hfaaq*<sup>1</sup> and when I learned that he was coming to your city I prevailed upon he and my father to let me come with them so that I could see you again."

"And the fact that you also would see SuMic again had nothing to do with it?" ToNas teased, referring to his young sister.

"Well, that thought may have crossed my mind a time or two," his friend said with a grin. He cast a curious glance at the earthmen whose unique appearance was attracting a great deal of attention from the strangers.

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1. A group of *bazeqs*.

## A VAJUVIAN MEDICINE SHOW

Noticing his friend's look ToNas introduced him to the earthmen and told him that they were strangers without going into details. These came later as they spent many long hours together over the next several *kus*.

But the present was taken up with the spectacle of the *bazeqs'* arrival. Each rider tried to outdo all of the previous ones in their horsemanship (if it could be called that, considering their mounts) and acrobatic stunts. Then came acrobats, dancers and other performers as they entertained the local people to draw crowds so that they might entice them to purchase or barter for their goods later. While the entertainment was going on the unearthly beasts of burden were being unburdened and booths and stalls set up with the goods of the traders. These were soon thronged with customers eager to trade for this merchandise from other places.

The earthlings too were enchanted with the goods displayed and the excitement of the event which broke up the routine that they had fallen into lately. The only rain that fell on Dave's parade was the occasional glimpse of IpuZob and some of his henchmen. The mere sight of him was enough to make Dave uneasy due to his display of malevolence toward them.

After a time they had to find a table at a temporary eating establishment set up in the shadow of the walls so that Don Dale could rest while they ate and drank some of the delectable treats available for this special occasion.

Eventually, KiMok and Ben Sanchez accompanied Don back to their quarters as he was obviously becoming very weary. After they had gone MiDar commented on his appearance, and ToNas and the others explained his baffling ailment which did not respond to any treatment and sadly described his seemingly relentless decline. MiDar remained thoughtfully silent through the narration as the genuine concern of all them, including ToNas, was in evidence.

Over the succeeding *kus* they had many amiable conversations with the congenial young *bazeq*. They still had their sessions with KiMok and ToNas, but they also accompanied ToNas as he entertained his friend and a friendship developed between the young trader and the earthlings also. The only thing that cast a pall on the proceedings was the continued deterioration of Don Dale's health.

As they sat around a table one evening at the inn where MiDar had taken up temporary residence he brought up the subject.

"Is there no change in DonDI's condition?" he asked.

"No," the Englishman said. "None for the better, that is."

MiDar was silent for a moment and then asked ToNas, "Do you remember the tales of *Melnor*?"

## VAJU: THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM

“The City of Healing?” ToNas asked. “Of course, I remember them from childhood.”

“What is this Melnor?” Dave asked.

“It is a fabulous, and I fear mythical, city whose citizens specialize in the healing arts. It is said that there is nothing they cannot cure,” KiMok replied. “It is even rumored that they have conquered Death itself.”

“But it is, of course, just a child’s fairy tale,” ToNas said as he noted a slight look of hope come over Dave’s face.

“It has been my experience that there is often some portion of truth in such tales,” Churchill put in. “In Africa there have been many instances of a fabulous native cure having been found to have some basis in fact, usually due to their use of some native plant with a drug in it not yet known to Western science.”

MiDar had remained silent during this exchange but now began to talk in a guarded manner.

“There is more than a little truth in the rumor of Melnor,” he said, “for such a city does exist and I have been there.”

Noting the Vajuvians’ looks of skepticism he continued, “They do indeed do marvelous things there. I do not know about the rumors of the conquest of Death itself, but I do know that when we were there we had a man who had been bitten by a *kwalneck* which, as you know, is a slow and certain death and they cured him in a matter of hours.”

“If there is such a place why do we not all know where it is?” KiMok asked, skeptically. “It would be world famous.”

“And it would probably be the object of attempted conquest,” the Englishman put in.

“Exactly,” MiDar said. “For this reason they keep its location as secret as possible. They are also extremely fierce in defending it, using weapons which no one else has. And also they use the threat of withholding their skills from the leading families of the cities which know of them, which they now restrict their practice to in the main.”

“Could they help Don?” Dave asked hopefully.

“I cannot say for certain,” the trader replied, “but just from what I have personally seen and the tales of other people whom I believe to be reliable I would be surprised if they could not.”

“But would they treat him? You said they only treated the ruling families of cities who knew of their existence,” Dave persisted.

“I think they probably would if ToNas’ father requested it,” MiDar said. “Also, they are said to be intrigued by mysteries, and I think DonDI’s appearance

## A VAJUVIAN MEDICINE SHOW

alone would intrigue them even if he did not have this mysterious ailment you describe.”

“How would we go about it?” Churchill queried. “Can we take him to them?”

“No, you would probably be rebuffed,” MiDar replied. “But if you can get ZaSox to formally request it we can take DonDl with us when we leave. We will be going to Melnor in a few *kus*.”

“That would be great!” Dave exclaimed, feeling a leap of elation which he had not felt in weeks.

“Yes,” the Englishman said. He hesitated then added more gravely, “If Don can last that long.”

This sobered Dave up for he recognized that this could be a factor considering Don’s present condition. It would be doubly tragic, he thought, for Don to die when a cure was apparently so close.

“I will see ZaSox tonight,” ToNas said, “and I guarantee you that you will have the request tomorrow morning. Can you persuade your uncle to cut your stay short since time is of the essence?”

“I will try. We are almost ready to go anyway, I think. I was trying to think of a way to delay it because of SuMic but I will see what I can do,” Midar said.

ToNas was as good as his word. The next morning Dan Owens, Dave, the Englishman and Don Dale were called to ZaSox’ quarters. ToNas and MiDar were there with another *bazeq* who turned out to be MiDar’s uncle. ToNas’ father waved away their formal greetings to tell them that he had made the formal request they desired and that KaTan had agreed to take Don with them. They would leave in two days’ time and should be in Melnor in about three *kus*. Dave hoped that would be soon enough. He felt it would be since it would be only about nine earth days and the look of hope which had flashed over Don’s face when they had told him of the prospect made him feel that his will to live would be bolstered enough for that to be sufficient.

MiDar said that in the event that the treatment was successful, which he had every confidence it would be, he and a small detachment of guards would escort Don back to Pyhoqux. Dave could not help but note that this would give MiDar yet another opportunity to visit with SuMic.

Two mornings later the party of earthlings stood with MiDar beside a huge *noxepiti* which knelt on the ground. They were saying goodbye to Don Dale before he mounted the beast. When at last it was Dave’s turn he did not know how to express the emotions he felt. For he could not have felt closer to the tall, blond Texan if he was his brother. He felt trepidation at the departure of

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his good friend, but for the first time in many weeks he felt that there was real hope for him and in that regard he was happy to see him go. He wished he could accompany him but neither the *bazeqs* nor ToNas' people would allow that. He could only grip his hand in both of his own and wish him the best of luck. But Don knew Dave better than anyone else and he knew that the sparsity of his words, as well as a faint glistening in his eyes, indicated the emotion he felt so he responded in kind.

Don climbed up a ladder which was let down from a basket which was suspended from the side of a saddle on the great beast's back. Dave noted that he looked and moved better than he had in weeks, the mere extension of some kind of hope apparently having bolstered his body's forces to resist the encroaching disease.

As he settled down in his seat in the basket Don said with a smile, which used to be his customary expression, "I'll see you in a few weeks and tell you all about the trip." Then as the beast lurched to his feet, he called to ToNas, "Are you sure this thing isn't carnivorous?"

"Quite sure," the Vajuvian replied with a smile.

"Be sure and fasten your seat belt," Dave said, "and keep your return ticket."

As Dave responded to Don's wave he thought with irony, I sure do have a way with words when it counts! It seems like my tongue gets paralyzed, and my brain likewise, when it comes time to express my feelings, whether it is to family, friend or female. He shook his head in disgust and then was almost trampled by a pair of riders mounted on *kabis*. He saw with surprise that one of them was IpuZob. He turned to ToNas with a question in his eye.

The Vajuvian prince replied to the unspoken question, "He is accompanying them to one of the cities to the south, delivering some message for his father. JixIb had my father request it for IpuZob's protection." He shrugged his shoulders to show his powerlessness in the situation.

Dave turned back to look at the receding figures. He guessed it was really all right since Don had the protection of the traders but he could not shake a certain uneasiness. He had much rather IpuZob had remained in Pyhoqux, but as far from him as possible.

The tension seemed to ease for the earthlings over the next few weeks perhaps partly due to the absence of IpuZob who seemed to have a knack for stirring up trouble. JixIb seemed to have forgotten that they existed. Dave figured that he just did not see anything to gain one way or the other so lost interest in them. He mentioned this to ToNas one day.

## A VAJUVIAN MEDICINE SHOW

“Contrariwise,” KiMok, who had been listening, put in. “If he sees any gain to be had from accepting you as legitimate guests he will take that position. He has a single-minded focus on his ambition and everything else must be bent to fit into the shape best calculated to further it.”

ToNas considered whether he should take advantage of IpuZob’s absence for this reason and push his advocacy of recognizing their legitimacy but decided it was a little too soon. He and KiMok thought they ought to introduce them around to the others of the palace crowd to stimulate interest in their cause before doing so.

In furtherance of this aim ToNas took them to dinners and entertainments put on by his father and others of the ruling class at every opportunity. ZaSox seemed to take a great interest in speaking with them to hear more of their accounts of their adventures and their people’s customs.

At one of these affairs ToNas introduced them to a strikingly attractive woman, LiMac, who was the hostess. She took a lively interest in them and had Dave and the Englishman placed on either side of her. Dave thought her interest was mainly in the Englishman but when Churchill, though courteous, seemed to be immune to her not inconsiderable charms, which were generously revealed by her evening wear, she eventually turned to Dave and lavished them upon him for most of the evening.

When eventually the lengthy meal was finished and the crowd left their places to mingle he rejoined the Englishman, Ben Sanchez and Diana Hunter who were standing talking to KiMok. He was a little perplexed by Diana’s actions. She greeted him rather coolly and then drifted away to join Dan Owens and a couple of the others of their party nearby. He stared after Diana and shook his head. He guessed he would never understand women and began to question KiMok about their hostess.

KiMok answered his query by saying that LiMac was from one of the wealthiest and most distinguished families and was independently wealthy in her own right. He went on to say that at one time it was thought that she and ToNas would marry but ToNas eventually broke it off.

“Why would he do that?” Dave asked. “She seems very personable, friendly and intelligent as well as having other good points too obvious to mention.”

“I noticed you appraising those obviously unmentionable good points,” Ben said grinning. “It took you long enough to make the appraisal.”

“Would you have me insult our hostess by rushing off?” Dave countered, somewhat defensively.

The Englishman laughed, “No, of course not. We realize it was all in the cause of diplomacy; the close proximity of a beautiful woman who is giving

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you her full attention had nothing to do with it, but you may have to use all that diplomacy and considerable more to get back on good terms with a certain journalist.”

So that’s what that was all about, Dave thought, looking over to where Diana stood. To cover up his confusion he repeated his question to KiMok.

“She is everything you said,” the scientist answered, “and more. But this party pretty well typifies her life. She does little else but use her wealth to make her life as pleasant as possible. Don’t misunderstand me; she is not an evil person, nor cruel. She does not mistreat her slaves. But her life is basically a pursuit of pleasure in all its forms, and in the end, ToNas did not believe that she would be willing to make a commitment to pursue it with him alone and he would accept nothing less.”

Dave could see where this would bother the strait-laced ToNas. Her lifestyle did seem rather hedonistic if this was typical of it. For instance he had never been to a topless bar or restaurant (he was, after all, a teetotaler), before tonight that is. And the dancers who entertained made the food servers seem over dressed by the time they had finished their entertainment. Not that he had noted that any of the visitors had seemed inclined to complain.

As far as Dave was concerned LiMac could invite him back any time, and he would be happy to do the right, diplomatic thing.

Another three weeks passed pleasantly for the visitors. ToNas indicated that he was about ready to press his father for a decision to accept them as legitimate guests, and he had little doubt that he would do so since it did not seem that JixIb would vigorously oppose them.

## OUT OF THE FRYING PAN

Several of the earthlings were walking with ToNas through a throng of people in the palace courtyard when Dave heard a familiar and unwelcome voice. It sounded like IpuZob. It was. He was apparently regaling some acquaintances (Dave doubted that many people qualified as real friends of the Vajuvian) with an account of his journey from which he had apparently just returned.

Almost against his will Dave felt himself drawn closer to his enemy to see if he had anything to say about how Don had fared. IpuZob saw him but pointedly ignored him and continued his obviously inflated and self-serving account. At last Dave could wait no longer and interjected a question.

“What happened to Don? Did he get to his destination all right? And if so how did he fare?” Dave inquired as civilly as he could. “Did he return with you?”

IpuZob stared coldly at him and then a slow smile came over his face as he replied, “Oh, him? He died.”

Dave was stunned. It was as if he had received a slap in the face. He had been so very hopeful. The Vajuvian’s response had stunned him and his face showed it.

IpuZob’s smile broadened as he saw this. He continued, “Why are you concerned about that *shatung*? Vaju is better off without him.” *Shatung* is a Vajuvian epithet which has no direct translation into English but which is intended on Vaju to convey a combination of the absolute worst in ancestry and character; it is the most vile and most vulgar of all Vajuvian insults.

Dave continued to stare into the grinning face of the Vajuvian for perhaps two or three seconds and then suddenly he was consumed by a fierce and unheeding rage against him as the focus of all their troubles. For one of the first times since he was a child he completely lost control and launched himself upon the large man without any thought of consequences. If he had actually had any thought at that moment, which he did not, it would have been that whatever the

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consequences he had to suffer for this action it would be worth it if he succeeded in throttling the life out of the malevolent being in front of him.

There was a space of two or three shocked seconds in which everyone else seemed paralyzed. In that time Dave bore the larger man down to the ground rocking him with a series of blows to the head and other vulnerable areas. The Vajuvians nearby reacted and pried him loose giving him a pretty thorough pummeling in the process. It seemed that he might be slain on the spot when Matthew Bell and the Englishman entered the fray pulling men off of him and setting off a general melee which lasted for a couple of minutes with, Dave thought, several earthlings involved. They were not all men. He saw Nellie trip IpuZob up as he tried to bring his sword into use.

The whole thing was broken up by the arrival of a host of palace guards led by BeLin, the commander. ToNas, who had a look of despair on his face, also helped restore order. When all was quiet again BeLin conferred with several people either involved or who were spectators, including ToNas, and then took all the earthlings present into custody and prepared to take them away. Before he did ToNas spoke to them briefly and sadly.

“You have all been arrested for assaulting one of the royal family. I think that probably all but Dave, Matt and Clay will be released. I will do what I can and talk to you as soon as possible.”

They were then hurried away under heavy guard, not back to the familiar quarters, but into the palace itself and down some stairs to some cells which apparently were the Vajuvian equivalent of dungeons. Dave, Matt and the Englishman were put into one and the others, Nellie, Ben and Jim, into another.

As the door clanged shut with a ring of finality Dave turned to the others and said, “Well, I did it this time, didn’t I?”

“I believe that you did, Dave,” the Englishman replied quietly.

“I am sorry I got you involved,” Dave added apologetically. “I didn’t mean to get anyone else in trouble. Actually, I didn’t think at all, just reacted to his insult. It all just seemed to be the last straw and something snapped. My only regret, aside from getting you all in dutch, is that I didn’t succeed in killing him.”

“Don’t apologize; we were Don’s friends too,” Bell said.

“It would have happened sooner or later,” Churchill agreed. “Men like IpuZob rarely die of natural causes and are mourned by few.”

“But now what happens to us?” Dave wondered.

“Nothing good, I’m sure,” the Englishman replied. “I doubt that ToNas can help us since we seem to have violated a sacred law.” He was walking around the cell examining it closely.

## OUT OF THE FRYING PAN

“And people who have cells like these often have novel and unpleasant methods of dealing with the people imprisoned in them.” Clay smiled at them. “Not that I wish to scare you.”

“You didn’t have to,” Dave replied. “I was already in that state.”

The Englishman laughed. “That’s natural enough but, whatever their plans are for us, I don’t plan to cooperate.”

The other two looked at their cellmate and drew some encouragement from him, for bleak as it might seem they had seen enough of the Englishman not to underestimate what he might find it possible to do.

When light first started to come in through the small window high on the back wall some guards came and brought food and water to them. It was probably not bad for dungeon cuisine.

Soon thereafter the door opened again and ToNas came in. The door shut behind him. The earthmen waited for him to speak.

“I have talked to my father,” he said shaking his head, “but there is very little that I can do. By attacking the person of a member of the royal family, which IpuZob is, though indirectly related, you have committed a crime against the state. It does not matter that most of the populace would have been happy for the attack to succeed. You will stand trial, and I am sure that you will be convicted.”

“And the penalty is death,” the Englishman said.

ToNas nodded. “It is automatic. This is a holdover from the laws of the Old Country. There are no extenuating circumstances. It is all black and white.”

“What about the others?” Dave asked.

“That will depend upon the evidence given,” ToNas replied. “From what I saw I do not think anyone else will be charged with a capital crime. Their involvement was such that I think they will receive little or no punishment.”

“When will all this take place?” Churchill asked.

“The trial will probably take place tomorrow,” the prince answered. “If convicted the punishment could come at any time.”

They talked desultorily for a few more minutes before ToNas banged on the door and left.

Dave and Matthew Bell were pretty much engulfed in gloom after his departure, but the fertile mind of the Englishman was busy exploring the possibilities of extracting themselves from the predicament. Since conviction seemed a foregone conclusion (after all they were guilty) escape seemed the only option left. He had already thoroughly examined the cell including the window and the bars in it and escape from it did not seem feasible.

## VAJU: THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM

The Englishman concluded, “We must make our escape either on the way to the trial or afterwards.”

“But how?” Dave asked. “We are bound to be heavily guarded and there is bound to be a large crowd if it is a public trial. That would seem to make it very difficult.”

“Difficult is not a synonym for impossible,” the Englishman said firmly. “We must try to remember the layout of the palace as best we can to determine where the best opportunity is likely to exist, and we must be ready to take that opportunity even if it is fleeting.”

Having forcibly pulled the other two out of their state of apathy the Englishman led them in a careful recapitulation of all their knowledge of the layout of the palace and the likely locale of the trial and the likely route to and from it. It did not help that they were not quite sure where they were.

They were interrupted by a visit from Dan Owens. He had talked to ZaSox and his opinion was as gloomy as ToNas’. The prisoners picked his mind likewise to help their escape plans, and he promised to try to make a more careful appraisal of the grounds and get back to them if possible.

About midday ToNas returned accompanied by another, older Vajuvian whom he introduced as WoPer. He was a former member of the ruling council and a distinguished orator. The Vajuvians had few full-time lawyers and they were not too highly thought of as a profession, somewhat in the same category as sanitation workers. In other words, men whose function was necessary but not one most people would go around bragging about. Most of the more important cases were defended by part-time practitioners and orators such as WoPer who were famous for their ability to sway public opinion.

WoPer interrogated them, but it was evident that he had already interrogated other witnesses and their answers just reinforced his conclusion that the facts of the case were not going to give him a victory. The only hope for success would be an oratorical performance of truly heroic proportions. Afterward, as they left, ToNas looked as gloomy as Murmansk<sup>1</sup> in January.

After the evening meal Dan Owens was allowed to visit them again. He did not try to gloss over his gloomy opinion of their chances. He quickly passed on to them the results of his reconnaissance of the probable routes to and from the trial. He had been a Marine ground officer before he had transferred to aviation, and it was obvious that he had learned his lessons well for he had as detailed a description of the terrain as could be had on such short notice when you are being kept under close surveillance. These he drew in the dust of the cell floor out of the direct view of anyone looking through the small window in the door.

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1. Biggest city above the Arctic Circle.

## OUT OF THE FRYING PAN

After Owens left, the three earthmen discussed the possibilities and decided that if given half a chance they would make their attempt on the way to the trial even though that would mean giving up the slim chance that they would get a favorable result from it. The reasoning was that they could not be assured of getting a chance after the trial and hence should take advantage of the earliest opportunity. "If any," Dave added silently to himself.

After they made their decision, the Englishman said that he was going to get some sleep in order to be in the best condition for tomorrow. He then rolled over on the floor of the cell and immediately went to sleep. Matt and Dave had a little more difficulty. Dave had just finally entered a state of fitful sleep sometime about midnight when he heard the door open and the light from outside woke them up.

It was ToNas and WoPer.

ToNas said that they had come to inform them of the result of their day-long search for a way out of the predicament.

"WoPer has pointed out that there is an alternative you might want to consider if you are found guilty," he said.

"There is a provision in our laws by which, in some cases involving capital punishment, the condemned man is allowed to appeal and invoke a Trial by Ordeal to prove his innocence. This is an old law dating back to the period before the Flight but it should still be binding since it has never been repealed," the advocate said.

"And just what is this Trial by Ordeal?" Clay Churchill asked.

"I found only three instances since the Flight," WoPer replied, "all in the early years. Two chose trial by combat in the arena and the third chose the Race for Life."

"And what were the results of them?" asked Matthew Bell.

ToNas grimaced and replied, "They all three died. The combat is against uneven odds, either man or beast, and the Race for Life is likewise uneven. Both these methods are used as means of capital punishment in other trials. We did not mean to imply that the chances were very good."

"But they are better than the zero we would have otherwise," the Englishman said.

"That is why we brought it up," ToNas said. "We wanted you to consider it and not get yourself killed beforehand." He looked at them meaningfully. "I have not been with you every day for many *kus* without learning something about you. I do not think that you are the type to sit around and passively accept whatever is thrust upon you. Think it over before the morning."

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With this statement the Vajuvians left and the Earthmen had a brand new decision to make which might eat up the remainder of their sleep.

“What do you think?” Churchill asked his two younger comrades.

“I think,” Matthew Bell said slowly, “that if ToNas knows us this well others do too, and it may be very difficult to escape as we planned.”

The Englishman nodded in agreement. “That is probably true, but I would nevertheless try rather than do nothing but this latest development presents a new possibility which we must consider.”

“Well,” Dave said, “I think we need to get more information about the details if possible. I think that you two would stand an excellent chance one on one against most of the Vajuvians I have seen, even the soldiers. It just depends on how one-sided they make the contest. I believe that you would have an initial advantage in that you would be underestimated by your opponents. As for me, I think I would have to learn more about the Race for Life. Looked at realistically I think the odds would be against me in an even match and certainly so if they make it two to one or more one-sided still.”

The Englishman nodded in agreement. “The way I see it we need to get as much more information as ToNas can give us before the trial then I would suggest that we might still keep our eyes out for a particularly good chance to escape, but if it doesn’t occur then certainly take whatever chance we can get in the Trial by Ordeal.”

His companions concurred. At this the Englishman promptly lay back down and almost immediately went to sleep again.

Dave and the big Olympian looked at each other, shook their heads at the sight and resumed their attempt at troubled sleep.

They were awakened out of their sleep by the arrival of a number of soldiers. They put a big crimp in their escape plans because the first thing that they did was put all the prisoners in chains, including leg irons. They were then fed and left to wait for a couple of hours before ToNas and WoPer were allowed in to talk with them.

“These are BeLin’s idea,” ToNas said, gesturing at the chains. “He is a competent and prudent man, and he did not wish to be embarrassed by an attempted escape.”

“He is also a wise man,” Clay Churchill said, “unfortunately.”

Just before noon BeLin and his guards arrived to escort the Earthlings to their judgment. As they proceeded Dave was upset to note that BeLin had not spared Nellie from the heavy chains, and she struggled under the weight of them. Fortunately they did not have far to go.

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The trial was to be held in the audience chamber where they had first faced the *ful* or king. It had been rearranged for this occasion. The king's throne was still where it had been, but a raised platform had been brought in to the *ful's* left with a table on it behind which were places for five judges to sit. There were also places for the opposing counsels and another where the six defendants were to stand under heavy guard but without the chains which were removed while they were in the courtroom, for such it had become.

The room was packed with spectators. This was undoubtedly the biggest thing to happen in some time, perhaps even bigger than the trading caravan.

After the *ful* had entered and taken his seat the proceedings began. Dave did not really know any of the opposing counsels or the judges although some of their faces were vaguely familiar.

"I would feel better with a jury rather than a panel of judges," the Englishman said to which Dave nodded his agreement.

"Yes, a jury of our peers," Matthew Bell said, "since that would limit it to members of our party!"

Dave smiled at that but at the same time he would have rather had a jury even though it might be made up solely of members of the ruling class. His boss was, among other things, an attorney. He had always said that although many people maligned jury trials and the great disparities of punishment which sometimes resulted he had always had a great respect for and faith in them, and he had many times seen a jury of common people without a lot of education cut through the opposing attorneys' smokescreens and the minefield of the law to render the verdict most likely to result in justice often in spite of the law. A judge, on the other hand, would be more likely to toe the line and hold in line with the bare bones of the law as he saw it (or thought it ought to be), justice be damned.

In short, Dave would rather have had some common citizens between them and IpuZob rather than five noble judges interpret their actions strictly in the light shed on them by the law.

The trial took a couple of hours. Dave really did not see why it should take so long since the evidence quickly proved that indeed he, Matthew Bell and the Englishman had committed the crime of attacking a member of the ruling family. He, at least, had attacked with an obvious intent to kill. As far as the others were concerned it was much less clear; they had been involved in an altercation, but they were not shown to have directly attacked IpuZob. Eventually Ben Sanchez and Jim West were acquitted, but to Dave's great dismay, Nellie Hall was found guilty on the charge of attacking a member of the royal family when witnesses testified to her tripping of IpuZob.

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As to the three main defendants who were accused, they were all found guilty as charged and, as there was only one penalty, were sentenced by the court to death. WoPer immediately appealed this verdict and sentence to the *fiul* who heard it without leaving the room. Vajuvian justice was swift if nothing else.

WoPer pled their case eloquently and at length. Dave had to admit that his reputation for eloquence was well deserved, but in this instance, he was afraid it would be a case of the operation being a success but the patients dying. This was exactly the case. In the end ZaSox sadly affirmed the sentences.

As ZaSox was about to leave the room ToNas stepped forward and on behalf of the condemned prisoners invoked the right of Trial by Ordeal. This caused a buzz to spread through the room. This had not been invoked since the earliest days of their exile. It was by no means certain that ZaSox would recognize this right.

ZaSox conferred for a few minutes with a couple of men whom Dave did not know. They were presumably legal advisors. ZaSox then rose to speak once again.

“I am advised that the ancient rules of appeal to Trial by Combat have never been repealed and thus must still be honored, so in two days time the condemned prisoners will be presented with a choice of Trials and on *Ryju* next the Trials will take place,” the king announced and then quickly left the room to a rising hum of excitement.

BeLin quickly saw to the shackling of the four convicted prisoners and the freeing of the other two. They were then hustled back to their cell with Nellie now being put in with the three men. ToNas had promised to see them as quickly as he could.

It was a subdued foursome that now occupied the cell. Dave felt responsible for Nellie since she was his niece and though the words came out with difficulty he tried to apologize to her for getting her in the present situation.

Although she was somewhat pale in the face she would have none of his apology. “I am full grown, and I alone am responsible for my actions,” she said. “I’m just sorry you didn’t succeed in throttling that s!@#%&\*!”

It was the first time he had heard such forceful language from her. He guessed that he would have to accustom himself to the fact that she was just what she said she was: an adult possessed of her own free will. Her actions, even more than her words, instilled a feeling of increased respect and pride in her.

But it did little to relieve Dave’s feeling of guilt.

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Nellie's condemnation had changed things tremendously. They would have to await ToNas' visit to find out for certain just how it did. In the interim they filled her in on how they understood the Trial by Ordeal worked.

After listening to their explanation she shook her head. "I don't know where that leaves me. I don't think I would make a very good gladiator. On the other hand, if the Race for life is an uphill contest for a man then I suppose it would be even more so for me. But I will certainly pick one of them rather than just go up and lay my head docilely on the chopping block."

"We will just have to wait for ToNas to give us more specifics before we can make a rational decision," the Englishman said.

This wait ended just after the evening meal when ToNas and Dan Owens were admitted to the cell. They were immediately besieged with questions. ToNas held up his hand for quiet, and when he had it, he began to speak.

"I can't tell you all the details yet because they haven't been fully decided. This has not been done in a long time. They are researching now. The odds in the arena will be at least two to one if they are human, but your opponents may be animal. If they are human they may be better armed and armored than you are. There has never been any pretense that this is meant to be an even contest but only a long shot chance at freedom for some, but in most cases it is just an alternative form of execution."

"Will we go one at a time or all at once?" asked Churchill.

"I can't answer that for certain, either," ToNas replied.

"What about Nellie?" Dave asked.

"She will face the same choices as the rest of you," the Vajuvian answered. "There will be no allowances for gender."

"It's a fine time to achieve full equality," Nellie commented wryly.

Dave smiled at that. She was upholding one of humanity's most admirable traditions: the ability to retain some sense of humor, albeit black, in the darkest hours.

"What about the Race for Life?" asked Matthew Bell.

"That I can be more specific about," ToNas replied. "The course for the race is one used in athletic contests for long-distance running. It is about forty-five *zixus* in length and goes up into the mountains and returns to the gates of the city."

"And who will I race against if I choose this option?" Dave queried.

ToNas looked at him and replied, "It is not who but what. You will be given a head start to the edge of the mountains, about ten *zixus* from the gate, and then a *qujyxpoh* will be released who will be given your scent. It you make it back

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to the gates before he catches you, you will have won. If you don't make it you will lose."

Dave shuddered. "I sure will," he said remembering the ferocity of the cat from which they had rescued ToNas. "On Earth these types of animals are swift but have no endurance. I don't suppose that is the case here?"

ToNas smiled grimly. "It has plenty of endurance and speed that you know about already."

After a little more talk the visitors were ushered out. As he was leaving ToNas said, "Day after tomorrow they are to present the choices more clearly to you, and if any of you choose the Race for Life, you will be conducted over the course."

"Will it be possible for us to have a place to exercise until the day of the contests?" inquired the Englishman.

"I will see what I can do," ToNas replied. "I believe that there is a suitable place that would be adequately secure for that purpose in the palace."

After his exit the prisoners discuss their alternatives. The consensus of opinion was, with their present knowledge, that it would probably be better for Nellie to choose the arena along with Matt and the Englishman if they had the option of all going in together, otherwise she should choose the Race for Life as the lesser of two evils. Neither was attractive and Dave's heart was very heavy with the realization that, long as the odds might be for him, they were much longer for her. Although she was athletic she would not stand a chance against a Vajuvian in the arena, and although she was one of the best of the women in so far as speed and endurance was concerned, this still left her considerably slower than him. He resolved, however, that if they raced together, they would do just that. If the *qujyx* caught up with them they would face it together with whatever slim hope that might give them of defeating it.

The next morning ToNas returned with BeLin and a coterie of soldiers who shackled the prisoners and conducted them to an open courtyard similar to the one where the rest of the Earth party was kept, the difference being that the walls here were were a good twenty feet high and heavily patrolled by armed guards.

The courtyard was also considerably larger and allowed them to exercise freely. Dave figured he would need all he could get since, except for his one run with the Triplets, he had been unable to join many of the others of their party, including Nellie, who regularly ran on the palace ground under guard. This had been a matter of much amusement and wonder to most of the Vajuvians who did not exercise so far as Dave could determine, unless it was absolutely unavoidable. Dave did not understand how they could all look so trim, but his

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friend, John Monroe, said that evidently they were, with a few exceptions, just not genetically inclined toward obesity.

They were also furnished with training weapons for combat practice. These were weapons of the same size and weight as those actually used but blunted and dulled so that they would not be too dangerous to people learning to handle them, or in this case, to their guards. They had played around with these things previously during their captivity, and it was clear to Dave that Clay Churchill had previously fenced and was quite proficient with sword and spear. Dave guessed that he should have known that would be the case. Matthew Bell had never used them before coming to Vaju, but he was a marvelous natural athlete. Dave's assessment was that Matthew was proficient enough to conduct a good defense of himself, if he concentrated on that and did not try any rash attacks, by using his rudimentary skills with the weapons combined with this strength and quickness, which was amazing for one of his size.

As for Dave, he had practiced less than the others and was not the natural athlete that they were. It was their unanimous opinion that his advantage in quickness and agility over a Vajuvian opponent would not compensate for his deficiency in strength and skill. In short, he and Nellie had better practice running.

Which they did in the short time that they had. Dave guessed that the longest distance he had ever run was in the neighborhood of fifteen miles. Nellie's greatest distance was somewhat less. From reading about marathons on Earth Dave was dubious about their ability to last twenty-five miles, but the incentive offered by the *qujyx* might inspire them to achieve it.

Whether they could do the distance in less time than the *qujyx* was another matter. Dave thought that if his stamina was sufficient he might very well do so, considering the head start, but Nellie's time would probably be at least fifteen minutes slower than his, and from what ToNas told him about the *qujyx*'s performance over that distance, he doubted that would be sufficient.

Two days after the courtroom trial they were given the briefing they had been promised on the specifics of the Trials by Ordeal. It was not quite as specific as they had hoped. They were told that if they chose the arena they would each face either three men or two *qyfus*, wolf-like carnivores larger than any earth creature of that sort. They would not know which until they met them in the arena. They would be armed with a long sword and a short sword each. All who chose the arena would fight at the same time. ToNas protested the uncertainty, but the arbiters were adamant and ZaSox would not overrule their decision.

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They were shown the arena and a pen of *qyfus*<sup>2</sup> from which any animals would be taken. Then they were taken outside the city gate from which the Race for Life would start and mounted on small antelope-like riding animals, shackled to the saddles and taken over the course. They were heavily guarded and their guards rode on some of the *kabis* which were obviously superior to the beasts on which the prisoners were mounted. Dave and Nellie chose to run part of the course especially after they got into the mountains to acclimate themselves to it, but they rode more than half the distance.

The first five or six miles were basically flat until they reached the foothills and entered a canyon with steep sides. From that point on until they returned to the plain from another canyon about a mile from the mouth of the first canyon they were constantly in the canyons. The sides would be very difficult to scale and most of the way, anyway, there would be guards. After about four miles into the first canyon the trail began to ascend the side of the canyon and continued to climb until it was several hundred feet up the side. When it reached a point about twelve miles from the start the canyon got very narrow and then the trail turned and went up a side canyon even narrower and steeper than the first.

They rested a minute at this point beside a slender tree before proceeding, and Dave peered upward and downward. It was several hundred feet each way, and it would be utterly impossible for him to negotiate either for use as an escape route. When he leaned on the tree to peer down Dave almost tumbled down the side of the slope as the tree, whose roots had apparently been almost uncovered by a landslide, gave under his weight. ToNas, standing on the corner where the trail entered the side canyon grabbed him and then pointed across the extremely narrow neck of the canyon.

“See that ledge on the canyon wall on the other side,” he asked, pointing to a narrow ledge on the opposite wall which at this point was no more than twenty-five or thirty feet from them. The ledge was perhaps five to eight feet lower down on the canyon wall than the one on which they were standing.

Dave nodded and ToNas continued, “That is this trail, but it is more than four *zixus* from here up to the end of this box canyon and back.”

Looking at the trail ToNas was pointing at, he could see that it quickly disappeared from view around a corner. He did not see it reappear. He looked straight down and could see narrow rapids some three or four hundred feet straight down. He shivered. It gave him a bad case of vertigo just looking at it.

The side canyon dead ended at a waterfall about a mile further on. The footing for about a quarter mile near the waterfall was wet and treacherous.

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2. A wolf-like animal of Vaju.

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They followed the trail as it doubled back on the other side of the box canyon, still high up the side, and came back out to the mouth a mile or so later. The trail then descended until two or three miles further it came down to the bottom of the canyon, crossed it and entered the canyon from which it eventually emerged back onto the plain six miles from the finish at the city gate. There would be no guards on the portion of the course where the trail was high up on the canyon wall because the walls were so steep above and below that it was deemed impossible for them to escape.

When they had returned to the city, and before they were returned to their prison compound, they were taken by the cages where the *qujyxes* were kept and shown the two that would be released after them. It was not a reassuring visit for the devil cats seemed to sense that they were looking at their next meal. They were informed that the animals would not be fed again before the race. Indeed, they had not been fed since the day of the trial. Dave saw Nellie shiver. He understood for he was doing likewise.

They made their choices. Matt and Clay for the arena, and Dave and Nellie for the race. In the day that remained, the racers ran less than usual, saving their energy. Likewise they ate everything they could lay their hands on to try to stoke up energy for the trial to come. On the other hand the two who were to fight in the arena trained ceaselessly all day, primarily to increase Matt's skill and to devise tactics for their opponents, be they man or beast. ToNas prevailed on BeLin to furnish them with the weapons they would use in the battle and train with them under the watchful eye of archers lining the walls.

After they retired for the night Dave could tell that only the Englishman, who seemed impervious to tension and fear, was getting the rest he needed. The other two were as restless as he was. He did not know whether they were exercising prayers which may not have been used in years, as he was, but he suspected that they probably were. It seemed that the old cliché that there are no atheists in foxholes was true.



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*Ryju*, which is the fifth day of the Vajuvian week and a holiday for most people, dawned with perfect weather for the gala event. Dave could not help but think of the old saying he had heard many a movie Indian utter (whether it was authentic or Hollywood he did not know): “It is a good day to die?” Either way, he hoped that it was not prophetic.

They were taken shackled and under heavy guard before dawn to a cell underneath the arena and held there until time for the event to begin. They were served a light meal which Dave forced down though he had no appetite at all. The Englishman’s appetite seemed healthy and surprisingly, so did Matt’s. Perhaps because of his long participation in athletics Matt seemed to have slipped into a routine of preparation for the contest that obscured the deadliness of it.

Even Nellie stoically consumed the food presented to her. He thought he was the only one with nerves until he touched her arm to get her attention and she almost jumped through the ceiling.

Midway through the morning it was apparent from the noise above that the arena was packed. When Dave asked one of the guards the reason for the noise he said there were some preliminary entertainments.

“But,” he said in a manner seemingly more careless than intentionally cruel, “don’t worry. You are the main attraction. It is your blood they have come to see flow.”

Dave looked at the Englishman and the Olympian. They both sat as impassively as if they were waiting for a bus. There might even have been a little bit of a smile on Churchill’s face.

Guards came and took Dave and Nellie, once again shackled, up a series of corridors and stairs until they came out into the open in the stands in a sort of box near the royal box where they were displayed to the crowd. They were greeted with a roar. Dave shivered involuntarily, for it seemed to him that it was a malevolent sound denoting a state, among the people who made the roar,

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that could only be satisfied by a blood sacrifice—his. He also guessed that the fact that one of the intended victims was a woman may have intensified the bloodlust. If anything has always sold better than plain old violence it is violence and sex, he thought.

Another even louder roar announced the fact that Matthew Bell and Clay Churchill had been ushered into the arena. They had been stripped and dressed in common warrior's garb consisting of a leather girdle from which their swords were suspended topping a short kilt. They had no armor of any kind except for the minimum protection the leather kilt would provide.

They stood close to the near wall of the arena. The arena floor was somewhat smaller than a football stadium, perhaps fifty yards across and twice that in length. It was empty as they moved a little further out into the center, looking around for their opponents. The crowd gradually grew quiet, not knowing exactly what to expect.

Then, from the other end of the arena, there appeared three Vajuvians. They were dressed the same as the Earthmen except that they also wore helmets and minimal body armor giving some protection to their shoulders and upper chest as well as part of their arms. In addition to the two swords the Earthmen had, they each also carried a heavy spear. This weapon was one Dave had been told was primarily for stabbing and was not made for throwing. Nonetheless, it would give the Vajuvians a decided advantage in reach.

The Earthmen had a whispered conference and then slowly circled, not getting too far out into the arena while looking around warily for more opponents. None seemed to be readily forthcoming and the three that were closing in on them demanded their full attention.

The three men confronting Matt and the Englishman were above average height for Vajuvians and like nearly all their race were good physical specimens. Dave had been given to understand that their opponents, if human, would be professionals, men who fought for a living. Their actions now seemed to bear this out. They circled warily, making probing feints and jabs at their smaller opponents, trying to encircle them. But, as they had planned, the Earthmen kept just close enough to the wall so that no one could get behind them without running the risk of being trapped against the wall. The Earthmen had also agreed that, at least at the onset, the Englishman would do all the attacking while the big Olympian would concentrate on protecting himself and the Englishman from counterattacks.

Perhaps five minutes went by in this manner with the Vajuvians trying to probe for weaknesses and to discern the level of skill of their opponents, and the Earthmen trying, conversely, to deny them in both departments while the

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Englishman tried to look for an opening for himself. What the Vajuvians did learn was that, skilled and athletic as they themselves were, they were no match for their opponents in quickness.

The pace was much too slow for the crowd which was becoming restive to the point of throwing objects into the arena, with the Earthmen being the primary targets. Guards moved into position to prevent any major problems in this area.

The only damage done so far was a slight cut on Matthew Bell's right shoulder. But it was minor, just a small trickle of blood was forthcoming and it did not impair him in any way. The two outside men opposing them were using their spears to jab at the Earthmen and control them while the middle one had jabbed his spear into the sand safely behind them and advanced with a sword in each hand, apparently ready to leap in to take advantage of any opening he might see against either of the Earthmen. Dave could not help wondering why the other three Vajuvian opponents had not made an appearance unless the organizers of the spectacle were trying to make a better show of it.

The man facing Clay Churchill was a little careless when he lunged forward, and the Englishman caught the spear with one hand, pulled it forward and slashed at his opponents hands and arms with his sword. The man's gauntlets protected him from major injury though he was bleeding when he retreated, leaving the spear behind. But when Churchill started forward to try to take advantage of it, his opponent had swiftly drawn both his swords, and the Englishman had to retreat from the attack of the center man who came to his aid. This precipitated a chain reaction as Bell moved to cut him off and then his principal opponent leaped forward to try to catch him off guard. There was a brief flurry of swordplay all round before it returned to the previous cautious game with no more damage done.

The Englishman's opponent retrieved his spear and sheathed his swords. They resumed their previous strategy but with even more caution now. Once again the crowd began to get restless.

Both of the Earthmen were using the long swords, not being practiced in the use of both at once. Now the Englishman began to be more aggressive, darting in to attack both the center man and the one fronting him. Even though he was much smaller, the Englishman was proving a very skillful swordsman (What else? the little voice in Dave's head said) and his superiority in quickness was so great that the two Vajuvians, skilled as they obviously were, were forced to be very cautious. Dave sensed that Churchill too wondered where their other opponents were and was trying to cut down the odds before they came upon the scene.

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The two men on the left stalked Churchill watching intently for an opening to put him away. Suddenly a new element was introduced into the game as Matt Bell, who had been adjusting his movements to Churchill's to maintain their proper defensive distance suddenly leaped toward the center man who was intent upon the Englishman's movements, too intent as it turned out, for he was unable to turn around to confront the former Olympic champion and could only try to parry his attack with the short sword he had in his left hand. It was not sufficient for he was borne to the ground by the force of Bell's attack, badly wounded, his short sword falling away.

It should have been a fatal mistake but Bell, never having killed anyone, pulled away before dispatching him. Now things happened almost too rapidly to relate. When the man in front of Churchill was distracted by what was transpiring to his left it was a fatal error, for the Englishman, deflecting the spear, drove his sword underneath the man's armor and into his chest. The man fell fatally wounded, but this movement wrenched Churchill's sword out of his hand.

In the meantime the man on the right had seized his opportunity to attack Bell and though Matt managed to avoid a fatal blow, deflecting the spear point and pulling it out of his hands, it hit a glancing blow on his chest and opened up a long, deep gash on his right side that caused him to drop his sword. The Vajuvian then quickly drew his own sword and closed in for the kill as the big Earthman struggled to draw his short sword. He succeeded in doing so but he was at a severe disadvantage on the ground and with his right arm being impaired by the Vajuvian's spear thrust.

The Englishman saw the peril of his companion. Quick though he was, he was too far away to directly intervene but drawing his short sword, he grasped it by the blade and threw it at the Vajuvian. It was not a killing hit, glancing off the body armor and penetrating his side but it successfully prevented him from attacking Bell. Taking advantage of this Bell retrieved his long sword, and struggling to his feet, advanced on the wounded Vajuvian. This time he did not pull his punches. Grasping his long sword in both hands he attacked his opponent who also had a long sword. There was no finesse about it; he simply overpowered him, beating down his attempted parries and finally dispatched him with a two handed slash which split the Vajuvian's helmet.

Intent as had he been on the perilous action in which his friends had been engaged, Dave had not realized that now the crowd, which he thought was probably twenty thousand strong, was roaring its approval.

Turning his attention back to the center of the arena Dave saw that the third Vajuvian, though gravely wounded, had struggled to his feet and stood, sword

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in hand obviously determined to defend himself to the end. His left arm hung useless and his torso was covered with blood. Dave could not determine the exact source of the blood, but he stood, legs braced, ready to sell himself dearly. Dave thought they had better not underestimate him, for he assumed from the man's central position that he was probably the most formidable one of the bunch.

Matt had gone down to one knee, but Churchill had retrieved his long sword and now cautiously approached his opponent when suddenly he straightened up, turned and cried to Bell for their other opponents had just appeared on the scene. Bearing down swiftly on the wounded Earthman was one of the big Vajuvain wolves, a *qyfu*.

Matt struggled to his feet and raised his weapon just in time to be borne to the ground by the animal. He had, however, inflicted enough of a wound on the beast that it backed off, limping, and then began to circle the wounded man to try to catch him from behind. Churchill, meanwhile, raced to his defense, leaving the last Vajuvian standing in the center of the arena, from the other side of which came another of the fierce beasts. Since the second *qyfu* was running straight at the wounded Vajuvian Dave expected to see him go down under the beast's charge, but to his surprise, he ran around him and began to close on the two Earthmen. Perhaps, Dave guessed, they had been given the scent of their intended victims and had been trained to ignore all others, though he did not see how that could be possible since they had purportedly been starved for four days.

Meanwhile, the other beast had charged at the kneeling Bell who was unable to turn quickly enough to face him squarely and went down under the two hundred pound animal. The Englishman, arriving on the scene was unable to get a clear shot with his long sword and picking up a short sword lying on the ground, leaped on the back of the animal who immediately left off attacking the wounded Earthman to try to dislodge his new attacker.

The Englishman was not easily dislodged. His left hand was twisted in the hair on the beast's neck and his legs were twined around his belly. Clay clung to him while trying to drive the short sword into his chest like an oversized knife. It was too unwieldy for this purpose, however, and he could not get it to penetrate deeply. He inflicted deep but not fatal wounds. Finally he abandoned this tack and instead, pulling back as hard as he could on the animal's head with his left arm still entwined in the hair along its neck, slit its throat. It collapsed to the ground in its death throes.

The Englishman, however, now had a king-sized problem for the second animal had arrived as he was finishing off the first one and leaped upon his

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back. It was all he could do to keep its jaws from closing on his throat, killing him instantly. They rolled on the ground, the Earthman somehow holding him off but unable to get free or find a weapon to use even if he could have afforded to turn loose of the animal's throat with one hand long enough to grasp one. Somehow, Dave felt that he would do so eventually, but this never became necessary because Matthew Bell struggled to his feet and retrieved a fallen spear. The Englishman spied him and abetted him as much as possible by trying to present him with a clear target. Matt drove the spear through the beast's body causing it to collapse on top of Churchill. Bell then sank to the ground again.

The crowd was going insane for they had at last gotten their money's worth. The Englishman struggled to get out from under the combined weight of the *qyfu* and Bell. The reason for this was that the remaining Vajuvian was struggling slowly across the arena toward them, but when the Englishman regained his feet and retrieved a spear and sword the Vajuvian stopped and braced himself for the expected attack.

Churchill, however, noting the condition of his opponent, merely feinted a frontal attack. When the man, desperately weak from loss of blood, stumbled to his knees, he hit him across the back of the head with the staff of the spear and disarmed him. Then poisoning with his weapon in a killing position he declined to drive it home. ZaSox acknowledged his victory and waved off the killing blow.

The crowd which shortly before had bellowed loudly for the blood of the Earthmen now roared just as loudly in praise and appreciation of their exploits.

A host of people now ran onto the arena floor to tend the wounded and remove the fallen men and beasts. The crowd roared its approval and ZaSox made a short proclamation formalizing the granting of their freedom which they had just won with great effort and expense.

The cost had been great. Matthew Bell was severely wounded with the deep gash in his side and a nasty wound on his left shoulder made by the *qyfu* as well as other more minor ones. The Englishman's wounds were not as great but he had by no means gotten off scot-free. He had several wounds inflicted by the second *qyfu* as well as a wound to his left hand and arm suffered when he had disarmed the first Vajuvian early in the fight. But he could walk from the arena without help and accept ZaSox' congratulations. Dave could see that John Monroe, as well as a couple of Vajuvians, were ministering to Matt. He was then carried from the arena on a stretcher. The surviving Vajuvian was also carried out. His wounds were the worst of all but Dave suspected that, with the skills the Vajuvians had with trauma wounds, he would recover if he had not lost too much blood.

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Dave and Nellie were able to visit with them briefly under the stands where they had been taken for treatment before they were ushered off to face their own ordeal. Dave congratulated Matthew Bell and left Nellie talking with him while he talked with the perpetually amazing Englishman who was conversing with the surviving Vajuvian. You would not have known from their friendly talk that ten minutes before they had been earnestly trying to kill each other. The Vajuvian, whose name was WoKan, wished Dave and Nellie good luck which Dave accepted, though he silently wished that WoKan had given them a sword instead. The Vajuvian had lost so much blood that he seemed paler than the Earthlings, but ToNas said that he would probably survive.

“I hope he does,” the prince continued, “for he is a good man, even though he is one of IpuZob’s friends.”

Dave had no time to ponder on this for now it was his and Nellie’s time on center stage.



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Dave and Nellie were ushered out of the room and into an adjoining one by several guards. There they were unshackled and, except for the hardy Vajuvian shoe-sandals with which they had previously been provided, were stripped of most of their clothes. Soon they would find out the reason for this. Uncomfortably shy all his life, Dave did not care for this development but tried to push it to the back of his mind for he knew he needed to concentrate on the really important thing: survival. Nevertheless it angered him to see Nellie standing self-consciously in the midst of the crowd of men, trying half-heartedly to cover herself with her hands.

A *little* anger might even be beneficial, Dave told himself, but he could not afford so much anger that it obscured the task at hand or burned up energy that was going to be needed. He reached over to squeeze Nellie's hand as they were ordered to start up the ramp to the street. She jumped before she realized it was him then gave him a wan smile from a face that was tear streaked. I should have said something before I touched her, he thought, angry at himself now. Before they were ushered out the door, their hands were bound behind them. As if they had a chance to escape under these conditions, Dave thought!

They were separated by the guards as they came up onto the city street. A street that was lined on both sides by a boisterous crowd through which they were forced to run a gauntlet.

It was a crowd that greeted them with a roar and followed them through the streets to the city wall with jeers, taunts and lewd comments. It pressed in on them and was able, from time to time, despite the best efforts of the guards to prevent it, to physically harass them, pawing, pinching, pulling hair and generally cuffing them about. This seemed to be the worst part of the crowd, probably put into an uglier mood by their companions' earlier escape from death in the arena. It may have been his imagination, but Dave thought that they looked different from the normal Vajuvians, uglier and meaner. Part of it was

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probably due to the fact that one of the potential victims was a pretty woman thus adding a sexual dimension to their bloodlust.

At any rate Dave was glad for the presence of the guards, since he would have hated to have been thrown to the mercy of this crowd. His fate would probably be ugly and swift, he thought, and Nellie's would be even uglier, though not as swift. It was almost a relief to finally reach the city gates and be thrust through them.

The gates were set in the enclosed end of a rectangle framed on three sides by the city wall with the open end in front of them facing the mountains. The wall stretched on either side of the gate for about seventy yards before making a right angle turn toward the mountains so that anyone trying to force the gates would find themselves subject to attack from atop the city walls on three sides.

A noisy crowd packed these walls on all three sides. In addition, the area outside the walls was packed with jeering Vajuvians making a vast semicircle extending from the gates both ways out to the far corners of the rectangle.

They were conducted about twenty-five yards out and left alone in what seemed to be the focus of the roar of the crowd. The VIPs strolled to their choice reserved places on the walls above them. After a couple of minutes they were untied. Nellie's back was to Dave and after rubbing his wrists gingerly for a few seconds he stepped toward her and gingerly and somewhat self-consciously placed his hand on her shoulder. She did not jump this time. She turned her face toward him. Tears no longer ran down her cheeks and the wan look she had before had been replaced by a look of determination which either denoted the purported family stubbornness or just plain west Texas orneriness or some combination of the two. Some people were so uncharitable as to describe it as mule headed. In any case it bespoke a refusal to be beaten down by the raucous, ribald and bloodthirsty crowd. She gripped his hand as if to say that whatever happened, whether it be triumph or tragedy, they would face it together and they would not yield.

He saw ToNas talking vigorously with an officer nearby. The officer was objecting to what ToNas said but presently left grumbling and soon returned with something in his hand and resumed the argument. ToNas, obviously angry, finally jerked his head in agreement and turned and stalked off. The officer, still grumbling, came over and handed Nellie something which turned out to be a tunic of sorts, but what sort of creature it was for was something of a mystery for when she quickly slipped it over her head the neck opening was so wide it nearly slipped over her shoulders, but at the same time it was almost impossibly brief. It just barely reached her thighs. If she pulled it down in front it rode up the back and vice versa. Likewise, it would come down too far in front at

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the top. It was a garment a woman might imagine herself to be stuck with at a formal gathering in a nightmare.

The officer also thrust something into Dave's hands. It was a pair of shorts, Vajuvian in size. He did not feel a great deal more clothed after he put it on, but it was better than mere skivvies.

Presently ZaSox and the royal entourage arrived, including IpuZob who seemed to Dave to be gloating at their impending doom. After they were seated, the chief judge read their sentence and the choice made by them. It seemed clear to Dave, from the way he read it, that the *qujyxes* would execute the death sentence.

They were then conducted over to the cages where the two animals were kept and pushed forward so that the cats could get a look at their meals. The Earthlings noted that their clothing was tossed into the cages so that they could imprint their scent as if they would need it once they got into that narrow mountain trail. Dave felt Nellie shiver. He assumed she felt him do the same thing.

Finally they were moved out to the open end of the rectangle even with the line of the city walls with the cages being pulled out there too. The crowd followed them, still being restrained by the guards spreading out in a semicircle on either side of them. The crowd's frenzy seemed to increase, possibly because of not getting to see their companions killed in the arena or possibly because they knew that it was likely that their victims were going to die in the jaws of the *qujyxes* in the mountains out of their view.

Then the race began, not with a starting gun of course, nor even a voice command, but they took the hint that it was time to begin when the starter hit them across the buttocks with a *deifh*, the Vajuvian equivalent of a quirt.

They started off briskly to get free of the crowd, some of which followed along for a short distance, though kept away from them by some mounted guards. As soon as they were clear of the crowd, they slowed the pace considerably. Dave noted that many of the crowd seemed to be heading for the mouth of the canyon from which they would emerge if they were so fortunate as to last that long.

They were to be given a head start of the distance to the entrance of the other canyon in the foothills, and they planned to take it easy until then and then quicken their pace. The cats could be released prior to that time if in the sole discretion of the judge they were not going fast enough, but ToNas had given them a good idea of how slow they could go and, since their 'jewelry' had not been taken from them when they were stripped, Dave still had his watch.

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Other parts of their plan had not worked so well. They had some quick energy food stashed in their clothing which would now do them no good. Also they had been going to carry some water but this had been taken also. However, they had noted streams along the way where they could get a drink, at a cost in time to be sure, but there would be no replacement possible for the food.

They ran side by side across the level plain, Dave matching his pace to Nellie's. For the most part they ran silently, conserving all their energy and concentrating on the formidable challenge in front of them. Dave did speak briefly about the water and reminded Nellie to relax and conserve energy. She nodded, but Dave thought that she was, if anything, more relaxed than he was so he resolved to save his breath.

They had estimated that it would take them about three hours to make the run if the course were all on level ground, if they could complete it at all. However it was not all on level ground. How much that would slow them they did not know. Dave thought they would have about a forty minute head start, but he was dubious about that being sufficient from what he had seen and heard about the cats' abilities. It would *have* to be enough, he thought angrily; he had not come half a billion miles to wind up as cat chow. He recognized one of the guards riding escort with them and asked him to warn them if they released the cats early.

"If they do you'll be able to tell by the roar of the crowd," the guard replied.

They were still running easily as they neared the entrance to the canyon and the signal station there which would signal for the release of their pursuers. He glanced at his watch to see that they were going to be five or six minutes earlier than he had estimated. He was not sure whether this was good or bad. Did it mean that they were going to make better time all the way through and have a better chance or just that they had run too fast and would tire out sooner. He had no time for conjecture though, for as they passed the signal station, a fire was lit. As the smoke rose he could hear a faint roar over the five-mile gap indicating that the cats were on their way.

This incentive seemed to cause both of them to speed up without the need for communication. Nellie took the lead as planned in the narrower confines of the trail winding up the canyon. As the pace quickened he saw that she, as well as he, was beginning to perspire more and more as they went along. This caused a problem since they had no headbands. The sweat kept running down into his eyes and bothering him. He saw that Nellie was having the same problem. In addition she was having trouble with her oversized tunic. It was constantly trying to slide off of her shoulders and she was constantly having to adjust it. This was a distraction and expenditure of energy she did not need.

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He was having problems of his own with his ill-fitting garment. It was continually slipping. But he couldn't see stopping and trying to fix it.

He looked around him. There were still a few guards and even some spectators who had made their way here and were perched precariously on the sides of the canyon. I hope you all fall down the side of the cliff just when the *qujyxes* come by, Dave thought. Now *that* would be an act of God and the answer to his foxhole prayers.

When they came to the point where the trail started to climb they stopped for a few seconds and drank from the stream. They would have no further chance until they reached the waterfall. Dave looked at his watch. They were several minutes ahead of his schedule. His hopes rose, but not much, for the worst of the course was about to begin.

This fact became quickly evident. They were not used to running up slopes like this. Their pace slowed and their breathing became labored. Their bodies quickly became drenched in sweat.

They labored up the next two miles until they finally reached the place where the trail turned up the side canyon. There they had to stop to rest for a moment. Dave almost leaned on the tree again before he remembered. While they caught their breath, Nellie tied a knot in the front of her tunic, curing the problem with it trying to slip off. Dave took a moment to tighten the knots on his troublesome garment too.

After they had their breath sufficiently back, he was about to tell Nellie that they had better start up again when an anguished look came over her face.

"Look!" she said despairingly and pointed back down the trail.

Dave turned and looked. Far back down the trail he saw a *qujyx* come around a turn and then disappear behind a hill. Moments later a second followed and likewise disappeared. Dave's heart sank. They were no more than three miles behind them! They had made up at least two miles. At that rate they would never even make the plains! He looked at Nellie and saw that she looked like he felt.

He reflexively put his hand on the tree again and it moved under his touch leaving him in a precarious position. He moved back from it and desperately looked up and down the slopes. That was hopeless he knew. He doubted that they could scale them if they had all the time in the world. They would probably tumble down the side like that tree was threatening to do. In any case the cats could climb anything they could, and better.

Then he looked at the tree again. It was, he estimated, about forty feet tall, straight, and thicker than a man's thigh for most of that length. It clung

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tenaciously to the cliff side with a couple of roots but these could not keep it upright much longer.

Dave had an idea born of desperation. The tree was leaning toward the opposite wall of the canyon. He called for Nellie to join him and together they pushed against the trunk of the tree. There were many things possible, few of them good. Precarious as it seemed, they still might not be able to push the tree over. If they did it might not fall in the right direction. Even if it fell in the right direction the roots would probably pull out and the tree tumble into the canyon, possibly taking them with it. Even if it fell as they hoped and the roots held making the bridge of their impossible dream, they might fall into the canyon anyway from the momentum of their straining effort. Even if none of these things happened and it made the bridge, they might fall off of it or their weight might make it drop when they tried to cross. Aside from those things, he thought, there were no problems, providing that on the other side, they can then finish pushing the tree into the canyon so that they would not just be providing the cats a convenient bridge. Nevertheless it was their best chance which was a commentary on just how sad their plight was.

Their straining efforts did indeed finally precipitate the tree's fall. Their immediate attention was then focused on keeping from falling over the rim themselves from their efforts. This they managed to do and then turned to look at the result.

The tree appeared to be firmly in place on the far side but on their side the roots were almost entirely torn out of the ground. When Dave gingerly shook the roots the entire tree shook precariously. However, they had little choice.

"Go on across, Nellie," Dave urged.

The dark-haired girl looked at the shaky bridge and almost audibly gulped. "How?" she asked.

"You'll have to crawl," Dave replied. "I'll try to hold it steady from this side."

She stood still.

"We've no choice," he added.

He gingerly planted himself on the edge and grasped the roots protruding upward and urged her onward. The tree wobbled precariously as she eased onto it but she clung to it, wrapping her arms and legs around it.

"Close your eyes and go on," Dave urged. She gritted her teeth and inched her way along the trunk. It was made more difficult by the fact that she had made a mistake and was going across head first and that meant that her head was below her feet. But it was too late to change her mind.

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If her heart's pounding as much as mine, Dave thought, she may have a heart attack before she makes it. But make it she eventually did and crawled safely onto the ledge. As she did so one of the roots came completely out of the ground.

Nellie grasped the top of the tree and called for him to commence the crossing but Dave could see that was not to be. The one remaining root was so nearly free of the ground that the slightest weight would precipitate the entire shaky bridge falling into the canyon. He told her to stand clear, and though she protested, she could see that he was right when he said that if he started across with her holding onto the other end it would just result in both of them winding up in the stream far below. She reluctantly moved away and Dave, holding onto a rocky projection, pushed on the root with his foot. Perversely, the root now stubbornly resisted his efforts, but eventually it gave up the ghost and the tree tumbled into the abyss.

They both watched its progress until it came to rest. Then Dave called out to Nellie to start on down the trail and he would catch up with her as he started to go on down the side canyon.

"No!" she shouted. "Wait!"

"I've got to get started now, Nellie. I've no time to lose," he replied, his voice rising a little bit with the urgency of the situation.

"No, you'll never make it," she shouted back. "Jump!"

He knew in his heart that he would never make it, but he would never have expected her to ask him to give up and jump into the canyon. It was not like her to give up.

"No," she said, guessing from the look on his face that he had misunderstood her. "Not into the canyon. It's only twenty feet across here and it's lower on this side. You can jump across."

She was lying about the distance. It was further than that. Even if it wasn't Dave didn't think he could jump that far. If he practiced for two or three months he thought he might just possibly do fifteen feet, or even a little more, but not this distance.

"You can make it with the lower gravity and everything," she pleaded. "It's your best chance!"

He doubted her first statement. Still, the gravity should make some difference and she was certainly right about it being his best chance. It was just about his only chance so he girded up his loins, figuratively speaking. The first time they had been girded for some time, he thought. With haste he made a couple of practice runs. There was a rocky projection at one spot right on the rim and he planned to try to propel himself off of it. But, being a track nut,

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he knew that broad jumpers spend long hours of practice in order to get their steps down. He would have to get it right the first time if he was to have even a slim chance of making it. Just maybe if he did it just right he might come near enough making it across to be able to get his hands on the ledge and pull himself up with Nellie's help.

He backed away, closed his eyes, said a quick but fervent prayer, opened them, tried to swallow his heart and started his run. When he got close he accelerated as fast as he could and tried to concentrate on the place where he would put his right foot and push off.

His placement wasn't too bad for a first effort but it was far from perfect, and he had the sinking feeling that he would be far short and involuntarily closed his eyes. It seemed he was an eternity in the air. He forced his eyes open just in time to see the canyon wall hit him in the face stunning him and rendering him helpless to fall down the canyon.

It was a pleasant surprise to find Nellie shaking him and urging him to his feet. The wall he had hit was not below the ledge but above it! He had made it with room to spare. Although he had rebounded off the wall and hung half over the edge of the precipice Nellie had immediately grabbed him to prevent his dropping over the rim into the canyon although both of them had been made slippery with sweat. The combination of lighter gravity, higher oxygen content, a physical condition better than he had ever been in before and the sheer abject terror inspired by the cats coming to tear the flesh from his bones and maybe the prayers he had uttered had propelled him to a jump he could never hope to come close to duplicating. Unless, perhaps, he thought as he began to stagger on around the corner of the trail and down the side of the mountain with Nellie's aid, there are some shark-toothed cats breathing down his neck.

As his head cleared Nellie once again took the lead and they began to move swiftly down the slope. They wanted to put some distance between them and the cats. Still unanswered, he realized, was what the cats would do when they came to the corner and the scent disappeared.

There was a place about a mile and a half down the canyon where he thought they could see the mouth of the side canyon. He was correct. When they reached that spot they stopped momentarily and looked back up the way they had come trying to keep out of sight themselves. Dave did not think that would be any problem. He did not think the cats would be looking down there, at least not until they lost the scent.

He was correct again. They had just gotten settled when both the cats appeared and then disappeared into the side canyon. Dave was dismayed. He had hoped that the loss of scent would delay them for a while.

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As he was about to turn away they reappeared and began to circle and sniff around. Dave urged Nellie to start on down the trail while he stayed to watch a while longer. He could easily catch her, he said, and he needed to rest a little anyway to recover from his collision with the wall. She reluctantly did as he asked.

What he said was basically true. He watched as the cats milled around in frustration for several minutes, going back down the trail and reappearing, sniffing up the wall and along the edge of the rim up and down the trail. He held his breath when they investigated the place where the tree had been uprooted, but they did not seem to have the intelligence to make the leap, figuratively and literally, across the canyon. Finally, as he had guessed they would, they gave up and resumed their way up the side canyon but at a slower pace, pausing now and then to sniff.

Seeing this he resumed running down the trail, a little refreshed by the rest but a little stiff from his bruises and abrasions, which, he was sorry to see, were leaving a trickle of blood on the trail. He could imagine what that would do for the cats when they came to it!

They were now back to perhaps a four mile lead with about eleven miles to go. He did not know if that would be enough or not. Perhaps if the cats continued to go slowly looking for the scent it would be. When he reached the bottom of the canyon he saw Nellie about a half mile ahead. She was kneeling at the stream, her cupped hand quickly flying from the stream to her mouth. She looked back at him and it seemed like she was going to wait for him but he frantically waved her on. He could easily catch her before they got back to the city, he thought, (if they did) and she would need every step of lead she could get on the cats, as would he.

He stopped to get a long drink; it would have to be his last. They were still going downhill and he tried to conserve his energy for the final six mile "sprint" across the open plain.

Nellie was still a quarter mile ahead as they neared the canyon mouth. Their appearance caused considerable excitement among the spectators and guards there. Few had thought that they would get this far.

Shadows were lengthening as they came out onto the plain with Nellie still almost a quarter mile ahead. But as Dave came out of the canyon mouth and started toward the city he saw her head duck as if she was beginning to strain. She may be hitting the proverbial 'wall', he thought, that marathoners talk about. He hoped *qujyzes* had a wall too.

He glued his eyes to her back as a means of keeping his concentration up. Her body was drenched in perspiration like his own. He was now catching up

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to her rapidly. She probably had hit the 'wall' because he knew that he sure had. He caught her about two miles out onto the plain and touched her arm to let her know that he was there. She looked around at him and smiled, but he did not know how much she had left in her; she seemed to be running mostly on grit now. But then, he knew that she had a plentiful supply of that.

For that matter, he did not know how much he had left either. He had never run this far before and that collision with the canyon wall had taken a good bit out of him. He was afraid to slow down for fear that he would not be able to accelerate again.

They heard a noise from the distant walls of the city. They knew what that must mean and indeed, when Dave sneaked a look behind, he saw two small, rapidly moving objects appear from the mouth of the canyon. Dave found that, exhausted or not, he was able to accelerate under this stimulus and Nellie matched his pace.

Dave estimated that they had a two mile lead with something less than four miles to go, but it seemed that if they had accelerated upon seeing their pursuers so had the cats upon sighting their prey. It would be close, Dave thought. He touched Nellie's elbow silently urging her on.

The next four miles were pure agony. He did not think either of them would have made it alone, but when he felt he had nothing left, he could look at Nellie's grim determination and find something and she seemed to draw the same strength from him.

As they drew near the city gates Dave could see that there was no crowd outside this time; evidently no one wanted to be outside if the *qujyxes* were thwarted in their pursuit of supper. The walls however were packed.

He glanced back when they were less than a half mile from the gates and they were almost that much ahead of the *qujyxes*. For the first time, he really thought that they were going to make it. He urged Nellie on with a look.

And then something incredible happened. As they neared the gates, they began to close and before they reached them they were fully closed leaving them outside with the cats.

Dave was filled with utter despair. For a few seconds they just stood there, seemingly awaiting their doom. Then Dave saw a familiar face atop the wall above the gate. It was IpuZob and Dave immediately guessed the cause of the inexplicable closure of the gates. And once again he felt an all consuming rage which pumped him full of adrenalin and purpose.

Just to the left of the gate he saw several of the Earthmen waving frantically at them. Grabbing Nellie by the hand he dragged her toward them. Jack Hardin, held by some of his companions, leaned over the parapet stretching his hand

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down as far as he could. Looking behind him at the onrushing cats Dave grabbed Nellie around the waist and tried to literally throw her up to the outstretched arm. And, under the rush of adrenalin, it just might have worked too except for the fact that her sweat covered body was too slippery to get a grip on and she slipped out of his grasp. He tried a second time with the same results.

Regrouping, he leaned down, boosted her up to where she was sitting on his left shoulder and then with the gymnastics of necessity he placed one hand on her buttocks and one hand under her right foot and propelled her upward so Hardin could grasp her outstretched hand and haul her to safety.

There was no way, adrenalin or not, that Dave could leap high enough, flatfooted at least, to reach them. He turned and saw the *qujyxes* now bearing down on him less than a furlong away. The gate remained closed. He ran straight at the cats. Surprised at this tactic they veered away and circled, one of them getting between him and the Earthmen on the wall in the process.

He knew that he had only seconds to live and one chance. The wall here was, he estimated, probably fifteen or sixteen feet to the top of the parapet. But the top was serrated to offer protection for defenders and these brought the minimum height down two or three more feet. That was still more than the maximum that he could conceive himself making with body and arms stretched out to the limit, low gravity, thin air and all but, once again, he had no choice.

He charged toward the wall aiming for the gap between the two cats, feinting in each direction and slowing their attack a little, but once his back was presented to them they were after him full speed. The path that he had to take made him come into the wall at a slight angle which may have saved him for as he launched himself upward with all his strength he thought he was going to come up short, but as one hand clawed at the top of the wall one foot found a slight hold on the wall and boosted him a few precious inches allowing him to get both hands on top of the wall. He did not get away scot-free though for he felt a fiery pain as a cat clawed at him, grazing his left side just above his thigh, but the cat fell away, momentarily blocking the other one as well.

There followed a short-lived tug of war. Some Vajuvians tried to pull him up while others tried to dislodge him but all fled as a great longitudinally striped brown and red body attained the top of the wall just as Dave scrambled over the parapet.

It seemed that this might prove to be academic as now both cats were atop the wall and there was a stampede of people away from him down the stairs and into a packed, milling mob below leaving the top of the wall to him and the *qujyxes*.

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The *qujyxes* immediately charged straight at him. He in turn whirled and launched himself off the wall into the solid mass of people below it. The cats followed.

Now pandemonium broke loose in earnest as the half-starved, blood-crazed cats forgot their training and his scent and attacked the nearest Vajuvians. Dave took that opportunity to remove himself from the vicinity.

He pushed his way through the mass of people now oblivious to his presence. They were thinking only of trying to put some distance between themselves and the claws and fangs of the devil-cats wreaking havoc behind them. He glimpsed IpuZob and, his rage returning, he went after him but the Vajuvian disappeared into the crowd.

He heard his name called above the cacophony of sound and turned to see several of the Earthlings struggling through the crowd toward him. Nellie hugged him, now sobbing in relief after having held up magnificently through the ordeal just finished. He was in little better shape; tears filled his eyes and all energy seemed to have been drained from his body. After they had a couple of minutes to regain their composure ToNas found them a place to sit and gave them a couple of soldiers' cloaks to cover themselves. They drank thirstily from the vessels provided while ToNas had someone tend his wound. Dave thought that he could drink his weight in water but forced himself to take it slowly.

Chaos reigned in the streets as soldiers and trainers tried to force their way through the panic stricken crowd to reach the devil-cats, but they were blocked by the desperate Vajuvians trying to escape the fangs and claws of the two cats who, apparently driven crazy with starvation, were now attacking anyone they could reach rather than stopping to feed on their first kills.

ToNas maneuvered Dave and Nellie away from this scene. He told them that they would be taken to the throne room shortly to face his father but they would first have an opportunity to rest and clean up while order was being restored in the streets. To this end he escorted them to the public baths then into a smaller, more private area where they were attended by slaves, rather than the large area to which they were accustomed, which was for slaves and commoners.

Exhaustion hit them full force when they felt the hot water. When he got a chance to do so Dave remarked to Nellie in English that perhaps they should not reveal the secret of their success, their shortcut that is, to the Vajuvians for fear that this might be considered cheating and they might have to do it again!

Dave wished that he could have stayed in the warm water and relaxed for a week or so, slowly sipping the cold liquids a slave brought to them, but ToNas

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soon returned with their clothes which he had retrieved. They got dressed and accompanied him to the throne room.

The room was crowded when they arrived and ZaSox soon entered and took his place on the throne. He motioned the four earthlings forward except for Matt, who was unable to do so, and begin to speak.

“By your actions today you have passed the Trial by Ordeal and under our ancient laws have earned your freedom from the death sentences that had been passed on you. Those sentences are hereby voided and I commend you for your actions today. The valor and the loyalty which you displayed commends you highly and speaks highly of the society, real or imaginary, from which you come, whatever and wherever that society may be.” The *ful* was evidently not without a little dry humor of his own.

“In addition, I have decided to change the status of you and all your companions to that of probationary foreign residents. Under this status you will have the right to remain, work and have full freedom of movement in Pyhoqux but may not leave the confines of the valley without special permission. Otherwise, excepting the right to vote, you will have the same rights as citizens. The only other requirement will be that you will continue to work with KiMok and ToNas to see how our two cultures may learn from one another.”

At this point ZaSox smiled and said, “I can only add that the former was said in my capacity as *ful*, but personally I am happy to be able to grant these privileges for I share ToNas’ opinion that you have comported yourselves honorably and thus must represent an honorable society which we need not fear.”

He descended to the floor and shook the hands of the four earthlings then left the room. They were immediately surrounded by a crowd of Vajuvians and Earthlings warmly congratulating them. Relieved smiles graced the faces of the humans as a threat, which had been lurking in the background for all the months of their stay there, had been lifted. From the actions and words of the Vajuvians you would have never known that many of them had actively opposed the granting of such status and many had undoubtedly been screaming for their blood only a few hours earlier.

So now we have our green cards, Dave thought.

As the sun was setting ToNas hosted an impromptu dinner for all the Earthlings. It was a joyous occasion for them but very soon Dave and Nellie found that their exertions had caught up with them and begged leave to turn in. ToNas had a couple of soldiers carry Matthew Bell, who was still very weak from loss of blood. He and KiMok accompanied them, the Englishman and several others back to their old quarters.

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As he turned to leave ToNas said to them, “These are your old quarters, but I would like to point out a couple of changes.” With this he pointed to the top of the wall, which was barren of guards.

Dan Owens smiled and said to him, “We appreciate the renovation. It makes all the difference in the world.”

Dave agreed with that thought and stood, now pleasantly tired with only a dull ache in his hip to remind him of the recent ordeal, looking around at the familiar surroundings which now seemed almost friendly.

He noted KiMok gazing upward at the sky. As he watched, the older man spoke to a soldier that had accompanied them. The soldier disappeared for a moment and returned with a ladder and leaned it against the wall.

“Come here gentlemen and I will show you something that may be of interest to you,” he said. He mounted the ladder to the top of the wall and motioned for them to follow.

As Dave turned his gaze upward to follow the Englishman up the ladder he noted that the night sky was unusually clear. He could not remember a night when so many stars had been so clearly visible. Perhaps Jupiter was having its own version of the ozone hole.

“You say that you are from the Nxeu Ghof,” KiMok said. “If that is so then perhaps you would like to see it.” He pointed to the east at a group of small, indistinct stars, low in the sky.

Dave’s heart quickened involuntarily as he peered intently in the direction the Vajuvian scientist was pointing. At first he did not see anything that could be blue, but after a couple of minutes, he thought he could see one faint point of light that *might* be blue. But he was not sure that it was not just wishful thinking for they had discussed it and were doubtful that Earth could ever be seen from Jupiter since it would always be in the direction of the sun. But whether he could really see it or not he felt a sudden wave of deep loneliness and homesickness. Would they ever see the old world again?

He tried to shake the feeling, telling himself that at least they were now free and could again attack the problem, possibly even with some help from the Vajuvians.

Clay Churchill, noting his mood, assured him that he could make out a blue star, but Dave did not know whether he was just trying to cheer him up or not, and besides, even the redoubtable Englishman’s heart might lie to him.

Dave figuratively shook himself and, taking a last look at what he now was *sure* was a blue point of light, his heart grew lighter as he looked at the small group of people who had been through so much together. He knew that they would never quit trying and somehow, he assured himself, no matter what

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the odds, they would find a way to succeed. In any case, now was a time to celebrate their upturn in fortune and not to mope around about possible future misfortunes.

Dave also noted that when ToNas and KiMok left the door was not closed and locked and there were no guards outside. Dan was certainly right; the familiar surroundings seem almost like home without the guards.

### The Beginning



## Alien Characters

ToNas, Vajuvian prince  
ZaSox, Vajuvian king  
IpuZob, distant cousin of ToNas  
JixIb, father of IpuZob  
TorKyh, a 'wit'  
KiMok, foremost man of learning  
BeLin, commander of the palace guard  
MiDar, ToNas' friend and a traveling trader  
SuMic, ToNas' sister  
KaTan, MiDar's uncle  
LiMac, a hostess among the palace crowd  
WoPer, distinguished orator  
WoKan, a professional fighter

## Alien Words and Phrases

Note: an 's' or 'es' on the end usually denotes a plural

bazeqs	- traders
cehos	- prostitutes
ClaChl	- Vajuvian name for Clay Churchill
DaNownns	- Vajuvian name for Dan Owens
DaVal	- Vajuvian name for Dave Hall
deifh	- a quilt
ful	- king
Gax	- Sun or god
hfaaq	- a group of bazeqs (traders)
hful	- the T-Rex of Vaju
ipu	- ice or snow
kabi	- horse-like animal
kwalneck	- poisonous animal
lnak	- crossbow
Melnor	- The City of Healing
noxepti	- domesticated beast of the bazeqs
Nxeu	- Earth
Nxeu Ghof	- the Blue Star, Earth
ocuzob	- vicious fighters, the hairy beast men
Ofak ih	- Drop it
pecco	- Vajuvian beverage
Pocihox	- Capital city of an empire to the east
Pocihoxites	- inhabitants of Pocihox
poh	- cat

## Alien words and phrases, continued

Pyhoqux	- Alien city in a wide valley
Pyhoquxian	- related to the city of Pyhoqux
Qta ofu yae?	- What is your name?
qujyxpoh	- devil cat (also shortened to qujyx)
qyfus	- wolf-like animals
Ryju	- fifth day of the Vajunian week
sebs	- prostitutes
sfiq	- prince
shatung	- insulting epithet
tobq	- hand or five
Uefaco	- Europa, a moon of Jupiter
vo-zixus	- square kilometer
xabhak	- longbow
Xags Hfu	- long trek
Vaju	- Jupiter
Vajuvian	- Resident of Jupiter
Ya	- Io, a moon of Jupiter
yuof	- one rotation of Jupiter around the sun
zixu	- about one kilometer
zob	- man

## Numbering System

qysi	- 1
hka	- 2
htfu	- 3
raef	- 4
tobq	- 5
vo-tobq	- 25
pubh	- 125
zixy	- 625
zoli	- 390,625
nyzoli	- 244,140,625
rah	- about a foot
jofo	- about five feet
vo-rah	- a square rah (foot)
taef	- one-fifth of a Jajuvian day
qois	- Vajuvian days
ku	- five qois (days)
vo-ku	- five kus or 25 qois
zab	- five vo-ku or 125 qois
vo-zab	- five zab or 625 qois

## About the Author

Vernon Davis Anderson was the son of William Ellis and Bessie Alice Anderson. He was born in 1934 in Hyman, Texas and grew up on a farm near Grandfalls, Texas. At nine years of age, he was stricken with polio which left him crippled in body but not in spirit. Confined to bed many months at a time as a child, he read everything he could. History became a special interest leading him on knowledge quests in both secular and Biblical history.

After he graduated from Grandfalls-Royalty High School, he obtained a Bachelor of Science degree from Texas A&M University. Most of his adult life was spent in Bryan, Texas. He was a CPA serving as the treasurer of General Security Life Insurance Company.

His last years were spent in Odessa, Texas, where he was an active member of West University Church of Christ. Post Polio Syndrome struck him fifty years after his initial illness. He heroically battled the disease until it claimed his life at the age of 68.

Vernon had four older siblings, brothers William Ellis and Howard Neil Anderson, and sisters Helen Black and Anita Love. The families of his brothers and sisters meant a great deal to him. Family gatherings were especially dear to his heart, and he enjoyed playing cards, dominos and board games with them.

At a very young age,  
Vernon was struck with a disease.  
Polio crippled him,  
But yet he refused to freeze.  
He read the entire library  
Learning things as he went  
Over many a century.  
To A&M he went  
Where he could use his knowledge,  
Obtain a degree  
And graduate from college.  
Even up to the last  
Vernon continued his long fight  
Never giving up hope  
'Til he had given all his might.  
Now he's resting in peace  
Standing hand in hand with angels  
In a land where he  
Has no more pain, strife, or struggles.

Adapted from Vernon Anderson's obituary  
Author of the poem: Kathy Jones

