There was no sign of Tirkel’s circular ship on the radio screen, and I had not expected there would be. My plan was radio silence and a sharp watch with the directive equipment. Tirkel would be aching to contact his accomplice.

The altitude of the Hemrod was still decreasing and her slow rotation gave a changing view of the planet below. I watched from the controlroom port, not liking what was revealed. Huge, billowy masses of white vapour hung over the surface at much lower levels. Only once before in my life had I seen their like. It shocked me that the planetary temperature was so low that water vapour should remain in its visible condensed state. Tirkel and Path had been hard pressed indeed to flee to such a planet when I had surprised their twin ships resting on the baked, sunward side of the smaller planet much nearer the system’s centre.

Beyond the vapour banks was visible a mottled green. That, too, was bad. It suggested a sub-zero vegetation, thriving in a biting cold so severe that it could instantly solidify the zinc in any of the ship’s cabin thermometers. My eyes turned to that above the control panel. The temperature was 100 — one hundred degrees above the zero at which zinc ceased to be liquid. The sight was reassuring. If the ship’s inner temperature dropped below 60 that would mean having to wear an insulated suit.

Bare ribbons threading the green spoke of communication ways such as most socialised creatures construct. Objects moved on them rapidly, but whether the creatures themselves, or some form of vehicle, it was impossible to decide from such an extreme altitude. The communication ways were numerous, mostly terminating at irregular groups of many-hued constructions of varying shapes which demonstrated a liking for the square, rectangular, and perpendicular. The creatures dwelling upon the planet were evidently numerous, but probably only at a low level of civilisation.

A warning oscillation abruptly filled the control room. The stern screen was illuminated and showed three objects moving rapidly in V-shaped formation, closing in. As automatic controls rotated my ship I saw they were artifacts — long, slender, with short wings. I watched a moment, then put the ship into second progression. They dwindled behind and were gone. Evidently the planet-dwellers had atmosphere craft.

Again at high altitude, the Hemrod hovered, rotating. At one or two spots upon the extreme low-frequency tuning range of my equipment garbled sounds were audible, but whether they were interplanetary static or some form of primitive radio communication employed by the creatures below could not be decided. Time moved on

around me, and eventually came the signal which I knew must arise — Tirkel cautiously calling Path on minimum power. My first directive reading gave a line stretching almost from pole to pole of the world below. The radio screen, set at maximum range, did not reveal Tirkel's ship. It would be necessary to shift position and take another reading to obtain a directional cross.

With the Henirod moving fast under autocontrol, I listened. Tirkel was getting no reply. He was stepping up power and sounded agitated.

" Tirkel calling Path—"

The temptation to flip the send switch and say " Hemrod here," was almost too strong. Or, again to try to trick Tirkel by pretending to be Path. If he was agitated he might forget to check on the ship's radio identification overtone . . .

Abruptly as it had begun, his sending halted. Annoyed, I noted the last reading. The directive cross was poor, the points from which readings had been made being too adjacent. That there was no reply from Path might mean he had perished. One propulsion sector of his ship had remained dark when he had so hurriedly left the system's lesser planet and his acceleration had not equalled Tirkel's.

I turned on the sub radio. That was duty. Duty often seemed foolish.

" Hemrod here."

There was the usual sub-radio delay — a delay equal in duration whether communication was from planet to planet or across the in- finities between galaxies. The reply was just intelligible, a whisper over light-years of ordinary space.

" Headquarters here. You are received."

" Hemrod reporting." I was conscious that Tirkel could hear me if he was listening — the fact which made some duties foolish. "Tirkel's ship located on further planet of the system. Path's ship not located."

The delay, then: " Conclude your duty."

That was all. No praise, no blame, no advice. Just a phrase reminding me. .'

d Tirkel knew the extent of my duty also. I pressed the " message received " button and let the sub-radio die. I was on my own.

The Hemrod followed the bearing course automatically. Since Tirkel had been outside radio screen range there was no need for an immediate watch for him and I studied

the terrain below, pondering on the strangeness of creatures able to exist in temperatures so low that even an element like water vapour could visibly condense. The ship's outer skin temperature was over 300 below zero. Only once before, outside the laboratory, had I witnessed such appalling coldness. It was, I judged, sufficiently frigid for water vapour actually to condense into liquid water. Even at zero, the melting point of zinc, some mechanisms in the ship would begin to fail. At 300 below, the lowest melting-point liquid metal lubricants would freeze, locking the machinery beyond repair.

Remembering duty, I entered a record in the foil log. If I died and the ship could still fly she would return to Pollux under auto control. Meanwhile, the deadly chill outside seemed far off, with the ship's heater keeping the inside at a comfortable 100 above zero. I calculated that if the creatures below used the temperature at which water ceased to be liquid as zero, a comfortable 100 for me would probably be death for them.

The ship swayed and all my attention snapped back to the screens and the streaming passage of time. Tirkel's circular ship was coming up behind me fast; a ray lit. He had come back along the bearing path, surprising me from behind . . .

I lifted the Hemrod, twirling, vibration telling me his ray had struck.

" You're a fool. Zero," he said over the radio.

I smiled at that, partly because of the name. It showed that he was not thinking of me as an individual, but as the first member or prime mover of a folk whose enmity he had earned.

" Many a fool is an able instrument to fulfil a simple duty," I pointed out.

" Meaning you don't anticipate much difficulty with me?"

The words showed he had heard the sub-radio directive. Already clear of the planet's atmosphere, I increased speed to a level he dare not use at lower altitude.

" Your trap's failed, Tirkel," I said.

He did not answer, but the screens showed he was no longer following me. Roles reversed, I followed him, confident that he would not leave the planet. Inhospitable as it was, he had travelled too far, and been surprised into flight too often, to waste any chance of replenishing his stores.

A feeler circuit check showed that he had nipped the Hemrod's rim. Luck had decreed the damage was in a sector housing half the ship's heating equipment. Damnable, I

thought, when planet atmosphere temperatures were 300 to 400 below zero.

I put on a heated suit to inspect the damage at first hand. The two last doors in the corridor had pressure on my side, showing the hull fabric was fractured and I hesitated before opening the last, watching the gauge. I could not afford to loose too much of the ship's oxohelium air.

A glance from beyond the second door showed the damage to be beyond repair. The metal lubricants of the pumps already hung in solid icicles. Shaken, I retreated and fastened the door.

High, I followed Tirkel. This set a limit on time. He was keeping low, too, and the more I descended into the atmosphere the greater would the Hemrod's heat loss be.

I checked temperatures and the ship's operation. When my eyes returned to the radio screen Tirkel's ship had gone.

Hovering, the Hemrod scanned the area below and around. There was no sign of Tirkel, but the terrain was undulant and largely covered with some high species of the sub-zero vegetation. I calculated from his last seen position and speed, and took the Hemrod down, wondering how long my single heater would keep the temperature endurable.

The vegetation cracked and sent up steam as the ship settled. Low growths nearby became brown, black, and sparked into spontaneous combustion. The outer hull thermometers showed that a stiff wind was blowing, its temperature some 350 below zero. Under its influence the flames grew, licking merrily among adjacent clumps of prickly, dry-looking plants. I shivered involuntarily as I slipped into my suit. Without protection, 10 below zero would bring rapid death — and outside it was 350 below.

The earth steamed with every footfall, but the suit temperature should remain sufficiently high while I reconnoitred the area in which Tirkel had probably landed. Sunshine streamed among the high plants, each scores of times my height. Lower vegetation obscured the view, but thinned ahead. Soon a much greater area was visible. At some distant a low artifact stood- — probably a dwelling. Surrounded by many long-stemmed, golden brown plants, it looked insubstantial. Much nearer something was momentarily visible, moving at once from sight, and I went on.

At the top of a slight slope I halted in astonishment. Lower down a stream of liquid moved, and from laboratory experiments I knew it to be water. A small creature clad in a striped garment sat on a stone with feet dangling in the liquid, apparently experiencing enjoyment despite the temperature, which I calculated must be at least 320 below zero, since the liquid gasified at 319 below. Nearby, a bridge of shaped trunks spanned the stream.

The small being rose, seeing me, sunshine glinting in her golden hair. Her eyes grew big. She approached slowly, until only a few paces away, then put up her hands before her face, made an audible vibration, and stepped back.

I hesitated, then turned and hurried away. No useful development could come of any personal contact with the planet's beings, even had such contact not been specifically forbidden, when avoidable. I had not anticipated contact, and had not attempted to prepare myself for it.

Back amid the tall trunks, I searched until the light began to grow dim. Just before deciding to return to the Hentrod I found a singed trail through the vegetation, consistent with my own. Tirkel had undoubtedly gone that way, possibly searching for the things he lacked, or substitutes.

Something began to spatter upon the foliage of the plants, hissing as it struck my suit. Liquid water, I thought. Horrified, I turned and ran for the Hemrod.

The suit temperature was down to 80 when I gained her. The inside of the ship was 95 and light outside had gone. The thought of searching while drops of liquid at 320 below zero fell could not be entertained and I decided the time might be well spent investigating the radio sounds first heard on approaching the planet.

Several bands of signals proved to be audible on the ship's all- purpose local communication equipment. Some carriers held only strange warblings of continuously changing pitch and tone, but others seemed more promising and I plugged in the ship's basic sound analyser. As darkness had come and the downfall was continuing a period of rest seemed indicated. An automatic alarm would tell if Tirkel's ship rose. On second thoughts I assumed the radio was tuned to a powerful, and thus presumably local, transmitter, and clipped the analyser's output pads to my head. If Tirkel stayed grounded search on foot would be necessary, and knowledge of a few basic symbols of audio-vibration communication could prove valuable if native lifeforms were encountered.

I awoke when the light was returning. The rain — the word came without effort to my mind- — had ceased. I went out, hoping it would not return. A heavy downpour might cool the suit below tolerance level, or quench the Hemrod for ever.

I went the same way, determined to follow Tirkel's path. On the rise the golden-haired being stood, totally unafraid. I hesitated, halting ten paces away.

" Why were you afraid last night?" she said.

I turned on the suit's equipment. " You are a little girl?"

“ Yes. Susan.” She examined me seriously. “ You are a fairy-tale man, aren’t you?”

No significance came to my mind. I sought a useful word.

“ Perhaps.”

“ Why are you here?”

“ To search a companion. Have you seen him?”

She shook her head slowly. “ No, only you. Are there other fairy-tale men?”

“ Perhaps,” I said again.

As she did not know, it was useless to wait. Behind her, noses in the water, were two beasts.

“ Have your companions seen him?” I asked.

She laughed, the sound ringing amid the trees. “ Silly, cows don’t talk ”

I realised I had made an error. It was always so easy, with alien life-forms. “ Oh, no?”

“ Except in fairy-land,” she said. “ Mummy says they can there.” She hesitated. “ What is your name?”

I gave it phonetically: “ Zero.” On Pollux we do not use audio-vibrations as communication during personal contact.

I left her, anxious to find Tirkel. She ran a little way, came near me, said “ Oh, but you’re hot !” and let me go on, waving once when I looked back.

Tirkel’s trail ran amid the trees for a long way, then turned away into gorse. Here, the rain seemed to have been slight and sun and wind had dried the vegetation so that it smoked at my touch. Once, when I halted, little flames began to grow under my feet. In one place Tirkel had apparently tried to gather a low herb which reminded me of our polar hungerweed, but had obviously abandoned his efforts because the plants withered to brown ash at his touch. He must be desperate for food, I decided. No Polluxian would attempt to make food from an alien plant unless extremely hard pressed. I did not pity Tirkel. Men who kill a brother of an upholder of the law must expect their hunter to feel both personal hate and a strong desire to fulfil his duty.

The trail ended at stones and bare earth and could not be found again. I decided to

return to the Hemrod. If Tirkel had abandoned his search for supplies he might take off to try elsewhere on the planet.

A read weal ran along the Hemrod' s side and I knew I had made a bad mistake. Seen from a distance, it had the characteristic form of a hand weapon burn. From near by, the damage was obvious. The outer hull was sliced in several places. Inside, the temperature was already 50 below zero. The zinc in my cabin thermometer was frozen, reminder that such frigidity would never normally be encountered there. The remaining heat generator was cut into neat sections. As if in grim humour Tirkel had left the dial intact. It was already at 80 below, and visibly falling.

A quick examination revealed his two-fold purpose. Half my stores were gone. The amount already taken was astonishing: the remainder had only been left because it could not be carried, as dropped items showed.

The Hemrod was cooling — dying. At her exit port were signs that gave me a second shock. In all, three sets of footprints marked the scorched earth — those of myself, and two others. Path, I thought. Path had not answered Tirkel's call, but had instead listened and watched . . .

I sought for spare suit heating containers, and found none. The pair had taken them. Within two hours, at most, my temperature would have fallen to a level where metabolism ceased. Nor could the cooling Hemrod save me from death.

Leaving her, I moved fast. The broken, wooded hills, and adjoining plain formed a large area to search on foot. Tirkel's ship was well hidden, as its disappearance from the radio screen proved.

A quarter of my remaining time had passed when I saw the smoke against the sky that could have indicated where Tirkel's ship had lain. Higher ground gave a view of acres of flames that spread rapidly with all the ferocity of an autumn woodland fire. I guessed the two I sought, or their vessels, were its cause. Low-temperature objects, kindled into spontaneous ignition —

Movement attracted my gaze. Near the wooden dwelling I had seen the day before something white fluttered. In the hands of the girl Susan ... I wondered why, then realised. Susan had enjoyed water at 320 below zero; had said I was hot. Was, in brief, a low-temperature organism. Fire was high-temperature — could mean death. A rule learned during interplanetary cadetship returned — No harm shall in any circumstances be caused to any native life-form. It was of first importance — overshadowing even personal survival, the basis of all inter-galactic peace. Quick, as if following a reflex, I ran for the distant farm.

The fifty yards of leaping flames through which I had to pass were nothing. When I

reached the farm house it was surrounded by fire and Susan was cowering with her hands before her face, crying. A boy child was there also, somewhat her senior, and a woman who stared at me with a terror matching her horror of the fire.

“ I will carry you to safety,” I said.

Boy and woman withdrew from me, but not Susan, who uncovered here eyes. “ You’re hot,” she said.

I grew still. 1 was a comfortable 100 above zero — for creatures living at 320 or more below, that could be death. Part of a programme only half understood had come through the analyser. These creatures called zero the temperature at which water became solid, and 100 the temperature at which it boiled. On that scale, my suit was 419 or my suit and me at 519.

The woman was sobbing, the boy white-faced. Minutes precious for us all slid past and a tree crashed, throwing sparks. Susan’s lips moved ;

“ Save us, fairy man ”

I looked in the house, and around it. The back was smoking. A pipe ran from the roof into a circular metal vessel — an iron tank, large as myself and a third full of water. I thought of Susan, of the stream, and of experiments in the laboratory with simple, low-temperature life-forms.

The tank was heavy. The water threatened to splash me, drawing off my life’s heat in steam. Susan understood first. “ Oh, yes, yes!” she said.

I carried her through the walls of fire in the tank, tilted it so that she could climb out, and returned to the farm. The boy did not hesitate though his eyes were full of terror and curiosity. I stumbled once, carrying him, and water fell on me, hissing. Only when I reached the hillside did his head appear above the top of the tank.

“ Mother,” Susan was wailing. “ Oh, Bob, make him go back for mother . . .”

The boy did not speak, but the look in their eyes was expressive. I had to rest. The two journeys had taken longer than I had supposed.

“ Please — fetch — mother,” the boy whispered at last.

I forced myself up. Time was passing, carrying death for me too. And these low-temperature life-forms obviously had a deep love for each other.

The woman hesitated when I appeared out of the smoke. Her eyes were streaming,

wild, yet sane.

“ What are you?” she said.

I thought of explanations, of passing time, of their love. “ Susan and Bob are safe and want you,” I said simply.

She climbed into the tank and I carried her to the hillside. There, locked in each others’ arms, they stared at me. I felt chilled from contact with the tank and its deadly, frigid water. Worse, half my remaining time was gone, and so was the portable weapon I had carried to deal with Tirkel.

“ I knew you were kind when I met you before,” Susan stated. A smile came to her grimed little face. “ Did you come from fairy-land to save us . . .?”

Time was short. In saving them I could have lost my chance. “ I must go.”

She pulled free from her mother, ran towards me, extended a hand, and drew back.

“ Why?”

The simplest reply seemed best. “ Because two other fairyland men want to kill me.”

She looked serious. “ Then they are wicked ”

I left the group. Tirkel’s ship could have caused the fire. Therefore I must go that way, unarmed because many hours’ search among the burning debris to the farm might not reveal my lost weapon. The house itself was already half gone.

The need for heat would soon become imperative, first agonies coming when the highest melting-point fats in my vascular system began to solidify. Many millennia before, death by cold had been a primitive and favourite torture of some Polluxian races.

The smoke was carried among the trees by the frigid wind which so cooled my suit, and it was not always easy to see. Once I halted aghast upon a bank below which ran the stream. A source of pleasure for Susan and her cold-blooded kind, it would be certain death for me. I remembered the bridge and began to follow the bank. The suit temperature was down to 80 . Never before had I felt so cold. A drop of only 80 , and the zinc in the capillary suit thermometer would solidify — but the fact would not be known to me. Death would have come, swiftly and painfully, at about 55.

I hastened, nearing the bridge. The smoke cleared and out of it, four paces from me, emerged a sleek, shining form at least two feet taller than the highest human I had yet

seen — Path. His recognition of me was equally instantaneous and my name danced upon the silvery tympanum of his cheeks.

“ Zero !”

My hand went to my weapon belt before its emptiness was remembered. The movement betrayed my loss.

“ Defenceless, too,” Path said. The suit’s transparent headpiece in no way concealed his triumph. “ I’m glad I came back !”

I played for time, watching him. “ You like a final decision rather than uncertainty?”

“ Always.” He was watching me too. “ As I told Tirkel, I’d prefer to see you die in person — ”

Smoke came between us. When it cleared I had gained the end of the bridge.

“ You are both under arrest,” I said. “ To which ship did you take my stores, your own, or Tirkel’s? We will return in that — ”

He laughed, a rapid vibration of the cheeks. “ My ship was wholly destroyed on landing. Zero. And your apparent confidence does not deceive me. Tirkel’s ship is so hidden you would never find it in a month — while I doubt if you have hours, even if I let you live, which I shall not . . .”

His eyes moved significantly as if he could indeed see the wind that drew from me heat I could not replace.

“ My records at H.Q. contain no failures.” I was waiting for the smoke to come again.

“ Then they will close with one,” Path stated. “ But I waste time. It is two hours march to Tirkel’s ship.”

His hand dropped to his belt. The smoke came again and when it cleared I was nearly over the bridge. As I had ran I had calculated: my suit heat would not last two hours.

Feet flying, I ran on, judged when Path would be on the bridge, turned and raced back. He fired, missed, and I struck him . . . Only then did he realise his danger, seek in terror to maintain his balance — and failed.

His quenching was so instantaneous that it shocked me, his cooling into rigidity so abrupt that one hand remained raised. Steam bubbled, hissed, then was gone. Prone, immovable as one of the stones upon which he lay. Path was still visible through the

shimmering crystal of the deadly liquid the bridge spanned.

I went to the bank, not daring to touch the water which could draw off heat-supporting life so instantly. Path's weapon had fallen too and lay near him. From my knowledge of its mechanism I knew that immersion in the liquid for even brief moments would destroy it.

The other thing I coveted — Path's power container — was strapped to his suit. If got out quickly it could still be of some use. I tried to drag it free with a branch, but failed. No other means were available. Touching the surface of the stream with a finger sent cold seeping in. It would be impossible to seize the container with one hand. The temperature drop would freeze my limb into uselessness the moment it was plunged in . . .

I turned from the stream. Two hours march to Tirkel's ship, Path had said. If one knew where it was. My heat would not last so long. There was thus one chance only: to return to the old Hemrod. She offered no shelter. But Tirkel could have returned for the remaining stores while Path searched me. Tirkel lacked things left there. Want could have sent him back.

A deadly mist, very fine but more cooling than wind alone, had begun when the Hemrod came into view. My suit temperature had long dropped well below 70 and my limbs were chill. I ran for the ship's port, sheltering from the falling moisture which made my blood congeal and created a cloak of vapour about me.

In complete silence I moved through the ship. Her temperature was so low that I fancied I could feel the numbing cold even through my suit. She was dead, her temperature drawn off by wind, mist and rain, her mechanisms locked by their frozen lubricants, there to lie until they became part of the dripping forest. Time was passing, too. I looked at the zinc level in the tube of my suit thermometer, and averted my gaze. There was no common basis between myself and the planet upon which I stood. Its very plants and fauna shrank at my approach, shrivelled by my heat. I, in turn, recoiled from the ap- palling coldness of everything surrounding me. The environment was untouchable, alien — therefore death. Oxohelium to breathe and food to eat I had in plenty. If they had lacked, they could not be found here, as Tirkel had discovered, because the planet was not one for such as we. But of life-giving heat I had almost none. Nor could that simple, basic need be met. The planet was too cold. There was no mutual standpoint of existence, no uniting factor, no coefficiency. With coefficiency at zero, a being thrown upon his own resources could not hope to maintain himself —

" So Path didn't kill you."

Tirkel stood in the corridor behind me. Tall as Path, strong, silver in his suit, he already held a weapon trained on my chest. Danger, triumph, despair rose in my mind.

“ Path?” I said. “ Is he here?” Let Tirkel think Path lived — it would increase his feeling of security and triumph. “ I thought his ship was damaged leaving Mercury.”

“ The inner planet? It was.” Tirkel was wary. “ But he got here, following me. He planned to sit on your tail, in radio silence, but crashed — ”

“ Then he’s dead,” I said.

“ No.” Tirkel obviously believed me ignorant. “ The ship was ruined, that’s all . . .”

I had hoped that Path might have been deceiving me on that point. A search for two ships had twice the chance of a search for one.

“ So your vessel is the last, Tirkel,” I murmured.

“ The very last.”

He was not going to be drawn. His expression showed that. By no hint would he give the slightest indication of where his vessel lay.

“ Since Path didn’t make sure of you, I will,” he said.

I began to retreat. The situation must not remain static. “ You know I’ve never failed on a case, and shall not fail on this one,” I pointed out.

There was momentary doubt in his eyes, but it went. “ You’re alone !” It was a statement — he knew.

Still moving back, I reviewed the situation with half my mind. I must overcome or kill Tirkell, must have his power container to increase and maintain my suit temperature — and must find where his ship lay, promptly. The last point was as essential as the others. To gain it, Tirkel must be made to confess where she lay.

He followed me, and I realised I was in the Hemrod’s entrance port. Outside was slow death; here, quick death — perhaps.

“ H.Q. did not delegate me for this task because it was my brother,” I said evenly, “ but because it was one they thought I would fulfil.”

“ They have made mistakes before now.” Tirkel seemed to have reached the end of his waiting. The weapon was steady, the digit on its firing stud rigid.

“ Your simplest solution is to take me back to your vessel and return to Pollux as my

prisoner," I stated.

He laughed and I knew he was going to shoot. I dived for his legs — an impossible chance. Simultaneously something in the trees opposite the port exploded with an abrupt crack and Tirkel collapsed. He landed on his back. There was a hole in his chest and I knew he was dead.

The boy and girl, almost forgotten, ran from the trees. " I told Bob to shoot !" Susan was panting. " He was a bad fairyland man and going to kill you!"

The boy stood as near as he dared and looked me in the face with adult eyes. " You saved us and mother. You — you're from another world, aren't you.?"

Automatically I removed Tirkel's cylinder. " Yes, boy." This meant another few hours life. But Path had said no one could find Tirkel's ship in many times that period. He was not given to exaggeration. My searches had so far revealed nothing, and the deadly mist still fell.

" Which world?" The boy's eyes were shining, now.

" One you wouldn't know." I gestured. " You can have my ship and all in her. It's little enough to give for such an act "

I strode from the Hemrod. The mist hissed on my suit, wasting heat. But to wait was worse. I could only search — search — until I dropped.

Wet grass sizzled under my boots and branches and leaves steamed and fizzed as I brushed against them in my haste. There was no clue. Hope, if I had had any, would have been killed by the absolute confidence of both Tirkel and Path that no one would find the ship unless he knew where to look.

I followed the bank of the stream and wondered which way to go. All directions seemed equally useless, mere woods, hills, undergrowth.

" Fairyland man — " a voiced wailed.

I looked back and saw Sue running, drenched. Every moment could count, yet I waited.

" You saved us," she said.

" I did, Susan."

" Then why are you running away? We would not hurt you."

“I am not running away,” I stated. “I am looking for another ship” —

Her eyes grew big. “ Another fairyland ship !” The idea seemed to please her. “ There is one hidden in the old caves — I saw it come — ”

A shock of hope ran through me. “ Show me.”

“ Of course !”

She began to run ahead through the trees. Following, I wondered if there was some mutual basis, even here, for the coefficiency which meant survival. Not of temperature, not of food. But of kindness for kindness, help given in return for help received, trust given for trust . . .

“ It’s a beautiful big fairyland ship,” the little girl said over her shoulder. “ Bob says the man he shot came from it.”

“ Forget him,” I said. “ There aren’t many as wicked as he where I come from. He had to die.”

Tirkel’s ship was loaded with my stores, unharmed, and ready to fly out through the gap in the natural rock formation where he had concealed her . . .