

# NORBY FINDS A VILLAIN

Janet and  
Isaac Asimov



UNI

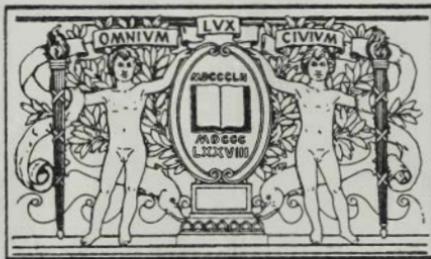
BR

## NORBY FINDS A VILLAIN

By Janet and Isaac Asimov

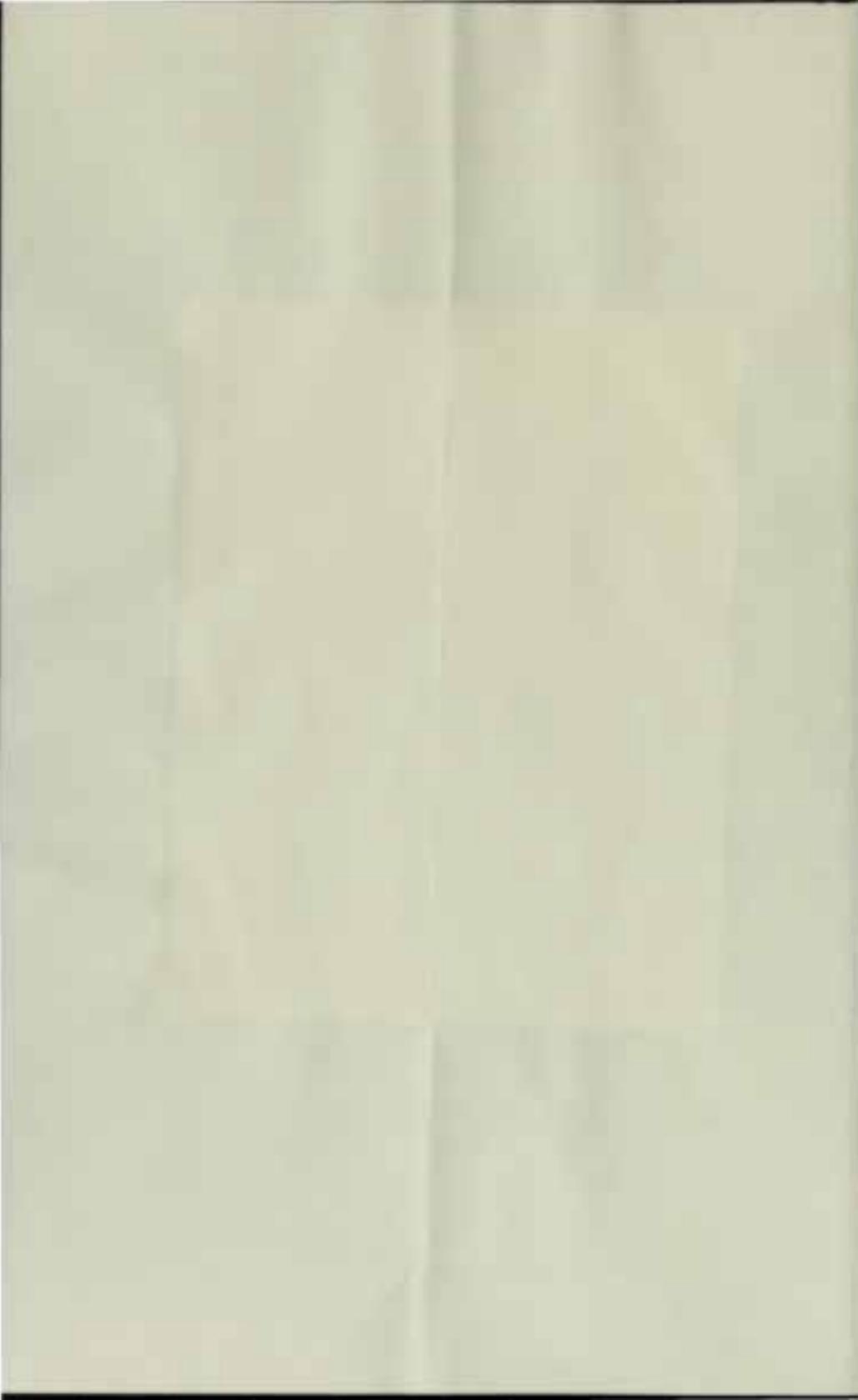
In the sixth book in the Norby series, Jeff and his mixed-up robot, Norby, are joined by freckle-faced red-headed Rinda, Crown Princess of the planet Izz, and Rinda's small robot, Pera. Their adventure weaves them in and out of time travel. They go back briefly to the Pleistocene period and forward five hundred years into a false future. Transported via hyperspace to a strange new place, they become prisoners of alien creatures.

With imagination and humor, Janet and Isaac Asimov have joined forces again to create an adventure story that tames the evil forces of Ing the Incredible Ingrate, and brings back the Others, the intelligent and wise beings from ancient times, whose influence for good—with Jeff and Norby's help—remains in effect.



**BOSTON  
PUBLIC  
LIBRARY**





# Norby Finds a Villain

**Other titles in the Norby Series  
by Janet and Isaac Asimov**

---

Norby the Mixed-Up Robot  
Norby's Other Secret  
Norby and the Lost Princess  
Norby and the Invaders  
Norby and the Queen's Necklace

**Books on Robots by:  
J. O. Jeppson (Janet Asimov)**

---

The Second Experiment  
The Last Immortal

**Isaac Asimov**

---

I, Robot  
The Rest of the Robots  
The Complete Robot  
The Caves of Steel  
The Naked Sun  
The Robots of Dawn  
Robots and Empire  
How Did We Find Out About Robots?  
Robots (with Karen A. Frenkel)  
Foundation and Earth

# NORBY FINDS A VILLAIN

by  
**Janet and Isaac  
Asimov**



Walker and Company  
New York, New York

**BRIGHTON**

Bv 2/88  
Copyright © 1987 by Janet & Isaac Asimov

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the Publisher.

All the characters and events portrayed in this story are fictitious.

Published simultaneously in Canada by Thomas Allen & Son Canada, Limited, Markham, Ontario.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Asimov, Janet.

Norby finds a villain.

Summary: Fifteen-year-old Jeff and his mixed-up robot, Norby, travel backwards and forwards in time and find themselves prisoners on an alien planet in another universe.

[1. Robots—Fiction. 2. Space and time—Fiction. 3. Science Fiction] I. Asimov, Isaac, 1920-  
II. Title.

PZ7.A836Nni 1987 [Fic] 87-10529

ISBN: 0-8027-6710-9 Trade

0-8027-6711-7 Reinforced

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data TK

**Dedicated to our favorite  
science fiction writer,  
Clifford D. Simak**

1911

Received of the Treasurer of the  
Board of Education  
the sum of \$100.00  
for the year 1911

All bills payable to the Board of Education

should be sent to the Treasurer of the  
Board of Education

Wm. J. [Name]

April 1911  
Treasurer

Received of the Treasurer of the  
Board of Education  
the sum of \$100.00  
for the year 1911

Wm. J. [Name]

April 1911  
Treasurer

Received of the Treasurer of the  
Board of Education

the sum of \$100.00

1911

Wm. J. [Name]

# Contents

1	Unexpected Visitors	1
2	The Wicked Magician	5
3	The Stolen Ship	12
4	Escaping into Time	19
5	Closer to Home	26
6	An Artist Lost in Time	32
7	A Disastrous Change	40
8	Prisoners!	46
9	The Problem	55
10	Norby's Idea	61
11	Back and Out	66
12	The Sacred Grove	72
13	Enemy or Friend?	80
14	The Master Cult Arrives	85
15	Searching for Norby	89
16	The Way Home	93

# Contents

1	Chapter 1: Introduction
2	The British Empire
3	The British Ship
4	Shipping and Trade
5	China in Trade
6	An Asian Port in Trade
7	A Maritime Strategy
8	Reflections
9	The British
10	British Ships
11	Ship and Sea
12	The British Empire
13	Shipping and Trade
14	The British Ship
15	Shipping and Trade
16	The British Ship

# Norby Finds a Villain

The first part of the story is very faint and mostly illegible. It appears to be an introductory paragraph or two.

Norby was a young boy who was very brave and kind. He lived in a small town with his family.

One day, he went to school and saw a strange man who was acting very suspiciously.

The man was talking to the teacher and seemed to be in a hurry. Norby decided to follow him.

He followed the man through the streets and saw him go into a dark alleyway.

Norby was very curious and decided to go in and see what was going on.

He saw the man talking to a woman who was crying. The man seemed to be comforting her.

Handwritten title or header text, possibly "Handwritten Title" or similar, appearing faintly in the upper center of the page.

# 1

## Unexpected Visitors

"I'm a lonesome spacer, far away from home . . ." sang Jefferson Wells in his shower. He felt good. Good and ready for his astrophysics exam, at last.

". . . far from Manhattan, where I'd rather roam . . ." His voice ended in a yell as a cake of soap shot out of his hands, hit his nose, and disappeared in the steam and water by his feet. He searched for it blindly as the shower sprayed from wall openings under forced pressure, compensating for the artificial gravity of Space Academy.

The shower door couldn't have opened, yet he distinctly heard someone squeal and he suddenly felt crowded. At the same moment, his foot found the soap.

"Oops!" Skidding out of control, Jeff landed bottom down, right in front of somebody he could barely see through the cloud of steam.

"Naked humans are not allowed in the presence of clothed royalty," said an imperious treble voice. "Furthermore, it is too wet in here. My travel outfit is being ruined."

Another treble voice, gentle yet metallic, said "I'm sorry about this, Jeff."

"I will turn off the water," said another metallic voice that could only belong to Jeff's personal teaching robot.

"Norby! What have you done?"

"Turned the water off. Isn't that better? Now we can all see each other," said Norby, whirling the metal barrel that served as his body and winking at Jeff from both sets of eyes that peeked out, front and back, from under the brim of his dome-shaped hat.

"Great Galaxy!" said Jeff, blushing and trying to drape his washcloth upon himself. "You've brought Rinda and Pera!"

The Crown Princess of Izz giggled. "When Norby tuned into you through hyperspace, we didn't imagine you'd be in the shower at your apartment. And why did the water fall in that funny way? Is there something wrong with Earth's gravity?"

Pera handed Jeff a towel and he turned his back on Rinda to dry himself. Trust Pera to be considerate. She was an alien robot slightly smaller than Norby, supposedly as female as Norby insisted he was male. Unlike Norby's retractable head, hers was a bulge on top of a round metal body, with three eyes on each side. Their jointed legs, arms, two-way feet, and two-thumbed hands were much alike, because Pera had been made by the mysterious spacefarers known as the Others, and parts of Norby had been made by the Others' robots.

"There's nothing wrong with Earth's gravity because this isn't Earth," said Jeff, hurrying into his cadet's uniform while Rinda danced before the hot air jet to dry herself off, her silver pants ballooning out as they dried and her green tunic shining under her carrot-colored hair.

"Where are we?" asked Rinda. "I wanted to visit Earth, now that Pera's taught me Terran Basic and I can disguise myself as a member of your Terran Federation. My parents still want our planet Izz to be kept a secret from the rest of the human race. You know how superior Mother feels because our Izzian ancestors were taken from primitive Earth by the Others and given civilization on Izz."

"While my ancestors came up the hard way, by themselves," said Jeff, putting on his boots. "The water here falls funny because the gravity in an artificial satellite is pseudo-gravity, produced by spinning. You're in Space Academy, part of Space Command, in orbit around Mars, a long way from Earth. But we can go home easily enough by matter transmitter. That is, we can go after I've taken my exam, which is in ten minutes."

"Must you?" said Rinda, pouting. "You look good in that uniform, Jeff. You've grown. I noticed especially when we first arrived . . ."

"Now, Rinda . . ."

"And I bet you haven't noticed that I've grown, too. I'm eleven, now. And you've just turned fifteen. Are you too grown-up to want to be friends with me?"

She had indeed grown. Her freckled face seemed prettier, and the rest of her wasn't as skinny as he'd remembered. "Of course not, Rinda. It's just that I'm in a terrible hurry to take that exam. It's important. Norby should have waited until he was sure I'd gone back to our Manhattan apartment."

"We had to leave Izz in a hurry," said Norby, claspng his hands in front of his barrel, which meant that he was embarrassed.

"Why?"

"We thought you'd welcome our company," said Rinda, her long red-gold eyelashes dropping. There was obviously something more to the story.

"Pera, isn't your special robotic talent the capacity to observe and record facts, even the most subtle facts?" Jeff asked.

"Yes, Jeff. I also have miniantigrav travel like Norby, but I can't travel in hyperspace or through time."

"You're also truthful," said Jeff. "Tell me the real reason why Norby brought you and Rinda here unannounced."

"It was my fault," said Pera. "I happened to be in the palace court when Rinda's mother, Her Royal Queenness, was hearing complaints from the citizens. I happened to mention how many jewels the royal treasury contains . . ."

"Just after Mother had told a citizen legation that the Queendom was too poor to build a new schoolhouse in that area of the planet," said Rinda. "Mother got mad and threatened to put Pera into a stasis box. I told Norby we had to save Pera, so we came here. By the time we get home, Mother will have cooled off and she'll forgive Pera."

"I see," said Jeff, trying not to smile. "Norby, while I take my exam, you take Pera and Rinda on a tour of Space Command, but be sure to speak Terran Basic instead of Izzian, and meet me back in the dorm in three hours."

"Okay, Jeff," said Norby. "Come along, you two. And don't forget about cosmic bubbles, Jeff. And strings and knots. For the exam."

"You're talking through your hat!"

"That's how I talk," said Norby, taking Rinda and Pera by the hand and leading them out.

Jeff was running down the corridor to his exam when he remembered that he hadn't reminded Norby to stay out of trouble.

He slid into the chair at his computer monitor at the last minute. Every cadet in the room was quiet, studying the exam. Then fingers began playing over the keyboards. Jeff gulped and tried to concentrate.

Cosmic bubbles? Silly. Norby's attempts to teach him astrophysics had always been. . . . Strings? Knots? Jeff looked at the question on his monitor and muttered, "Maybe Norby's right."

The time went by while Jeff worked, and finally he tapped "Finished," closed the connection to the exam so he couldn't change any of his answers, and stretched. He knew he wasn't brilliant like his brother, Fargo, but he'd done the best he could. Maybe he'd even passed the exam.

"Hey, Jeff!" It was the cadet nearest him. She pointed to his monitor. "The warning light's flashing. Could you have accidentally wiped out all your answers?"

"Oh, no!" Jeff reconnected himself to the computer, and printed words appeared on the screen. Computers in exam rooms were not allowed to speak out loud.

"Jefferson Wells," printed the computer, "come to Admiral Yobo's office!!!" The third exclamation point was in red.

# 2

## The Wicked Magician

At the nearest slider entrance, Jeff hopped into a waiting car, punching Yobo's code into the direction panel. The buglike car sealed itself and shot through the transparent tunnel, bypassing exits to other corridors until it reached the Main Hub tunnel and swerved into it.

As the car sped up, or possibly down—it didn't matter because away in the hub of the gigantic wheel that was Space Command there was no pseudogravity—Jeff worried. When you are an orphan tall for your age, with a daredevil older brother, you are inclined to worry a lot, especially since Boris Yobo, in charge of Space Command, did not ordinarily summon lowly cadets to his private office.

The Hub tunnel increased in size as more pipes joined it from other small wheel-shaped satellites of Space Command, docks and military barracks and research labs and others Jeff knew little about. Vehicles passed Jeff's car in both directions, but all he could think about was whether or not he had bollixed up Space Command's main computer by doing something wrong with his exam computer. It had happened before. And the Admiral was not a patient man.

When he was finally standing in front of Yobo's big desk, he saw that Norby, Pera and Rinda were also in the room.

"You are responsible for visitors," said Yobo, speaking in a sort of bass purr that boded no good.

"Yes, sir. I was taking an exam . . ."

"That's no excuse. Especially with that mixed-up robot of yours on the loose. It was all I could do to keep Security Control from finding out that Rinda here is not a Terran but

from a planet nobody outside this room has heard about—with the exception of your brother and his fiancée, who are totally out of reach because they've hidden themselves in some mountains on Earth. Some sort of hiking holiday . . ."

"Yes, sir. Fargo didn't want anyone to be able to find him."

"Which I can't. So you'll have to see to it that these two robots and that child . . ."

"I am not a child!" said Rinda. "I'm eleven and a Crown Princess!"

Yobo growled. "See to it that they don't get into any more trouble."

"But what did they do?" asked Jeff.

"I was merely educating Rinda and Pera," said Norby, waving his arm importantly. "I was explaining about how I helped capture the traitor Ing the Ingrate when he tried to take over the Federation."

"You mean you were bragging about it," said Jeff.

"And furthermore, Rinda said she wanted to know more about my glorious achievements, so I just tapped into the library computer banks and let her listen . . ."

"You blasted barrel of a robot!" roared Yobo. "You succeeded in tapping into the classified information section of Space Command's Secret Service!"

"I didn't learn a thing," said Rinda, "except what Ing looked like—grey hair and red eyes and skinny—not at all interesting."

"I'm afraid I learned everything," said Pera, always truthful. "I'm sorry, Admiral. I won't tell anyone about the secrets of Space Command, or things like the code numbers of official spies, or exactly how much you weigh . . ."

"That will do," said Yobo, his majestic bulk rising from the chair behind the desk. "Cadet Wells, take the Princess and her robot and your robot—especially your robot—away."

"But, Admiral," said Norby. "I was only tapping into Space Command's files to try to find a way to get tickets for the show tonight. Can't we go?"

Rinda turned on Jeff. "You mean you weren't going to take me to a show?"

"I forgot about it," said Jeff. "I didn't get tickets because, with Fargo on vacation, I have to go back to Earth right after my exams. Our pet Oola gets lonely being taken care of by the stupid kitchen computer."

"I want to go to the show," said Rinda.

"It's just a bunch of traveling entertainers," said Yobo, somewhat wearily.

"And you are Master of Ceremonies," said Norby. "The computer said so. You're even taking part in one of the skits, aren't you?"

"Unfortunately, yes," said Yobo, massaging his bald black head. "I get a headache every time I go into that silly magician's magic box, which isn't magic, of course . . ."

"Oh, Admiral," said Rinda, sidling around the desk and fingering the Admiral's medals on his broad chest. Her eyelashes fluttered up at him. "I do so want to see you perform. You must be marvelous."

"No! Absolutely not!" said Yobo. "Jeff, take her to your apartment on Earth and keep her out of trouble . . ."

"Oh dear," said Rinda, her lips trembling. "I so wanted Pera to observe and record your magnificent performance, so I could show it at the royal court of Izz, and now"—a tear rolled down her cheek—"you won't let me."

"Well, harrumph! Comet tails, but I can't bear seeing females cry. . . . If you promise to be good."

And so they got tickets to the show. After a hasty dinner, which Rinda devoured and Jeff picked at because he was still worrying, they went to their seats, which were at the back of the crowded auditorium.

It was a long show with many acts, some serious with classical music and dramatic readings, all introduced by the Admiral in his deep, commanding voice. During the intermission, Rinda burred about how marvelous Yobo was.

"Just your luck that the Admiral's old-fashioned enough to

believe that nonsense about weak, helpless females," said Jeff. "I have never yet met a genuinely helpless female. Look at your own mother! Sometimes I think you take after her . . ."

Rinda's elbow caught him in the ribs. "Shut up, Jeff. The second half is starting and the program says it's going to be funny, with clowns. But look—your clowns wear baggy pants—that's not funny."

"It is here," said Norby, sitting on Jeff's lap as Pera was on Rinda's. "Everyone wears baggy pants on Izz, so only tight leggings are funny there."

Jeff, who expected to be bored, had to admit to himself that the clown act was good, if ancient. They rode around in strange wheeled vehicles that made odd noises, they smacked each other with rubber baseball bats, and then they did a hilarious dance to the tune of a pocket flute played by the chief clown, a pudgy, black-haired man whose forked beard and handle-bar mustache contrasted with the red bulb fixed to the end of his long nose.

"Threezy!" shouted the children of Space Command personnel. "Hurray for Threezy the Clown!"

Threezy bowed and played another tune which he danced to very well.

Pera's arm reached over to touch Jeff and establish telepathic contact. Since Norby was also touching Jeff, he tuned in also.

—I am upset [said Pera]. Something is wrong. There is an artificial layer covering the eyeballs of that clown.

—Idiot [that was Norby]. Lots of humans wear contact lenses on their eyes.

Admiral Yobo then announced that the troupe of traveling entertainers would put on a special melodrama which he would personally oversee to make sure that it didn't frighten anyone. A chair was placed for him at the side of the stage and the curtain rose upon a blustering villain wearing a black cape lined with red satin to match his nose.

It was Threezy, who sneered at the audience and broke into hideous laughter before beginning his song:

"You can speak of many villains with any claim to fame,  
But you'll never find another who can beat ME at the  
game!

At enterprising evil I put Ing to second best—

I am wild and wicked Threezy, by far the horriest!"

The children laughed and clapped as Threezy menaced the heroine, a spangled lady with blue feathered hair who kept screaming, "Save me from this villain!"

"Ah, me proud beauty!" said Threezy. "Behold my magic box in which I will carry you away with me." He gestured, and a long box emerged from the stage trap door. A door in the front of the box opened.

—I don't understand [said Pera]. Their hair is wrong. The top layer of the lady's hair is a synthetic substance made to look like feathers, and Threezy's hair has black material on it.

—It's okay, Pera [said Jeff]. In the Federation, humans are allowed to wear wigs and dye their hair.

—The Queen of Izz would not approve.

—I heard somebody say that this is where the lady goes to Yobo for help and Threezy forces the Admiral into the magic box [said Norby].

Indeed, the spangled lady, shrieking that she did not love the caped villain, had scurried across the stage to clutch Admiral Yobo's arm. Yobo put a massive palm out against Threezy's approach.

"Cease and desist, villain!" said Yobo. The crowd was delighted.

But Pera was not. She slowly rose on miniantigrav from Rinda's lap, pointing toward the stage.

"I don't like that magic box," she said out loud. "I must observe it at closer range." Before Rinda could grab her, Pera sailed out over the heads of the crowd, toward the stage.

The spangled heroine gaped at the little robot and Yobo

shook his fist in Jeff's direction, but it was Threezy who made the robot's appearance part of the act.

"Aha!" he shouted. "No doubt this is our Admiral's body-guard. Isn't it amazing how they make them smaller as our Admiral gets bigger."

Everyone laughed, but a little uneasily, because Yobo's frown was always an intimidating sight even when it was not known if the frown was make-believe or not.

"Come back, Pera," cried Rinda, standing up.

Jeff stood up, too, holding Norby, who was struggling to follow Pera and stop her from embarrassing them.

Threezy seemed to stop dead, staring at the audience. "Ah," he said. "Fee, fie, fo, fum—I smell the blood of young villains. I see you, Jefferson Wells!"

And with that, Threezy caught Pera as she sailed toward the magic box and jumped into it with her. The door slid shut and the box sank below the stage.

"Open that trap door," said Yobo as Jeff fought his way toward the stage, followed by Rinda, who was calling for Pera.

"The mechanism's locked from the other side," said one of the stagehands. "We'll have to go below stage the other way."

A security cop came running up to Yobo. "All entrances to below stage are locked, and there's an emergency air lock that's been opened. Security patrol boats are on their way."

"I don't know any reason why Threezy would steal the little robot and disappear like that," said the producer, wringing her hands. "He's new to the company, but he's very talented. We found him working in a cafe under Titan's dome and I hired him to replace a clown who'd retired. But Threezy was so good I made him the star of the show. Funny thing, though—he'd never let us touch his magic box."

"Same box that gave me a headache," said Yobo. "Find him and bring him back for questioning."

"Why did he take Pera? I want my robot back!" said Rinda.

—Jeff [said Norby, telepathically], I sensed that there was an engine in that magic box, as well as a lot of other equipment. The clown's going somewhere in it and I think we ought to follow him.

—Good idea, but all the exits from Space Command will be watched . . .

—Don't be stupid, Jeff. Let's get behind those curtains and go into hyperspace and reappear in normal space outside the satellite. Then we'll find Threezy.

Jeff managed to get to Yobo and whispered to him that he and Norby might be able to find Threezy before the Security cops did. Yobo nodded.

"Take care of Rinda, please," said Jeff. "She and I together won't fit inside Norby's personal protective field, so I have to leave her behind."

Yobo rolled his eyes upward and said, "Hurry, Jeff."

Just before the grey gloom of hyperspace enveloped Jeff, he saw Rinda's little face, streaked with tears, poke around the curtain and shout at him.

"Wait for me!"

# 3

## The Stolen Ship

The sensation of being in hyperspace, the groundwork of the cosmos, was always awesome at first. It seemed to Jeff that he was lost out of time and normal space forever, but no sooner had he steeled himself to the feeling when Norby went back. Jeff blinked, for he'd expected to be outside the wheel of Space Command, floating in space, and instead his eyes were filled with bright light.

"I thought I was tuning into Pera's whereabouts," Norby said softly, "but we've come too late."

They were in the control room of a ship that was familiar. Jeff blinked again and recognized Space Command's first, experimental and so far only hyperdrive ship, recently re-named *Quest* by Yobo.

"Well, well. Unexpected visitors," said an unpleasant voice that seemed dreadfully familiar.

Jeff turned and saw the bizarre figure of Threezy the Clown, aiming a stun gun at him.

"I didn't see you come in," continued Threezy in a voice that seemed remarkably unlike the one the clown had used before. "No matter. You are merely an adolescent of no importance and you have brought me an extra robot."

"I don't know what you think you're doing, Threezy," said Jeff, "but stealing a robot is . . ."

"Stupid boy, I have planned for a long time to steal something else—this oh-so-special ship of the Admiral's. And now success is mine!"

"You can't even run this ship!"

"Oh, can't I? After inveigling Yobo into my act so I could rehearse with him inside my magic box? I have a mind probe in there . . ."

"Mind probes are illegal!"

"Dear honest youth, you have no conception of what it takes to be genuinely brilliant, a genius capable of the greatest plans devised by any mind. I've thoroughly probed Yobo's mind for information on how to run his precious hyperdrive ship. Now I think I've heard enough from you."

"Be careful, Jeff," said Pera's voice. "There's a detonator in his pocket, and he has two powerful bombs in the ship. Don't do anything to upset him." In the far corner of the control room was the magic box, with Pera inside it behind bars that now closed the opening. Since Pera couldn't disappear into hyperspace like Norby, she was trapped.

"I don't like you, Jefferson Wells," said Threezy, "and you'll not thwart my plans again." He pressed the trigger and the stun rays hit Jeff and Norby.

As Jeff hit the floor, he saw Norby fall beside him, and wondered why his own eyes were still open. The full blast of a stun gun should have made him unconscious. Norby's barrel was touching his arm. Perhaps he could still communicate.

—Are you paralyzed too, Norby?

—I got the full dose and it must be one of those illegal, too-powerful guns, because I'm having trouble moving and I don't think I can use hyperjump to get us out of here.

"Still awake?" said Threezy, lifting his upper lip far enough so that his greyish fang-like incisor teeth showed under the giant moustache in the ancient primate demonstration of threat. "But I see that you can't move, Wells. Now you just listen quietly while I send my message to the Federation."

He touched a switch on the control board and Jeff hoped against hope that Threezy would be so occupied in bragging to the Federation that he wouldn't notice that, according to

the viewscreen, patrol boats now surrounded the dock where the *Quest* was moored.

—Jeff, I've analyzed the voice data, and that's not Threezy. I mean, it's Threezy, but it's also Ing the Ingrate!

—Blast! I should have figured that out. He's gained weight and dyed his hair and grown a moustache, but you're right, he's Ing.

"Beware, Terran Federation!" said the erstwhile clown, speaking into the ship's communicator. "Do not attempt to take me into custody. I possess two bombs which will effectively destroy all of Space Command and I will not hesitate to use them to avoid capture."

Ing smiled. "I want you all to know that you are in the power, not of a mere clown named Threezy, but of the most important being in the universe—Ing the Incredible! And I am about to take my revenge. I will set off my special bombs in hyperspace itself!"

—Norby, can't you move at all? I think I'm getting back some muscular ability . . .

—Be careful, Jeff. He's dangerous.

"You don't understand what will happen, you stupid fools," said Ing, "but when I set off my bombs in hyperspace, the explosion will alter the fabric of normal space. The universe will collapse and soon become lethal to all life forms."

—Norby! Can he do that?

—I don't know. Maybe the Others, who have been using hyperspace for millennia, could tell whether or not Ing's right, but I can't.

"But ah, Federation—your unappreciated Ing will not have to join your death party. I will be safe in hyperspace, in my magic box that I can transform into a stasis container. I will wait while the universe dies and then expands again. I will be there when the reborn-universe is ready to receive me as its master! Farewell. You have twenty-four hours to say goodbye to each other."

There was a lurch and, to Jeff's horror, the viewscreen showed that the *Quest* was now in the grey nothingness of hyperspace. Ing had indeed learned how to use hyperdrive, and he had escaped capture.

Jeff managed to move his tongue, and slurred words came out. "You're mad, Ing."

"I wanted you conscious, but not lively," said Ing, brandishing the gun. "Don't try anything heroic, Wells, or I'll attach you to the first bomb I send out. Nothing's going to stop me now. You and that silly robot of yours once foiled my plans to run the Federation, but now I can be master of a new universe." He laughed maniacally.

"Jeff," said Pera, "I can detect abnormal patterns in his brain waves. There is something wrong with this clown who now calls himself Ing."

"Shut up, robot, and mind your own business," said Ing. "I have work to do."

"Your plan will fail, Ing," said Jeff. "You'll probably destroy this ship and yourself, but you won't change the universe. It's too big and your bombs are too little."

"Not by my calculations." Ing stroked one of the handlebars of his moustache. "Furthermore, there's nobody in hyperspace who can stop me. This is the only hyperdrive ship in existence, although I've heard a rumor that your robot can attach himself to a ship's computer and generate hyperdrive capacity."

Ing's eyes widened. "Hmmm. Even geniuses don't consider everything. It never occurred to me to try to steal your robot, Wells, when I could have hyperdrive merely by stealing the *Quest*. But with your robot already here, thanks to your stupid heroics, perhaps I can augment the hyperdrive by using him."

"You won't be able to," said Jeff, trying to test his leg and arm muscles in isometric contractions.

"Why not? Is the rumor untrue?"

Jeff didn't answer, but pretended to be semiconscious.

"Humph!" said Ing, kicking Jeff, who didn't respond. "And the robot looks dead. But not the other one—I had no idea you had two of them, Wells. They don't look exactly alike but I suppose it doesn't matter. You, robot in the cage, is Norby capable of hyperdrive?"

Pera did not answer.

Ing strode over to the cage and glared at her. Then he pointed the gun at Jeff. "I'm going to stun young Wells until he stops breathing if you don't tell me the truth."

"Norby is capable of hyperdrive," said Pera.

Jeff gathered his strength and hurled himself at Ing, but the gun was too quick. This time Jeff blacked out.

When he awoke, he looked at the ship's chronometer and saw that an hour had passed. He still couldn't move easily, but he made the mistake of yawning.

"So you're conscious again, are you, Wells?" Ing looked furious, but the anger didn't seem to be aimed at Jeff.

"What's the matter, Ing?" asked Jeff groggily.

"The bombs don't work, that's what's the matter," yelled Ing. "I sent out the first one, timed to go off when far away from the *Quest* . . ."

"It's impossible to tell dimensions in hyperspace," said Jeff wearily.

"Oh, so you're a hyperspace expert? Maybe you are, if the rumors about your robot are correct. But the bomb didn't go off too close to this ship. I had radio link with it and there was no explosion."

"I'm not sure it would be possible to tell if it exploded or not. Perhaps you're just lucky to be still alive."

"Robot in the cage," demanded Ing, "you have sensors that might be able to tell. Did the bomb explode?"

"Should I answer him, Jeff?"

"Might as well. It might discourage him from continuing this idiotic experiment."

"The bomb did not explode, Mr. Ing."

"Hellfire!"

"Maybe bombs don't go off in hyperspace," said Jeff.

"Is that true?" Ing didn't ask Jeff, but pointed the gun at him again and asked Pera, a robot committed to telling the truth. "Tell me, robot, if you want Jefferson Wells to live."

"In my memory banks there is data indicating that bombs will go off in hyperspace."

"Then why, why?" Ing raged around the control room, hitting the walls and kicking Jeff again. The kick had one good effect—it pushed Jeff within touch of Norby's barrel.

—I'm getting back my functioning, Jeff, but it's slow, and he must not ask Pera what she surely has observed, because I did, and I'm not as good at that as she is.

—What are you talking about?

—There's something out there in hyperspace. Something that caught the bomb.

But Ing asked Pera a different, more dangerous question.

"All right, smart little robot, I want to set off my second bomb, but this time it's going to be part of the booster engine of this ship, forcing the ship itself to rip the fabric of the universe. I may die in the attempt, but maybe I won't. If I hook you up to the computer, will your power augment it?"

"Jeff, I don't want to answer . . ."

"Your Jeff is doomed if you don't answer," said Ing. "This time I mean it. One more stun and he's dead."

"Ing," said Jeff, "You're only dooming all of us. Be sensible and take us back into normal space and . . ."

"No! I'm going to destroy normal space! I'm going to destroy the universe! I don't need the robot's answer. I'll use the robot anyway."

Jeff tried to rise, but it was impossible. Norby's head was trying to rise out of his barrel but his arms and legs were still stuck inside.

Ing was stronger than he looked. He caught Pera's arms, stuck beseechingly through the bars of her cage, before she

could withdraw them into her body. With a wire from computer, he tied them together, and fixed a computer link device to her head.

"Stop it, Ing!"

Ing paid no attention. He lifted Jeff's arms and pulled him into the air lock that opened directly into the control room. Then he threw Norby inside and closed the door.

"Norby—can you do anything?"

One of Norby's arms came out and the hand grasped Jeff's just as the *Quest* gave a wild shudder and the outer door of the air lock opened.

The air in the lock rushed out, carrying Jeff and Norby with it.

# 4

## Escaping into Time

—Norby! I'm still alive!

—Don't you have faith in me, Jeff? I'm your personal robot, bound to protect you.

—But you were stunned and couldn't function and Ing threw us out into hyperspace . . .

—I am a superior robot and even when I haven't had time to recover all of my functioning, I can certainly put out a protective field for you.

—Thank you, Norby.

—Besides, the field comes on automatically. I confess that if I'd had to turn on the field deliberately, I might have had trouble. The old spacer who found my alien parts and put them into a Terran robot knew what he was doing, because that amount of stun would have ruined an ordinary robot. As it is, I'm nearly back to normal.

—Then find Ing's ship. We have to get inside and stop him from setting off that second bomb.

—I can't.

—Then you're not back to normal at all.

—I certainly am. I can't get inside the *Quest* because it isn't there. I have a limited ability to detect the presence of things in hyperspace, and the *Quest* is gone.

—Back into the universe?

—I—don't—know. Jeff, I'm scared. Something's wrong.

—With hyperspace? How can that be?

—Nothing seems wrong now, but something was wrong—at the moment we were thrown out of the *Quest*, it was forced through hyperspace by powerful energy. Ing

must have harnessed the force of his second bomb, perhaps by using Pera. She contains some of the same alien metal that I do, and although it was used to give her powers of observation instead of hyperdrive, she may have talents she doesn't know about.

—None of this makes sense. Why didn't the *Quest* just blow up? Maybe Ing and Pera are both dead.

—Oh, Jeff, don't say that. Yet, if the *Quest* did what Ing wanted it to, he may have succeeded. He may have forced the *Quest* out into the universe, but that could mean . . .

—What?

—That the tremendous energy he used to force the *Quest* out of hyperspace may have altered the field of our universe. I don't see how the *Quest* could have survived this. And perhaps our universe is even now dying.

Jeff found that he was breathing too quickly, using up the small and precious supply of air in Norby's protective field. Norby could survive a long time in hyperspace, but humans could not.

—Norby, review all the data in your memory banks, especially the moment when we left the *Quest*. Isn't that where you think something "wrong" happened? What was it?

—I told you. The force with which the *Quest* moved—no, Jeff. You're right. There was something else. Something that made me deduce a wrongness. It was . . . like a crack.

—I don't understand.

—Neither do I. It didn't last long, but my sensors picked up a dimension in hyperspace, which has none. As if a narrow hole opened and shut.

—Can you explain it?

—Of course not. I'm not a genius.

In the midst of his anxiety, Jeff almost laughed, for Norby was fond of bragging about being a genius. Just now, however, claiming to be a genius would sound too close to Ing's ravings.

—Jeff, you're breathing heavily. Are you all right? Are you still paralyzed? And is it affecting your diaphragm?

—The paralysis has gone because the stun dose has worn off, but I guess I'm getting a bit short of breath because the oxygen is running low. We have to go into normal space to a planet where I can replenish my air. Then we've got to get back into hyperspace and try to make sure that the *Quest* isn't there.

Norby was silent for such a long time that Jeff became frightened. He could feel Norby's hand holding his, and the protective field was still there because he was still alive, but what was happening to Norby? Had he been damaged?

—No, Jeff, I'm not damaged. I've been thinking. I don't know where to go. If the universe has been destroyed, maybe there isn't any "where" to go to.

—Comet tails!

—I agree. This is not a satisfactory situation. I will try to think of a solution to this problem . . . Hey! What was that!

—What was what?

—Didn't you feel . . . no, of course you wouldn't. You don't have my sensors. There's something that's come near us in hyperspace.

—The *Quest*? Is Ing trying to capture us?

—I don't think so. I don't know. I can't tell . . . I am an inadequate robot . . . Hey! Whatever it is, is trying to grab me with some kind of device. I don't like it at all.

—Norby, we can't stay in hyperspace! There's something after us and I'm running out of air. Go *somewhere* fast!

—But Jeff, what if there's no "where" to go to?

—Then try a "when."

—I'm sorry, Jeff.

—But we're out of hyperspace and the universe is still here and there's a planet! Take me down so I can replenish the air in here.

—Jeff . . .

—And look, Norby, you *are* a genius! You've brought us out of hyperspace into orbit around Earth, for there's the moon, peeking out behind . . . Oh! Earth . . . isn't right.

—No. I tried to jump back in time so I wouldn't come out into the normal space of the universe after Ing did whatever he did. But I jumped back too far. My sensors tell me that the atmosphere here isn't breathable by humans.

—Do you mean we've come back in time so far that bacteria in Earth's oceans haven't yet begun to put oxygen into the air?

—Yes. Hang on. I'm going forward in time.

—Be careful. Not too far.

This time Jeff hit something hard and he was so dizzy he couldn't see at first, and all the breath seemed to have been knocked out of him. He gasped, tried to expand his lungs—and air came rushing in. Air!

Jeff opened his eyes. He was lying prone, a slab of rock beneath him and a perfectly ordinary ant crawling past his nose. He could hear birds singing, water gurgling, and a mysterious trumpeting sound in a deep bass. He sat up and gasped again.

The view was astonishing—and beautiful, the crisp, cool air clean and fragrant with blossoms. He and Norby were sitting on a hillside, looking down into a green valley where herds of animals moved slowly—antelope and elk and . . .

"Norby! Mammoths! We're in the Ice Age of Earth!"

"I was concentrating on it, Jeff. You've always been interested in it and the water ought to be clean. You can take a drink at that stream." Norby pointed to a tiny spring gushing out between two boulders.

The water was as delicious as the air, and Jeff drank deeply. He had not realized how thirsty he was. Then he leaned back against the hillside.

"Norby, it's so beautiful here. I'm beginning to wish we could stay. Human beings haven't had time to ruin Earth."

"It isn't all ruined in our time. By the twenty-first century,

humans had stopped destroying the forests and polluting the air. And they made more of an effort to preserve the diversity of animal species that is so essential to a balanced ecology. . . ."

"Norby, there aren't any cities, or any Ings." Jeff sat up and rubbed his curly brown hair. "And speaking of villains, Ing didn't succeed, because here we are, in the universe."

"Far back in time, Jeff."

Jeff gulped. "You found me another 'when', a time before Ing destroyed the universe—is that what you mean?"

"Yes. No. I don't know. I can't predict what we'll find if we try to move forward to our own time."

"Well, as long as we're safely here in the Pleistocene, I think I'd better look around for some food. I'm getting awfully hungry. I'm certainly not equipped to kill any animals, but I might be able to find some nuts and berries . . ."

"I think you'll have to be hungry a while longer," said Norby. "If you had eyes in the back of your head like me, you'd see that we have company. Turn your head slowly and look up the hill, over to your left."

Jeff turned and glimpsed a shaggy head peeping over a crest of rock formation at the top of the hill.

"*Homo sapiens sapiens*," said Norby professorially. "Just like you. We've come in Cro-Magnon times, which is just as well since those earlier big-nosed, big-browed *homo sapiens neanderthalensis* might not have been friendly."

Just then a spear with an intricately incised shaft hit the rock slab by Jeff's toe and clattered down the hill.

"I never could understand why your variety of human insists on naming itself 'wise' twice," said Norby.

Jeff clutched Norby's hand just as another human stood up with another spear. "Time to go, Norby!"

—Can you breathe all right now, Jeff?

—Yes, but hyperspace looks gloomier than ever and I'm twice as hungry. You know I can't think clearly when my

stomach is rumbling. Please take me to a time when I'll be able to eat as well as breathe the air and drink the water.

—I'll do my best, Jeff. You'll have to admit that I'm getting better at taking us to times and places without mix-ups. You didn't even land hard enough on that Pleistocene hill to break anything.

—And you got us away before the second spear hit. I think it might have found its mark. Those Cro-Magnon people were skilled hunters. I wish I'd thought to bring the first spear with me.

—That might have disturbed history. Perhaps it's one of those spear shafts that was found in modern times and ended up in a museum. I wish we'd brought Ing with us and left him in the Pleistocene . . . Jeff! I have a brilliant idea. Let's go forward in time to find Ing when he was a child and bring him back here to be adopted by some Cro-Magnon family. Then he won't be able to set off his bombs and the danger won't have happened at all.

—You are ignoring your own advice about not disturbing history. Right after I bought you to become my teaching robot, we were mixed up in Ing's early wickedness, when he tried to become master of the Federation. If we remove Ing from history we'll destroy parts of our own histories, and we won't be the same. We might not even be together, and I don't want that.

—You're right, Jeff. Whatever happens, we two must stick together. Besides, judging from the rest of human history, if Ing hadn't been around to cause trouble, somebody else probably would have.

—I'm still terribly hungry, Norby. Please find me a time when I can eat without disturbing history.

The transition was so quick that Jeff smelled the food before he saw it. The smell was delicious, almost as if he'd landed in one of the better restaurants on Earth.

He looked around and thought that perhaps he had—at least he seemed to be in the huge kitchen of a restaurant. He

rubbed his eyes, for everything looked askew. Sandwiches, cakes, cookies, fruit, caviar, platters of meat, roasts and salads were sliding on the tilted floor. Oddly enough, the floor was not only tilted but seemed to be moving back and forth, and there was a horrendous noise.

Jeff picked up a chicken leg and an apple. "What's going on? Are we in an earthquake? It sounds as if tons of metal were clashing together."

Norby was quickly filling a bag with fruit and sandwiches and the chocolate cookies Jeff liked best. He didn't answer.

Jeff tried chewing on the chicken leg, but his stomach seemed to lurch and he put it in the bag, adding some cold cuts and a roll. "Where are we, Norby? I don't like it here."

A piece of heavy paper slid from a countertop, landing near Jeff. He picked it up and read it.

"White Star Line: Midnight Buffet: April 14, 1912 . . . Norby! This must be—" he turned the paper over and it said, "R.M.S. *Titanic*."

"It's all right, Jeff. The *Titanic* won't sink under water for another few minutes, and even when it does, there'll still be air here for quite a while so you can have your lunch . . ."

"Get me out *Now!*"

# 5

## Closer to Home

Jeff stuffed the bag of food into the inside of his tunic so he wouldn't miss dinner again in case anything went wrong.

And of course something went wrong, because he was under-water being stared at by a small fish. Then Norby yanked him upward, his head went into breathable air, and he smiled.

"Norby! The universe is safe! We're in the boating pond in Central Park, and there's our apartment building!"

Jeff found that with a few strokes he was in shallow water and able to haul himself onto one of his favorite perching places, a rock formation that jutted out into the lake.

Norby whirled on miniantigrav to dry his barrel, but when he came to rest beside Jeff, his sensor wire was out.

"Ing didn't succeed!" said Jeff, happily removing a snail from his tunic, "and I'm so glad he didn't, because if he had, you might have brought us into nothingness, or to a cosmic egg, or to whatever happens to a universe when it collapses."

Norby was so silent that Jeff peered at him to see if he was damaged. "Are you all right, Norby?"

"I am functioning perfectly, as usual. Almost perfectly. It's just that—well—I tried to arrive past the time when we last left our apartment, because of course we can't go into a time where we already exist . . ." He paused and withdrew his sensor wire. "Jeff, eat your lunch here."

"Why? What's wrong? Oola will be so glad to see us . . ."

"Please, just eat. Then we'll see about going home."

It was probably lunchtime in Manhattan, for the sun was warm and high overhead. The bag of food was only slightly damp. He munched on a sandwich that should have been at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean. "Are you going to tell me what's on what passes for your mind, Norby?"

"Well, I wanted to come to our apartment at the time when Fargo was due back from his vacation. That would accomplish two things—get us some help, and prove that Ing hadn't destroyed the universe. But maybe I was scared."

"What do you mean?" asked Jeff, watching a small boy bound over the rocks toward him. He hoped the boy wasn't hungry.

"I don't think I moved quite that far in time."

"Hi, mister," said the boy. "You're wet. I don't think you're supposed to swim in the lake."

"It was an accident. I didn't mean to swim," said Jeff. "Want an apple? I have two."

"Thanks," said the boy, pushing his wavy black hair off his high forehead. "I'm not supposed to take food from strangers, but my nanny robot hasn't caught up with me and, anyway, you don't look dangerous. You're big, but you're not grown up yet, are you?"

Jeff felt hurt. "I guess I'm not."

"What's in the barrel?"

Jeff saw that Norby was closed up and did indeed resemble a metal barrel, not a robot. "Parts of a robot," said Jeff, who hated to lie. Besides, it was safe to mention robots since they were clearly in a time period when little boys had nanny robots, just as Jeff once did.

"May I have a piece of chicken for my turtle?" asked the boy, taking one out of his pocket. "He eats under water. You can watch, if you like."

"Sure," said Jeff, handing over a small piece of chicken and watching the boy put the turtle on the rock in a depression that contained water.

"Master Farley!" said a metallic voice from the land side of the rock formation. A conventional nanny robot was standing there, waving at the small boy. "Do not put the turtle in the lake or it will swim away. And do not get wet."

"Okay, Nanny."

"Farley?" asked Jeff through a throat that was suddenly tight. "Is that really your name, and is that nanny robot yours? It has a dent on the side of its head . . ."

"It fell out of our window once. It's not very bright, but I like it. And my name is Farley, but don't call me that. I hate it."

"What do you like to be called?" croaked Jeff.

"Dad says I have an ancestor who was tarred and feathered in a town in North Dakota near the Red River. I don't know what tarred and feathered means, but Dad says I have something in common with that ancestor, so he calls me Fargo, because that's the place in North Dakota and, besides, it's both my names—Farley Gordon. Call me Fargo."

"I like the name," said Jeff. "How old are you?"

"I'm five. How old are you?"

"Fifteen." The same age difference, thought Jeff, that has always been between us, only now I'm the one who's ten years older.

"That's a good age for an older brother to be. I wish I had one. Mom says it's too late for me to have an older brother but someday I might have a younger one. She and Dad haven't gotten around to making me one yet."

"I'm sure they will."

"What's your name?" said young Fargo, scooping up his turtle and replacing it in his pocket because the nanny robot was waving at him to come.

"It doesn't matter. Enjoy your life, young Fargo."

"Okay, I will. You look sad. Don't you enjoy yours?"

"Right now I'm having some big problems."

"Don't you have a dad or a mom or an older brother or sister to help you out?"

"No. Not really. Not any more."

"I have some advice. Want it?"

Jeff smiled. "Sure."

"I hope you don't mind getting advice from a kid, but Dad says I'm preco—co . . ."

"Precocious. It means smart."

"Good." Fargo frowned as the nanny robot marched stolidly over the rocks and took him by the hand. "I've got to go home—why don't you come with me and maybe my Dad can help you. He's smart, too."

"I wish I could, but I can't," said Jeff. "I have to leave soon."

The boy cocked his head, his blue eyes wide. "I bet you're having an adventure. I like adventures, except that Nanny won't let me have many."

"I'm sure you'll grow up to have many adventures, and that you'll be brave and heroic, like my older brother."

Young Fargo turned pink and grinned. "Thanks. I hope you have luck with your problem, whatever it is. Remember that it's a good idea to find somebody older and smarter who can help. That's what Dad always says. Goodbye!"

"Goodbye." Jeff turned his back so he wouldn't have to see young Fargo walking with his nanny robot in the direction of the building where someday another Wells boy would be born.

"He won't remember this," said Norby softly. "He's much too young."

Jeff started to cry. "What if there's no future for him? What if Ing succeeded? It's my fault. If I hadn't stopped Ing from conquering the Federation, he wouldn't have gone crazy and wanted to be master of a new universe."

"He probably would have anyway. It's not your fault. Come on. We'll walk for a while to clear your head."

Norby pulled Jeff along the path by the lake, across Bow Bridge and into the woods known as the Ramble. Joggers and bird watchers went by, but paid no attention to the tall

teenager dressed in odd clothes, walking with a robot that resembled a small animated barrel. You had to be much odder than that to get attention in Central Park, at any time.

His vision blurry with tears, Jeff stumbled on in misery until he saw a blaze of crimson.

"The azalea pond! It's spring here—and look at the ruby-throated hummingbirds!"

"Too many people around," muttered Norby. "Come on."

They followed the little stream known as the Gill to the Lost Waterfall, still called that although it had been restored in the twenty-first century. The clean water splashed while small birds bathed and bluebells nodded over the banks.

Norby dragged Jeff on through the woods to the narrow opening of the Cave, a place that had also been closed for many years and still wasn't known to many people, for the way down into it was steep and its main opening was right into the lake. Jeff sat down on the stone bench inside and tried to meditate.

At first he couldn't concentrate. He listened to the bird-song, the splash of rowboaters out on the lake, and the faint hum of the surrounding city. The sounds seemed so precious, and now so threatened.

"I am a child of this universe," said Jeff. "Whatever happens to it, happens to me. I am only a small organic creature, part of the life of planet Earth, but the universe is one. All life is one, all intelligence—organic or robotic—is one. We are all responsible for helping each other . . . Norby!"

"You're doing fine, Jeff."

"I feel better, and I've thought of something. Young Fargo was right. We need wise help. We must find the Others. They are the wisest, oldest intelligent species in the universe and we must ask them what to do."

"We've met them in the distant past and in the far future, but never near our own time," said Norby.

"Try tuning in to them. I'll hold your hand and try to focus my mind, too."

Jeff half-closed his eyes, staring at the rippling water outside the mouth of the cave. He brought back the half-smile he used to help him meditate, but it vanished because he started worrying about the collapse of the universe. What could any intelligent species, even the Others, do about that?

"It didn't work, Jeff. We're still here," said Norby.

"It's different!" They were still in the cave, but only swampy ground, filled with weeds, came to the mouth. There were old aluminum cans lying in the swamp, pieces of dirty paper everywhere, and a puzzled heron sitting on the nearest branch of a willow tree.

The back opening of the cave was filled in and there was no way out except through the swamp.

"I must have gone back further in time instead of to wherever the Others are," said Norby. "Close your eyes this time, Jeff, and concentrate . . . oops!"

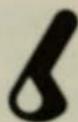
The cave disappeared and Jeff sat down hard on rough ground. Before him was a small muddy pond and around the shore were run-down shacks. There was only one building visible on the west side of the park, and that was under construction.

"They called that building *The Dakota* because it seemed so far away from the main part of the city," said Norby. "I've read all about it. Even your pet cave was man-made at the time Olmstead created Central Park . . ."

"Norby, we've gone back to the nineteenth century! Are we doomed to keep going further into the past? If Ing did destroy the universe in the future, is something blocking us . . ."

"Hey, you!" said a heavy voice in a strangely accented version of the English used before Terran Basic became standard. "What's in that funny-looking barrel—booze?"

A big, bearded man crashed through the trees in back of them and Jeff picked up Norby, holding him tightly.



## An Artist Lost in Time

There was a spinning sensation and the squatters' ground that was not yet Central Park vanished.

"Where are we? This isn't hyperspace."

"I don't know," said Norby. "I'm not sure what my circuits were doing when I hyperjumped. I just wanted to get away. It was you who shouted, 'Help.'"

"No, it was you."

"I wasn't that afraid." Norby's head sucked into his barrel so that only the tops of his eyes showed. "But I think I am now."

Jeff felt the same way, for they were in an enormous, dim room shaped like a half-moon. At the curved end was a huge photograph of a spiral galaxy, but it looked different from most astrophotographs Jeff had seen. There were no stars in the foreground, only the galaxy hanging in the black of space.

The room was so dim that Jeff didn't notice that there was a large door in the straight end, until Norby tugged at Jeff's arm and pointed with his other hand. "Look, Jeff."

The door was slowly dilating open to light so strong that Jeff could see only the silhouette of a tall figure in a flowing robe that shone green where the light filtered through the edge of it. The figure stepped forward into the room.

It was not a man. It had three eyes and two sets of arms.

"You are one of the Others," said Jeff in awe, using the language taught by the Others to two planets Jeff had previously visited.

"You know us?" said the Other. "I know that my ancestors

took some creatures like you from their home planet to another planet. But that was long ago and I have never seen your kind before. Are you from that planet?"

"No, sir. I am from Earth, the home planet of my species. This is my robot, Norby, who was made by Jamyn robots who were made by the Others long ago. I will tell you the whole story and how I came to meet your species in the past, but this is an emergency. We need your help."

"Indeed. Please sit down." The Other gestured, and two low seats rose from the floor. The Other sat down and so did Jeff, with Norby standing close beside him.

"If you met my species in the past, then you must be either very long-lived, or a time traveler," said the Other, "yet time travel is not possible without a certain metal from a previous universe. We Others once had a small supply, but it was lost long ago."

"I have some inside me," said Norby proudly. "And so does another robot like me, who can't time-travel but, well, we don't know what else she can do. She's been kidnapped and we think the universe is in danger. Or has already been destroyed, up in the future."

"Are you telepathic, small Norby?"

"When I touch humans who have been bitten by the Jamyn dragons."

"Then you will be telepathic if you touch an Other, because we gave that capacity to the dragons. Come here, Norby, and give me your knowledge."

When Norby hesitated, Jeff said, "Go ahead, Norby. It's the best thing to do."

After the information transferal the Other went to consult with his colleagues in another part of the ship. While waiting for his return, Jeff tried to consume some of the liquid and solid refreshment the Other had provided. It had a strange taste and appearance, but he supposed the Other wouldn't try to poison him. Even so, Jeff was worried.

He knew now that the curved wall of the room did not

contain a photograph, but plastiglass. He was in a gigantic ship traveling in space between his own Milky Way galaxy and what humans called M31, the spiral galaxy in the constellation of Andromeda. But Jeff wasn't looking at M31.

"That's our own galaxy we're looking at, Norby. It doesn't seem possible. The Others have a technology that permits this sort of travel."

"It's not so wonderful, Jeff. And because they don't have any of the metal that's inside me, they can't time-travel. But, of course, they invented hyperdrive long before the Federation did."

"They were civilized long before Earth evolved life," said Jeff. "If anyone can help us, they can."

"You'd better sleep. He said it would take a while to go over my information."

Jeff leaned back, for the seat had developed a soft back as if in response to his wish. Before he knew it, he was asleep. And when he woke, he felt refreshed.

The Other was sitting near him, and Jeff smiled, feeling safe for the first time since Threezy had revealed himself as Ing.

"Jeff Wells, I am going to tell you what we know," said the Other. "We Others travel through the universe in ships like this one, exploring and learning. This particular ship specializes in recording knowledge and ideas as art forms, and I am the chief artist."

"What's your name?"

A series of musical syllables flowed from the Other's almost human mouth, but Jeff knew he could never pronounce them. "I can't say your name. Would you mind if I gave you a name I can pronounce—a name of a renowned human artist?"

"I would be honored."

"Then I'll call you Rembrandt. Please go on telling us what you Others have decided to do after learning what Norby has stored in his memory banks about Ing's attempt to destroy the universe."

"It was this ship that we are on that caught Ing's first bomb and deactivated it," Rembrandt said. "We were traveling in hyperspace at the time, and we have developed ways of detecting ships that are also using hyperdrive. Then two things happened that we did not expect. The first was that the *Quest*, as we now know it to have been, disappeared from hyperspace, though not in the usual way. Something very odd happened, and Norby's impression of it is accurate. It was as if hyperspace opened with a momentary hole that immediately shut. We do not understand the phenomenon."

"But what was the other thing that happened?"

Rembrandt laughed. It sounded hearty and human to Jeff. "We tried to pick up something in hyperspace that was not a ship but much smaller. It, however, disappeared."

"Me? I? Jeff and I?"

"Yes, Norby. Then after we entered normal space, we detected that someone was trying to reach us. We tuned into you and we helped you journey to us."

"How marvelous!" said Jeff, more awestruck than ever. These Others were incredibly powerful. Surely they could do everything—save Pera, even the universe . . .

Norby was touching Jeff, perhaps tuning into his thoughts, but not transmitting any words, just a sudden feeling of anxiety. Jeff tried to ignore it, because he was so happy that they'd found the Others.

"Rembrandt," said Jeff, "the fact that you entered normal space *after* Ing did something drastic in hyperspace, proves that the universe is still here." He pointed to the transparent wall.

"Stars—wrong," muttered Norby.

"I'm afraid they are," said Rembrandt sadly. "Our ship was thrown back in time."

"How much time?" asked Jeff.

"Jeff," said Norby, "it happened to us, too. We went back further in time than we wanted to at first, remember?"

"We have gone back very far," said Rembrandt, "so far

that although galaxies have formed, there are only a few second generation stars and planets made from the elements created in the deaths of first generation stars. We here in this ship are the only life in the universe at this time."

"I will take you forward in time," said Norby, elevating his legs to full length. "Let me tie in to your computer . . ."

"We cannot return to any time where we once existed," said Rembrandt, "just as you cannot. If you help us, Norby, we will try to return to hyperspace just after we left it. We will search for Ing and if we can't find him . . ."

"Yes?" said Jeff, his heart sinking. Rembrandt looked as puzzled and worried as any human could look in a difficult situation.

"We will think about what to do. In the meantime, would you like to see some of the art forms we carry in this ship? There are too many for more than a quick survey of some of the finest specimens but . . ."

"I would like to see your work, Rembrandt," said Jeff.

"That is easily done." Rembrandt touched a switch and the floor in front of the window shimmered. It seemed as if several objects had emerged into the room, yet for all Jeff knew he was looking at advanced holograms. Only one was easy to examine. The others—were there two?—were misty.

The clear object turned slowly, and Jeff thought he could never like anything better. It was a sculpture made of tinted crystal and light, that at first meant nothing at all; yet after a few minutes, he could see almost anything in it that he wanted to.

Then the sculpture faded, and one of the other objects became easy to see. It was chunky and rough and had jolly music coming from it all of a sudden. Jeff wanted to tap his feet in time to the music and he felt himself smiling. The thing was humorous, and he wondered if only humans would find it so.

"To amuse our young," said Rembrandt. "We have children infrequently, but we love them dearly. This particular piece is also popular with grown Others."

Jeff nodded and watched the funny object fade and a third take its place. It was a flat rectangular object and when it came into focus, Jeff gasped.

"It's an oil painting!"

"Not exactly, but perhaps the canvas, paint, and technique are similar to those humans use. We Others used this technique early in our history, and in spite of its difficulties, it is still popular with serious artists, for it requires skill which must be painstakingly acquired. We enjoy the effort to acquire such skill; at least, I do."

The painting was of a dragon cradling her young offspring, almost in the manner of a Renaissance Madonna and Child. The picture seemed to glow with the love of the mother dragon.

"I've met the Jamyn dragons," said Jeff, "but they don't remember the Others, who bioengineered them. Surely you are not that old, Rembrandt, to be one of the founders of Jamya?"

"Oh, no," said Rembrandt, smiling. "We Others live longer than humans, but not that long. The Jamyn dragons have become one of our legends, and we like to paint pictures about them."

"They would love to see you," said Norby. "If Jamya still exists. If anything still exists."

The objects of art vanished, and the room seemed colder. Rembrandt closed the middle eye of his three. He shook his head. "No, we Others are space travelers now. We do not visit planets, and we believe that it is best to leave alone those species we once helped, like the Jamyn dragons or the humans we took to the planet Izz. If they still exist."

"Don't you know?" asked Jeff, bewildered. "If they still exist, I mean?"

"Ah, young human, I see that you believe we are such superior beings that we have powers for accomplishing anything. Although we are much older than the human race, we are not all that different. All our long history of experience and technological marvels has not prepared us

for this crisis. We have no machines that can give us information about the future. And without Norby's help, we cannot time-travel to find out what Ing did to the universe."

"I'm ready to help," said Norby.

The gigantic ship of the Others, so huge that Jeff had been in only small portions of it, was back in hyperspace, and had moved forward in time.

"I just don't understand it," said Jeff. "If hyperspace is dimensionless and outside time, how can we move forward in time within hyperspace?"

"We don't," said Norby, still hooked into the ship's mysteriously intricate computer. "I've never understood it either, although I *do* it, so I asked Yib here . . ."

"Yib?" said Rembrandt, while the rest of the control room crew members blinked all three of their eyes simultaneously.

"I've named your computer Yib because she's so big. I said You Immense Brain to her when I was trying to hook in—she's a little hard to get to know—and she didn't seem to mind; in fact she thinks I'm cute . . ."

Rembrandt passed one of his upper hands over his head. "We never realized that our computer had a personality. Especially a female personality. You were saying that Yib explained hyperspace to you?"

"Sure," said Norby. "Of course, a biological brain like yours or Jeff's couldn't possibly understand it completely."

Jeff and Rembrandt looked at each other in a sudden comradeship of the merely biological, while the rest of the Others in the room smiled. Norby had already become a favorite.

"Tell us, Norby!" commanded Jeff.

"It's just that you don't move in time when you're in hyperspace, except biological time. If you stay in hyperspace, you age just as you would in normal space, but you can come out of hyperspace at the exact moment, almost, that you went in, so nothing else will have aged."

"But . . ."

"And," said Norby, "when we move further in time, as this ship has just done, thanks to my genius, it is accomplished during the transition between normal space and hyperspace."

"That doesn't make sense," said Jeff.

Norby swung his arms back and forth. "No, I guess not. I guess I don't understand hyperspace either. But I've got you here."

"We know where we are," said Rembrandt patiently, "but *when* are we?"

"Just after you left, after Ing left. After Ing blew up or something. Should Yib and I take the ship further into time and out into normal space to see if the universe is there?"

There was silence for a moment. And then Rembrandt said, "I cannot risk the ship, which contains the art treasures of the long history of the Others, as well as works by many artists now living. There must be a scouting expedition to find out what the conditions are in the universe. I will go with Norby."

"No," said Jeff. "You're Rembrandt. As good as he was, I mean. Just Norby and I will go."

Norby detached himself from Yib and walked to the center of the room. He withdrew his legs and hung in the air, staring at everyone with all four of his eyes. "No biological being should go. The universe may be lethal to them, but a robot might survive long enough to come back with the facts. I will go alone."

Jeff didn't have time to argue. He flung himself upon Norby just as the robot vanished.

# 7

## A Disastrous Change

Jeff lay face down, staring at a floor. Something was licking the back of his neck. He sat up to see that he was in the Wells' small ship, the *Hopeful*, with Norby already seated at the control board. It was hard to see much because his all-purpose-pet, Oola, was climbing over him, licking his chin ecstatically. Loud purring rumbled under her green fur.

"Where have you been, Jeff Wells! I've waited and waited!" Rinda looked as if she'd been crying, but at the moment she seemed as angry as the daughter of a ferocious Izzian Queen could be. "Well? What happened to you two?"

Jeff burst into happy laughter. "We're home! The universe is safe! Everything still exists!"

"Are you out of your mind?" asked Rinda, sniffing.

"Your reasoning is logical, Jeff." said Norby, "If Rinda is here, then since Ing left hyperspace, enough time has passed for Rinda to have arrived at our apartment."

"Of course it has, you idiot," said Rinda. "I spent one day with the Admiral in Space Command while the fleet looked for you, but he and I knew you and the *Quest* wouldn't be found because you'd gone into hyperspace, and nobody else can follow. Then Yobo brought me here and we waited a couple of days. But you didn't show up, so I stayed to comfort Oola and hope that your vacationing brother would come home, but he hasn't. I've been all alone and very miserable and I don't like anything on Terran holovision and where have you been?"

She had run out of breath, so Jeff explained as fast as he

could. He wound up by saying, "But Ing failed. The universe is quite all right."

"The idea was ridiculous," said Rinda.

"Of course."

"But my Pera is still kidnapped. What are we going to do about it?"

"You're not going to do anything," said Jeff. "You're going to go back into the apartment with Oola and wait until we find Ing and bring Pera back to you."

"I won't. That's why I waited here in the *Hopeful* after the Admiral and I found it parked on your apartment roof. He said that Norby might try to come back for it, especially if you ran out of air, Jeff. And you almost did. I'm glad you're alive."

To Jeff's surprise, Rinda flung herself at his chest and gave him a huge hug.

"But you can't come with us, Rinda. It'll be dangerous."

"I am a princess and the daughter of a queen and I'm going with you and that's that."

"Yeoww!" said Oola, springing to the top of Norby's hat.

"Get her off of me," said Norby. "I'm busy trying to tune back into Rembrandt's ship, and I'm having trouble."

Rinda detached herself from Jeff and picked up Oola. "Your all-purpose pet and I intend to go. Don't argue with me, Jeff. It's not a good idea."

"I'll carry you and Oola bodily down to the apartment!"

"Try it," said Rinda. She had evidently been practicing the only kind of telepathy to which Oola responded—the wish that she would change her shape in a certain way.

Oola growled and showed a set of jagged fangs in a muzzle that Jeff didn't recognize.

"Now she's a vlimat," said Rinda, "one of the creatures native to Izz. Not nice. She may not at this moment realize you are her owner, Jeff, so you'd better not try to take us downstairs."

Jeff threw up his hands in defeat, and went to the *Hopeful's* galley to see what was available. Rinda had stocked it well with items from the apartment kitchen, including tasty dishes she'd evidently persuaded the kitchen computer to make.

He was full and leaning back in his chair half asleep when he felt the *Hopeful* toss like a ship in a storm. He tore into the control room, where Rinda was holding an irate Oola, who now looked like his pet cat, and where Norby was still at the control board.

"What happened, Norby?"

"I'm not sure, Jeff. I sent a message to Admiral Yobo, explaining that we had to find Pera, and I received a message—there it is—and decided I'd better obey him and pick him up . . ."

"You mean he wants to come?" Jeff turned on the message.

"Pick me up before you start searching hyperspace for Ing, and that's an order, Cadet." The voice was Yobo's bass rumble.

"So what is the problem in going to Space Command?" asked Jeff. "He went back there after he brought Rinda to Earth, didn't he?"

"Yes," said Rinda. "I want to see him. He's so big and strong."

Unaccountably jealous, Jeff turned to Norby again. "Why haven't you brought the *Hopeful* to Space Command?"

"I thought I had," said Norby, "but in going through hyperspace, just for the brief moment it takes on so short a trip, I seem to have gotten a little mixed up. Space Command isn't here."

"Isn't where? Where are we?"

"I thought we were in orbit around Mars, but—wait! That is Mars! Isn't it?"

Jeff stared at the viewscreen as Norby brought the *Hopeful* closer to the planet. "Sure—there's Mons Olympus, and I

can see the domed cities now. For a minute I thought you'd done something wrong and brought us back in time, before Earth people went into space and started colonies in the solar system. Space Command must be in orbit somewhere . . ."

"Now hear this!" shouted an unknown male voice.

"I don't understand a word," said Rinda.

"That's a hycom message from Mars, I assume," said Jeff slowly, "but why are they speaking Martian Swahili? The language used in all space communication is Terran Basic."

"Perhaps Norby's brought us to Mars at a time when the Martian colonists had built the domes, but Space Command didn't exist yet," said Rinda.

"Impossible," said Norby. "Space Command was built first, in orbit around Luna, Earth's moon, and later moved to Mars when they began to build the domed cities. Space Command is not here, but the cities are. We couldn't have gone back in time."

"Now hear this. Now hear this." After these two repetitions, the message continued, accompanied by the picture of the speaker on holovision. He was middle-aged, wearing a peculiar dark outfit and a blank expression.

"Unregistered ship—remain in orbit until the patrol makes contact with you. Failure to comply will result in instant destruction of your ship." The picture winked out.

"Maybe we'd better do what he wants," said Jeff.

"I will," said Norby, "but I thought you'd like to hear one of their news broadcasts. I've just tuned the hycom to it."

Norby pressed a button and another voice filled the control room. It was accompanied by a picture of a large, stony-faced woman who seemed to be reading from an unseen monitor. She spoke a language Jeff had never heard.

"Is that another of the strange Terran languages used before Terran Basic came in?" asked Rinda.

"No," said Jeff. "And that one sounds almost too difficult for humans to speak. She keeps clearing her throat."

The woman cleared her throat once more and said in Martian Swahili, "Now for the translation. Mars City quotas of filracks are falling behind. If this is not rectified by next Monday, penalties will be imposed. The ration of Instant Nourish will be cut immediately. If production is not speeded up by the next Monday, the Happy Time will be increased in intensity and duration for all citizens."

The woman's face vanished and was replaced by brilliantly-colored patterns that swirled and vibrated, accompanied by oddly unpleasant music that Jeff wanted turned off but could not do so himself.

"Look at the pretty colors," said Rinda, dreamily, picking up Oola again. "Pretty, pretty, pretty. Look, Oola."

"Pretty," said Jeff hoarsely. "Turn—no—on—no—off—pretty, pretty . . ."

"Ow!" said Rinda, dropping Oola. "She bit me! I must have been holding her too tightly. What's the matter, Oola?"

The all-purpose pet was stalking up to the holoscreen, her green fur bushed out like an angry cat's. She spat and snarled at the screen, her snout lengthening. When the patterns continued, she sat back on her haunches and howled.

Thanks to Oola, who had captured everyone's attention, Jeff was able to say, "Norby, turn off the hycom!"

Norby did so. "What's the matter with you three?" he asked. "You look sick."

"If that's the Happy Time," said Jeff, "it hypnotizes humans, but not Oola, who obviously hates it. Didn't it bother you, Norby?"

"I glanced at it, but the patterns and music didn't do anything except give me a slight ticklish feeling in my circuits, and besides, I was too busy monitoring the approach of—that."

In the viewscreen was a small ship, approaching the *Hopeful*, and, like it, obviously built to enter planetary atmospheres and dock on land surfaces instead of in space. It did

not, however, resemble the *Hopeful* nor any ship Jeff had studied during his years at Space Academy.

"It's not a hyperdrive ship," said Norby, "but it's scanning us with a very sophisticated scanner. The Federation never had any like that before. I suppose it will hail us—I've left ship-to-ship communication open . . ."

"Hey!" shouted Jeff. "What was that!" The *Hopeful* seemed to quiver and then move out of orbit.

"Traction beam," said Norby, in a small, tinny voice. "A very powerful type unknown to me. I don't like it. I'm going to try to break away." He worked hard at the control board and then said, "No use. It's pulling us to Mars."

"Go into hyperspace or back in time," said Jeff.

"Can't. Not while the beam is on. I *know* the Federation has nothing like this. Not the Federation that I know."

"Go into hyperspace yourself, Norby, without the *Hopeful*."

"I might not be able to get back to you, Jeff. I don't want to leave you in danger. We have to find out—oh!"

"Oh, what?"

"I just tuned into the hycom again and heard another message in Martian Swahili from that ship to the Mars base. It said, "Alien ship in tow. Inform the Master of Mars."

"There is no master of Mars."

"There was something else," said Norby. "The date. I did make a mistake, after all. I didn't just go through hyperspace to pick up Yobo at Space Command. I also went forward in time five hundred years!"

# 8

## Prisoners!

As the captured *Hopeful* slid into a dock that clamped restraining bars around it, Jeff wondered about the five hundred years. What could have happened to Space Command, so all-important in his own time?

"Jeff," said Norby, "the tow beam's off. Shall I try to make the *Hopeful* go into hyperspace to escape?"

"Yes," said Jeff.

"Better not," said Rinda. "Would you want to carry with us what's just come in from the air lock you supposedly locked?"

Jeff turned and Norby opened his back eyes (when at the control board he usually concentrated by *shutting* his back ones). Jeff grunted as if he'd been hit, and in the next moment he was—by Oola jumping upon him and wrapping herself around his neck. She was hissing in his ear.

"I guess we wouldn't want to bring this, ah, stranger with us," said Rinda, picking up Norby, who instantly closed up. "Don't let this guy steal my doll."

"Who are you?" asked Jeff.

The stranger said nothing. If it looked at them, it was impossible to tell, because Jeff couldn't see any eyes. Slightly higher than an adult human, the alien looked like a bilious-yellow palm tree whose thick trunk ended in eight stubby legs with strange joints. The top was only superficially leaf-like, because each of its ten leaves seemed to be made of a leathery hide that ended in a thin jointed arm with terminal pinchers.

The entire creature was encased in a transparent suit with separate sections for each arm. The horn-like pinchers extruded beyond the suit and were slowly moving ominously in a way that reminded Jeff of a crab about to catch its prey.

"It smells," said Rinda, wrinkling her nose. "And since all but its claws are covered with plastic, imagine what the whole creature must smell like. Go away, Mister!"

The alien turned a sickly orange color and waved its pinchers at Rinda. A stream of syllables came out of a speaker, but no one could understand them.

There was something about the alien that made Jeff feel queasy with fear. He went over to Rinda and put his arm around her, which brought him into telepathic contact with Norby.

—Is there data about such a creature in your memory banks, Norby?

—Nothing. I don't like it at all . . .

—You can take one of us to safety. Go into hyperspace and if possible take Rinda back to the apartment . . .

—I can't, Jeff. This creature or its fancy space suit projects an electronic field that makes it difficult for me to function. Be very careful. That creature is dangerous.

They were prisoners.

"The Master of Mars has scanned your ship and says that it does not have hyperdrive. How do you explain your sudden appearance in our air space, young man?"

"Well, your honor," Jeff began, but the man behind the big desk shook his head in disapproval and the humans in the courtroom murmured.

"Use of Terran Basic is forbidden. Speak only Martian Swahili if you do not know the language of the Masters," said the thin, sad-faced man Jeff assumed to be the judge. "And I am to be addressed as 'Sir Prosecutor.' "

"What's wrong with using Terran Basic?" asked Jeff in

Martian Swahili, grateful for Norby's coaching that had finally enabled him to achieve some competence in that language.

"Only regional languages are permitted. Surely you know that simple rule?"

"We don't know any of your rules, Sir Prosecutor. We have only just arrived."

The prosecutor turned to one of the human cops who had later boarded the *Hopeful* to take Jeff and Rinda to the courtroom with Oola bristling on Jeff's shoulders and Rinda carrying a closed-up Norby.

"I understand that the only occupants of that small antique spacecraft were these two children, their pet and their toy robot?"

"That is correct, Sir Prosecutor."

The alien standing beside Jeff suddenly spoke in its strange language.

After listening the prosecutor said, "I see. Then they have no grownup to explain why they violated our space without permit. They alone are guilty."

"We didn't know we were violating anything," said Jeff. "How can we be anything but innocent until we are *proven* guilty?"

"In the courts of the Masters, guilt does not need to be proven. The Masters decide. The Master of Mars has decided that you are guilty."

Rinda moved closer to Jeff so that he could touch his robot and hear Norby's telepathic message.

—Rinda, Jeff, your only hope is to say that you are from the past, thrown into this time period by some unknown force. You must go on pretending that I am merely a toy, because there aren't any robots that my sensors can find. Even the computers are small and simple. I'd guess that these aliens do everything, control everything.

"I'm sorry we have entered your space by accident," said

Jeff evenly, keeping his eyes wide and his face as childishly innocent as possible. "My friend and I were playing in my brother's scout ship when the whole thing was hurled away from where we were to wherever this is."

"Your brother's ship? But humans are not allowed to own any ships, even one as small and as old as yours. Explain."

"My brother works for Space Command and . . ."

"That is impossible. Space Command was destroyed four hundred and fifty years ago when our Masters arrived."

Jeff saw that a gleam of interest was shining in the eyes of the haggard prosecutor, and that possibly there had been some cynicism in the words 'our Masters'.

Evidently the alien could understand Martian Swahili even if it spoke only its own language, for it turned orange again and talked to the prosecutor.

"The Master says that you children are time travelers and must be examined closely. First the oldest—you, boy—must learn the language. Hold still and let the Master touch you."

—Telepathic teaching [said Norby, in Jeff's mind]. Better recite nonsense poems to yourself so it won't find out anything in case it tries to probe your mind.

But as the alien's claws approached, Jeff became afraid. Although the alien still wore the transparent space suit, the odor and the strangeness it exuded were unbearable.

Oola spat and yowled and the alien drew back.

"Control your pet or it will be killed," said the prosecutor.

Jeff handed Oola to Rinda, who had a hard time clutching both an irate all-purpose pet and Norby, until Norby used just enough antigrav to make himself practically weightless. Jeff could see Rinda's muscles relax and she smiled at him. She's brave, he thought.

The alien's claws came again, and this time they touched Jeff's head. Instantly he had a terrible headache.

'Twas brillig and the slithy toves

Did gyre and gimble in the wabe. . . .'

As long as the claws stayed on his head, Jeff went on with the Jabberwocky, grateful to Lewis Carroll for providing the best nonsense poem of all time.

The claws left and his headache began to clear.

"Human, listen to me," said the alien, and Jeff understood the language.

"I could not read the contents of your brain, but that will be rectified in time. It is clear to me that you are displaced from your own time."

"It happened when Ing . . ."

"Ing, the bringer of the key," said the alien. "There is no need to discuss it. When the key was brought, the space disturbance caused the transfer of your ship to this time period. Your mind is too muddled for adequate training to make you suitable for our time. You will be destroyed while the younger child will be trained."

When Jeff saw the human prosecutor wince, he turned to him and said politely, "Please, Sir Prosecutor, perhaps you can understand that all we want is to leave. We can't possibly harm the Master, or anyone else."

Jeff spoke Martian Swahili—he could understand the alien's language, but couldn't speak it. Perhaps only a few humans could, like the holo announcer and the prosecutor. Perhaps that was why they had important jobs.

The prosecutor smiled sadly. "Where can you go? Your ship is not capable of hyperdrive, and besides, the Masters do not allow humans to travel away from home."

"Please don't kill Jeff," said Rinda in Martian Swahili that was atrociously bad, but nevertheless a tribute to Norby's skill at quickie language teaching. "He's only fifteen."

"Looks older," muttered the prosecutor. "Master, is it possible that the boy could be trained after all?"

But the alien did not seem to be listening, for its leathery leaves were waving towards Rinda. Did it want Norby? Jeff was afraid that the alien had somehow tuned into the little robot's telepathic teaching of Rinda.

Then Jeff saw that Oola's shape had changed. Horrified, he realized that he had never seen the animal she had just become, an elongated dachshund-like body with tentacles at each end and sixteen legs.

"A nununiy!" exclaimed the alien, hobbling over to Rinda and taking Oola from her.

"Our pet can be what you want it to be," said Jeff. "You must have powerful thoughts, for Oola has discovered how to be a nununiy for your sake."

Rinda giggled and immediately suppressed it, but not before she winked at Jeff. What was she up to?

The alien cuddled Oola, everyone present staring at them, except Jeff. He was watching Norby, whose head was elevating just enough for him to wink at Jeff. Suddenly Norby and Rinda disappeared.

"The little girl's gone!" shouted the prosecutor, his face grey with fear. "It is not my fault, Master . . ."

The alien waved a claw at the prosecutor, and the man doubled over in obvious pain. Jeff decided that the alien possessed the power of electronic stimulation of pain circuits. No wonder it was so easy for one alien to control a courtroom. But how did one alien control a planet? Or were there more?

"Where did the girl go, time traveler?" asked the alien. It seemed to have forgotten Oola, who was still sitting on the palm-like top. Jeff was afraid that she meant to stay the alien's pet forever.

"I don't know where they went," said Jeff.

"Perhaps not, but you know how they did it."

When Jeff didn't answer, the alien's sickly orange color deepened and it pointed a claw at him. The pain was awful.

"I won't tell you," said Jeff. "What's the matter with you, anyway? If you have to stay in a space suit, why do you bother with planets like Mars? Why are you here?"

The courtroom audience gasped. Apparently no human ever talked back to a Master.

"You dislike me, young human. All humans do, but they obey, for we train them with the Happy Hour. If you do not respond to it while you are in jail, you will be killed."

"Killing is uncivilized. If you have a society capable of the kind of space travel it took to get to Mars, then you shouldn't be interested in killing."

"You are naive. You also don't seem to realize that there is a Master for every human colony. We are invulnerable, for we protect ourselves against human stun guns and conventional blast weapons, and we have powers you humans do not possess. We are superior beings, and your puny lives do not interest us. We do not care whether you live or die, but if you live, you must serve us with total obedience."

Jeff did not answer. He was trying not to look at Oola, whose shape was changing again.

"Can you give us total obedience?"

Oola looked more and more like a cat now, and she was growing bigger, her tail disappearing to compensate for the shift in mass.

"Total obedience?" questioned Jeff, trying to look as puzzled as possible to attract the attention of the court, many of whom were beginning to murmur about Oola. "What's that?"

"Bah, you are hopeless. I will get rid of you now," said the alien, lunging at Jeff with claws outstretched.

"Wait," said Jeff, stepping backward until he was against the prosecutor's desk. "There is much you can learn from me, and perhaps I will cooperate if you just explain a few things. Why do you call yourselves Masters, and why . . ."

"We are the only true intelligent species. All species must serve us."

Oola's fangs were growing longer. She now had a striking resemblance to the saber-toothed cat which was one of her more ferocious ancestors. But what could a smilodont do against an all-powerful alien?

"All species?" asked Jeff desperately, buying time while he hoped that Norby would return for him.

"Human imbecile! In the past some of you humans believed civilization could progress with many species living harmoniously in the same universe, but we disagree. We permit the lives of other species to continue only if they serve us. Above all, we do not permit intelligent species to travel in space. Hyperdrive is outlawed; humans stay in their own territories, making products we can use."

"But what is *your* territory?"

"Everything. We are the Masters."

"You're just a big ugly!" shouted a beloved metallic voice. And there was Norby, hovering in the air beside Jeff.

But the alien was too quick. Intense pain seared Jeff's body and Norby squeaked, falling to the floor as if his antigrav had been knocked out. The alien bent and a claw reached out to pick up Norby.

In spite of the pain, Jeff leaped upon the alien and tried to push it back, but the creature tossed him aside as if he weighed nothing.

"This robot is forbidden," said the alien. "This robot is a dangerous mechanism which must be destroyed."

"No!" yelled Jeff, trying to get up.

Oola's head reared back and then plunged down, her saber teeth stabbing into the alien's strange space suit.

The alien plucked her off its top and threw her at Jeff.

"A product of the Others, no doubt." The alien made a rasping sound that hurt the eardrums.

"The Others will punish you," said Jeff, holding Oola. Norby didn't move. Was he dead?

"Ah, then, you know the Others in your time? They are practically extinct now, for we have conquered them as we have conquered you puny humans. Soon we will be rid of any species that opposes us."

"The Others are good! They never kill. They respect life."

"Fools," said the alien. "And now, stupid human, I will take care that you never bother me again." It stepped toward Jeff again. And it crashed to the floor, its pinchers opening and closing uselessly. Inside the suit, the alien's body withered and shrank. Then it began to crumble into a grey powder.

"Oh, no!" said the prosecutor. "You have killed the Master! You have brought destruction on us all!"

"Good riddance," said Norby, jumping up and taking Jeff's hand. "It almost discombobulated all my circuits."

"You don't understand," wailed the prosecutor. "Each Master, throughout the universe, is linked with all the other Masters, and when one dies or is injured, the Masters send ships to destroy the planet or satellite where it happened. We are doomed!"

"Get into your own ships . . ."

"We have none."

"We do," said Norby. "No time to say goodbye, Jeff."

# 9 The Problem

The *Hopeful* was in orbit when Rinda pointed to the viewscreen and said, "Here they come!"

Huge ships were bearing down on Mars. "They must have come from hyperspace," said Jeff. "There must be a great many of those Biguglies."

"Biguglies?"

"Norby named them. I refuse to refer to them as masters. Can you get the *Hopeful* into hyperspace now, Norby?"

"As you have just pointed out, the Biguglies probably have many ships everywhere, and are capable of hyperdrive. I can't just go into hyperspace. I've got to move us backward in time, to a time before the Biguglies appeared in our solar system."

"Jeff," said Rinda, "If, as you reported, the Biguglies claim to have conquered everybody, does that mean that my planet Izz has a Master, too?"

"I'm afraid so," said Jeff. "Hurry, Norby."

"I wish those ships weren't coming so fast," said Norby. "I'm having trouble hurrying. My circuits feel more mixed-up than usual."

Just as the *Hopeful* winked out of normal space, Jeff saw in the viewscreen that the domed cities of Mars were exploding.

"All those people—dead—my fault," said Jeff.

Rinda was crying. "No, my fault. I persuaded Oola to imitate something she could detect that the alien used as a pet, so the alien's electronic guard field would drop a little. I thought maybe that would free Norby's hyperdrive so we could escape back to the ship."

"I didn't realize Oola's fangs could penetrate the alien's suit, but I guess only a tiny hole was needed," said Jeff. "I don't remember wishing she would become a sabertooth, but I must have."

"If the two of you would stop heaping guilt on yourselves, let me remind you of two things," said Norby. "The Bigugly was about to kill you, Jeff. And me, too. The second thing is that none of those people we saw really exists."

"But they were real!" said Jeff.

"In a time that should not have been," said Norby. "We have just visited a false future, one that should not have occurred. Jeff, you and I have been in the future once or twice and not only were humans space travelers, but the Others were alive and well."

"Then Ing did something that caused the Biguglies to start conquering everybody," said Rinda.

"Yes," said Norby. "We must find out what he did and go back to stop it. Ing brought the Biguglies a 'key'. We must find out."

"How?" asked Jeff, feeling weary and worn out.

"And where are we now?" asked Rinda.

"We're in hyperspace," said Norby. "I'm not sure how far we've traveled in time, but at least there aren't any Biguglies sneaking into our air lock. And as to how—I don't know."

"Then take the *Hopeful* out into normal space. Then we'll find out what time period we're in," said Jeff.

"After you and Rinda get some sleep," said Norby. "Do I have to be a nursemaid as well as a genius robot who rescues everybody?"

"I guess Oola has the right idea," said Rinda.

Oola was curled up like an ordinary cat that just happened to be green. She was sound asleep.

Jeff woke with a start, for Norby was poking him in the chest.

"What . . ."

"Shh. Rinda's asleep in the bedroom and I don't want to wake her unless it's necessary."

"Why did you wake me?"

"You've been asleep six hours, which should be plenty, and I need advice."

"A genius robot needs advice?"

"Don't be funny, Jeff. Look at that."

Jeff rolled over and sat up on the mat he'd brought into the control room. He looked where Norby was pointing and saw the viewscreen.

"It's just the peculiar grey pattern of hyperspace."

"Look again."

"There's a glitch in it. What does that mean?"

"Fargo once explained to me that the viewscreen is under the control of the ship's computer, and that when another ship comes close to the *Hopeful*, the viewscreen registers it."

"Another ship? In hyperspace—Norby, it can only be the Biguglies! They've found us and . . ."

Rinda came running in, rubbing sleep out of her eyes. "I heard you shout. What's happening?"

"Nothing good," said Jeff. "I think the Biguglies . . ."

Suddenly the air lock opened and Oola leapt to her feet.

"Wowrr? Me—uuu!" Oola sidled up to the invader who had entered through the air lock. She sniffed at him, licked her paw, yawned, and trotted back to Jeff.

"Have I passed a test?"

"Rembrandt!"

It was indeed, the Other whom Jeff had nicknamed Rembrandt. But he had aged tremendously. He appeared so old he was almost unrecognizable. He breathed laboriously, but managed to smile at Jeff. "When our scanning computer told us that this ship contained Norby, we could not believe that any humans would be alive. Yet here you are, as young as when I last saw you, and with an interesting animal and a beautiful young lady. You must have traveled in time, Jeff Wells."

"How much time, Rembrandt?" asked Jeff, noticing that Norby was touching Rinda with his sensor wire, presumably explaining all about the Other named Rembrandt.

"When you and Norby left our ship to enter normal space, it was just after Norby had so kindly brought us back in hyperspace to our own and your time. That was a thousand of your years ago."

"A thousand years!"

"I went forward instead of backward," said Norby. "Lucky we found you, Rembrandt."

"I don't think luck had much to do with it," said the Other. "When you did not return to us with information about whether the universe was collapsing or not, we waited many years. Finally we decided that we had to find out whether the universe was alive or dead, and we went out of hyperspace."

"I guess you found the Biguglies," said Rinda. "That's what Norby calls those leafy aliens."

A smile bent the wrinkles in Rembrandt's face. "The so-called Master Race certainly has an ugly nature, as we found out when we returned to normal space. They had conquered every inhabited planet, and destroyed every ship of the Others that they could find. They were too powerful to control, so we have unfortunately been forced to run from them ever since."

"I don't understand how you found us now," said Jeff.

"We had programmed our computer, Yib, to look for Norby in case he could help us escape the Biguglies by moving back or ahead in time. As years passed, we gave up hope, but Yib kept searching, and finally found you, with your friend."

"I'm Rinda, Princess of Izz, and I'm honored to meet one of the Others. We Izzians have legends about you, but we never thought you could live over a thousand years."

"Others live several thousand years," said Rembrandt, "but I am now at the end of my life span. Because we could not time-travel without Norby, we have lived through the past thousand years, helpless to prevent the conquest by the Biguglies. I am glad to have found you, but it is too late for

us. You must go back into normal space and help your own people to recover."

"But the Biguglies will capture us!" said Jeff.

"No. In the years since you last saw them, the Biguglies have been slowly poisoned, unable to adapt to any planet where Others and humans can live. They have suffered alterations in their cells that first sterilized and then killed them. Soon they will be extinct and we'll be rid of them, but it will be slow work to rebuild the civilizations they destroyed."

Jeff ran his fingers through his curly brown hair. "But can't we help restore this time track to the way it should have been, with humans and Others all over the universe, doing well? Norby and I once visited the future ahead of this time, and that's the way it was. Why can't Norby time-travel us back to stop the Biguglies before they conquer everything?"

"I am too old now," said Rembrandt, "and I fear that the Biguglies were always unstoppable. Norby, take your humans back somewhere in time where you will be safe."

"Then there's a better solution. We'll time travel back to stop *Ing!* Then this false future will not come about. There won't be any conquest by Biguglies."

Rembrandt shook his head. "It is true that the period of time we Others have lived through, this last thousand years, is a false time. But I fear that it is impossible to set things right. We in this last ship of the Others have tried to think of ways to solve the problem, but our research shows that it cannot be done. You cannot time-travel to change history."

"Why not?" asked Rinda and Jeff simultaneously.

"This time track will be permanent," said Rembrandt. "The original mistake that changed time cannot be corrected."

"I think I know why," said Norby. "I've analyzed all my own data and I think I know what's discouraged you Others. I'm sorry, Jeff, but we may be stuck."

"I won't believe that!" yelled Rinda. "I'm never going to

give up, and if someone doesn't tell me why they *think* we're stuck in this horrible place and time, I'm going to scream."

"Rinda's right," said Jeff, putting his arm around her shoulders. "She and I are human and young, but we can stand hearing the truth. Please tell us."

"We have studied the creatures you call the Biguglies, learned their language, and listened in on their conversations. We know where they come from, and why we cannot go back to stop their invasion." said Rembrandt. "Alas, when Ing added Pera and the force of his second bomb to the thrust of his ship, the combination made the *Quest* force its way out of the hyperspaceuniverse field that belongs to our own universe. Apparently there are many parallel universes, and Ing broke through into one of them."

"Then unless we can do the same thing Ing did, we can't go to find him!" said Jeff. "Now I know what the Bigugly meant when he said Ing was the bringer of the key. It meant the key that let the Biguglies travel from their universe to ours."

"Exactly," said Rembrandt. "The key must have been Pera, and the rare metal she contains. We don't know much about that metal, but the Others suspect that it was made in the previous expansion of our own universe. Pera has it, Norby has some, and it was rumored that Others were collecting bits of it to use when our universe collapses and dies a natural death."

"My Pera?" said Rinda. "She's the key to inter-universe travel?"

"Yes," said Rembrandt. "Using the metal they stole from Pera, the Biguglies invaded our universe at the same time, billions of them, and then could not return to their own home. They conquered our universe but we cannot go to theirs."

"To find Ing," said Jeff. "To find a villain."

# 10

## Norby's Idea

"Norby," said Jeff. "We've had a great dinner in Rembrandt's ship, and I'm beginning to think a little better."

"Dinner and sleep. I've been waiting hours for you and Rinda to wake up."

"I'm awake, and don't you dare leave me out of this conference," said Rinda, combing out her long red hair.

"This is how I see it," said Jeff. "Rembrandt has every reason to believe that it's impossible to follow Ing even if we can go back in time accurately to when, I mean just *after*, he penetrated to the next universe. The Others have lived many years on the run from the Biguglies, becoming so old and discouraged that they've given up. I used to think they were superbeings, but they have emotions and discouragements just as we do."

"I'm not discouraged," said Rinda. "I am confident that you'll find a way to sort out this mess. You and Norby." She smiled up at Jeff in a way that made him realize she wouldn't stay eleven. Her confidence in him made Jeff feel strong, powerful, and mature.

"Of course, it was really Oola who enabled us to escape," said Rinda serenely. "Not that you're not brave, Jeff, but you do fumble things quite a bit."

"Thanks a lot."

"Both of you are forgetting that if it weren't for me, you'd still be in that courtroom on Mars," said Norby.

"What do *you* suggest we do about this problem, Norby?" asked Jeff. "Since you're such a genius."

"While you were asleep I asked Rembrandt. Of course, I

got annoyed when he said that the alien metal in me and Pera was dangerous and likely to be misused, because after all I have done a lot of good even if I do get mixed up at times . . ."

"Norby!"

". . . and I asked Rembrandt if the Others wanted to take the metal out of me and use it . . ."

"They wouldn't!" Jeff exclaimed.

"Right. He said, and I quote accurately, 'We will leave you intact, Norby. You are unique, and you give any universe an extra element of fun and uncertainty.'"

"Stop bragging, Norby," said Rinda. "Pera never brags."

Jeff put out a hand to stop her. "Wait. I don't think Norby was just bragging. Or that Rembrandt was just flattering him. It was a message, wasn't it?"

"I think so, Jeff. Do you want to talk to him?"

"Yes."

The air lock opened once more and Rembrandt entered. "I left it to Norby to broach the subject with you, Jeff, and after you had food and rest. We wish to borrow Norby."

"What do you mean!"

"You know, Jeff," said Norby.

Jeff did. He put his head in his hands and thought about it. "I guess the Others want to link you to their computer, Norby, so their ship will go into the Biguglies' universe."

"I'm not built exactly like Pera, so there's no way of telling if I can go through the barrier, even with all the power of the Others' ship behind me, but I'm going to try."

"Norby and I have agreed that you and Rinda must stay in the *Hopeful*, safe in hyperspace now that the Biguglies are dying out in this time period."

"Oh, no," said Rinda. "You can't keep me out of your blasted big ship. I want to see it and I want to go where Norby goes."

"Staying behind is out of the question," said Jeff. "But I

have a suggestion. Norby can take the *Hopeful* back in time to find you, Rembrandt, when your ship was young . . ."

"You are discouraged by my frailty, aren't you, Jeff?"

"Yes, sir."

"Even if I die, it won't matter. The important thing is for Norby to use our ship as it is now, for over the centuries we have made our ship increasingly powerful. If you go back to find the Rembrandt that I used to be, he will not know how to make my ship powerful enough."

"Norby might be able to take the *Hopeful* if your ship's computer augments the power of ours," said Jeff. "The link would break once the *Hopeful* penetrated the Biguglies' universe, but it might be enough to begin with."

"Too uncertain," said Rembrandt. "And without our power, how would you bring the *Hopeful* back to your own universe?"

"Isn't there the risk that if you and Norby took your ship across, you might be stuck there?"

"Yes, Jeff, but I am old . . ."

"You and your crew are the last of the Others in this time period. If anything goes wrong . . ."

"Nevertheless, we will go and you two humans will stay."

Rinda laughed. She picked up a still sleepy Oola and petted her soft green head, laughing again when Oola yawned and began to purr.

"Mr. Rembrandt," said Rinda, "You're not telling the truth."

"We Others do not lie."

"Maybe not to someone you're talking to, but how about to yourself?"

"Don't insult Rembrandt," said Jeff, embarrassed.

"Think about it, Rembrandt," said Rinda, in exactly the tone her royal mother would use when lecturing a courtier. "Perhaps the reason you don't want Norby to go in the *Hopeful* is that if Jeff and I and Norby succeed without you,

then you'll die. You won't exist anymore, because this Rembrandt, the one you are now, won't ever have existed."

There was a long silence, and finally Rembrandt said, "I think you are correct, young Rinda of Izz. Perhaps I believed that somehow, if I went to the parallel universe, I would continue existing even if history were changed back. It is not logical. I am ashamed."

"Let me try with the *Hopeful*, as Jeff suggested," said Norby. "Let me use the power of your ship as long as I can."

"Very well," said Rembrandt. "We will establish the link. All of us will link with our computer and with Norby, who will then have powerful energy. I only grieve that it is likely that you will be stranded in the alien universe."

"Not if I can somehow make contact with you again, Rembrandt," said Norby. "Stay in hyperspace so . . ."

"If you succeed in the alien universe, we will not be available to you."

"But the original 'you' will be, the Rembrandt you were before, the young one . . ."

"He did not, will not, have my knowledge, especially the more recently-acquired knowledge that will enable us to use the great new power of our ship. I do not mind that my memories of battle and flight will be lost when I cease existing. I mind that all the important scientific knowledge will be lost . . ."

"Not if you give it to me," said Norby.

"You are a remarkably intelligent robot, Norby, but not even your brain could understand it."

"I'm smart—" Norby stopped, and withdrew his head into his barrel until only the domed hat could be seen.

"No, Norby. You cannot even imagine what knowledge we've learned and what can be done with it."

"All right," said Norby, "I'm not that smart, and I'm not built to record things as well as Pera, but I could record some data—like how to augment the power of your ship, and if I tell the young Rembrandt you used to be . . ."

Rembrandt's seamed and withered face smiled broadly. "You are even smarter than I thought. I will give you the knowledge, but only scientific knowledge, mainly about the ship. I do not want my young self to be burdened by the weighty, unhappy memories of an old being."

"I'm ready, sir," said Norby.

"Then let us prepare. We Others, the last of our kind in a universe gone wrong, will do all we can to send you rescuers both back—and *out*."

# 11

## Back and Out

"I don't want to be strapped into the chair," said Rinda, her cheeks so pale that her freckles stood out sharply.

"It's necessary," said Jeff, pushing her back into the chair and activating the restraining web. "Norby thinks the *Hopeful* may get shaken up when we cross into the parallel universe."

"But can't I be closer to you?" she pleaded.

"I'm going to be webbed in, too, Rinda, in this chair, but I'll leave one arm free so we can hold hands."

Oola, already encased in a padded box with a screened window, was giving her opinion of the whole enterprise by yowling and growling alternatively.

"Can't you put that animal in the bedroom?" asked Norby, fussing over his connections to the computer, which was linked to Yib in the *Other's* ship by means of radio waves as well as wires from ship to ship.

"If Oola claws her way out I want to be able to grab her," said Jeff.

"How can you, when you're tied up like me?" asked Rinda.

"Neither of us is tied up, as you put it. To release yourself in an emergency, just pull the string with the metal tab on the end of it, that one just over your head."

"Are you all settled finally?" asked Norby. "It's a lot of hard work to maintain these powerful connections while I'm trying to tune into somebody a thousand years in the past and in another universe."

"I don't see how it's possible," said Rinda. "How can you tune into Ing . . ."

"Not Ing!" said Norby. "I could never tune into any human, with the possible exception of Jeff, over such a distance and time. I'm trying to find a villain by finding his victim."

"Pera," said Rinda. "My Pera."

"My Pera," said Norby. "I'm very fond of her. Now hush up, everybody, so I can concentrate."

"Yes, Norby," said Rinda sweetly. "We have complete faith in you." With her free hand, she reached over to Jeff, but couldn't quite make it. He stretched his arm out and caught her hand. It was cold.

—I'm just a little worried [said Rinda, telepathically]. Naturally, being a royal princess, I'm not terrified or anything . . .

—Naturally.

—But do you think Norby knows what he's doing, Jeff?

—Honestly, I don't. How can he? It's never been done before except by Ing, with the aid of Pera and a large bomb.

—But what if we get across and can't find them . . .

—Don't think about it, Rinda. Can you see my face?

—Yes. You look scared. Of course, you're not of royal blood, but I suppose we're all allowed a little fear.

—That's gracious of you, Your Highness, but watch me. I'm going to put a small smile on my face, take a deep breath, let it out and try to relax all my muscles as I do so. Watch.

—And I suppose you want me to try it?

—That's the idea.

—You do look more relaxed, Jeff. Maybe I will . . .

"Okay, Rembrandt," said Norby. "I'm as ready as I can be, considering that I don't understand Yib very well. Your computer has grown so."

"Yib understands you, Norby," said Rembrandt from the *Hopeful's* speaker. "We are backing you up and pushing you out, all the way. It's up to you to locate yourself."

"I'm trying, I'm trying! Go ahead!"

"Goodbye, Norby," said Rembrandt. "And goodbye, Prin-

cess Rinda—I am delighted to have had the chance to know you."

"Goodbye," said Norby and Rinda simultaneously.

"And Jefferson Wells, I say goodbye to you in the hope that if you ever meet—him—please, tell him . . ."

Jeff waited.

"That's odd. I don't know what I want you to tell my former self about me," said Rembrandt. "Just give him my best regards."

"I will," said Jeff. "Goodbye, and thanks for helping us, Rembrandt."

"The fact of my existence will be wiped out, but nevertheless I am glad to help. Somehow it makes everything worthwhile."

"You won't die in our minds," said Jeff. "There you will always exist."

"Thank you," said Rembrandt. "Goodbye."

Norby activated the *Hopeful's* engines and said, "Hang on!"

Jeff gritted his teeth and tried not to black out. He managed to turn his head in spite of the enormous pressure and saw that Rinda's face, however distorted, valiantly kept a half-smile on it, and she was breathing slowly. Jeff tried to do the same.

And then he blacked out just after he heard Oola scream like a cougar trapped by men with guns.

"Jeff, Jeff!" Rinda was sitting on his lap, her body pressed against his, her arms around his neck. "If you're hurt I'll make my mother boil Norby and the Others in the thickest plurf she can find! Oh—you're moving!"

Rinda's tears wet his cheeks as she kissed him. "Oh, Jeff, when the ship started to go, I thought I was dying and that Oola had died, and then when I got loose I thought you were dead . . ."

"I'm alive, or I would be if I could breathe."

Rinda sat up and released her stranglehold on his neck.

"Oola's all right, too. I let her out and she went to use her litter box. I feel bruised all over, especially my feelings, and I wish I were home with my parents, who are difficult but not impossible and they love me."

"Norby, have we landed somewhere or are we in space?"

"Landed," said Rinda. "You must have been unconscious or you'd have felt the thud."

"Norby?"

Rinda turned. "Where is he?"

"Wasn't he at the control board when you woke up?"

"I don't know, Jeff. I had to let Oola out and I had to run to the toilet myself, and when I came back all I saw was that you were still unconscious and I thought you were hurt. Are you?"

"No. Get off. I have to find Norby. Maybe he's repairing some damage to the ship."

But Norby was not in the *Hopeful* and did not respond to calls made on the outside speakers.

An hour later Jeff sat at the control board, feeling forlorn and lost, but hoping beyond hope that Norby might still be somewhere outside the ship, even if he were too damaged to answer Jeff's call.

In the viewscreen, Jeff studied what was outside. It was a landscape he had never seen before and wished he didn't have to look at now. Strange purplish hills were dotted with rows of odd trees that seemed to be writhing in the wind, except that the ship's sensors indicated that there was a dead calm.

"Let's go outside," said Rinda.

"No, I don't like those things that look like trees but aren't. For all we know, they are distant relatives of the Biguglies. Notice the resemblance. The ship's sensors indicate that the nearest trees are reaching out to touch the *Hopeful*. Fortunately, they look rooted."

"Well can't we at least open the air lock and get some fresh air?"

"And die."

"What!"

"You heard me," said Jeff. "Stay away from that air lock. The air outside is poisonous to humans. No wonder the Biguglies had to wear space suits when they were in air that humans can breathe."

Oola trotted into the control room and batted her paw at the viewscreen. Her claws were out and she scraped them on the plastiglass. Oola clearly didn't like the 'trees' that weren't trees.

"I bet she recognizes them as Bigugly relatives," said Rinda. "And now that we've come here, what do we do next?"

"Look for Norby," said Jeff, grasping the controls. "I've told the computer to take the *Hopeful* low over the land, back and forth to look for him. It's a good thing Fargo taught me how to pilot this ship and instruct its computer. I'm rusty, though, because Norby usually does it."

Each time the *Hopeful* came near a tree, the claws at the branch ends reached for it, but could not reach it. Jeff took the ship carefully over all the ground they must have passed when landing between two hills, but Norby was nowhere in sight.

"Computer," said Jeff, "review all incoming data again. Do you find evidence of any radio wave source that might be coming from Norby trying to communicate with us?"

"I find no evidence of the robot Norby's communications."

"Try telepathy, Jeff," said Rinda. "I know it's not supposed to work without bodily contact, but sometimes he's tuned into you when you're far away. That's how we landed in your shower, remember?"

"But I can't tune into Norby. *He* has to do it," said Jeff. "At least, he has to be trying at the same time I am."

"Can this ship's computer tell if anyone is trying to reach anybody telepathically?"

"Of course not, Rinda, it's only an unintelligent—oh! I'm the stupid one. Computer! Are there any signs of any communication that doesn't come from Norby?"

"Yes, sir. Beyond the nearest hill is a source of radio waves."

"Can you read them?"

"Yes, sir. There is a message in standard Federation code for S.O.S."

"What does that mean?" asked Rinda.

"Help."

"It's not Pera. She wouldn't use S.O.S."

"No. It has to be Ing."

# 12

## The Sacred Grove

Jeff cautiously piloted the *Hopeful* above the tops of the tree-like creatures he thought of as Bigugly relatives. When the ship crested the hill, Rinda cried out.

"How can Ing be alive in that?"

Admiral Yobo's precious *Quest* had broken in half on impact and the outer door of the air lock was open. Jeff brought the *Hopeful* as close as he could, but there was no way to maneuver so that he could join air locks.

"Do we have any space suits?" asked Rinda.

"There's one here that fits me and there ought to be one in the *Quest*, since by law every ship must carry a suit in case somebody has to go outside to make repairs."

"Why isn't it required that there be emergency suits for everyone?"

"I don't know. I suppose the Federation is too complacent, confident that our antigrav units and strong ship hulls will prevent that sort of accident," said Jeff, pointing to the *Quest*. He opened the locker, took out the suit, and started getting into it.

"Why can't I go instead of you? Pera is my robot."

"Because Ing is dangerous . . ."

"I can use a stun gun."

"I don't have one. My brother doesn't ordinarily stock the *Hopeful* with weapons. He always says that verbal skill plus a little karate is better and safer. Besides, you can't go because the suit fits me, not you."

"Rorrwwww!" said Oola, jumping onto Jeff's shoulder just as he fastened the helmet. He lifted her off and handed

her to Rinda. Then he had to speak through the suit's microphone.

"Now don't get ideas, Rinda. There's nothing you can persuade Oola to change into that will be useful this time, because whatever she looks like, her body cells are still from a different universe and won't be able to tolerate the biology of this one. I've left the radio on so we can talk once I'm over there."

"Are you hoping Norby is there, somehow trapped and unable to leave?"

She was too smart, thought Jeff, for he had indeed been entertaining that crazy idea. He nodded, waved goodbye, and went out the air lock.

There were only a few meters between the *Hopeful* and the *Quest*, but with each step, Jeff was poked and prodded and pulled by long extensible "arms" from the palmy "leaves" of the rooted aliens that surrounded the two ships. Each arm ended in pinchers that could have torn apart a suit less well made than Jeff's.

He made it to the *Quest's* air lock and saw with relief that the inside door was still closed. With difficulty, he closed the outer door behind him, sure that it wasn't completely airtight, and then tried to open the inner door. It was locked.

"Ing!" shouted Jeff, turning up his mike to its highest volume. There should have been a pickup mike inside the air lock, but Jeff didn't know if Ing had turned off all communication from the outside when he was stealing the ship and had forgotten or been unable to turn it back on.

When there was no response, Jeff banged on the door, and after a minute, tried knocking in the S.O.S. pattern—three quick knocks, three heavy knocks widely spaced, three quick knocks again.

This time there was a click and he could open the inner door of the air lock. He did so as quickly as possible, shutting it behind him before too much of the poisonous air could enter.

"That's a Federation suit you've got on, so I assume you're human. Come to arrest me?" Ing was sitting in the control chair, one arm on the board where he had presumably just switched the air lock to open, and the other holding a stun gun aimed at Jeff. His face looked flushed and his breathing was labored.

"Rescue party," said Jeff, holding his hands out so that Ing could see there was no weapon. "Where's the suit that should be in the *Quest*?"

"So—Jefferson Wells, they sent a boy to pick me up, to take me back to one of those Federation penal colonies . . ."

"Ing, listen . . ."

The would-be destroyer of a universe coughed, his eyes bloodshot. "Take off that suit, boy, before I shoot and strip you myself. I'm going to take your ship—" He waved at the viewscreen, still operating and showing the *Hopeful* nearby.

"Ing, we're not back in the Federation . . ."

"Sure we are. I failed, but I'll try again. Thanks to that incompetent robot in the cage, we've crashed back on an idiotic sulfurous place like Io. Certainly smells like it. Take off your suit, Wells!"

"Don't trust Ing, Jeff," said Pera, peering out from the cage Ing had made from the magic box.

"Ing!" shouted Jeff. "Look at the viewscreen! Have you ever seen any trees like that? Can you believe that things grow on Io? I tell you we're not in the Federation! We're in a parallel universe, and we're trapped. All of us."

"Lies, lies," said Ing, but he coughed and the gun sagged in his hand.

Jeff's hand came down in a karate chop and the gun spun across the room. Ing lurched after it, but Jeff was quicker.

"Now I've got the gun," said Jeff. "If you want to live, at least a little longer, you'll wait quietly while I see if there's a spare suit. Get back in the chair."

Ing sat down again, coughing spasmodically. "Parallel universe? More than one? Full of life forms—how can I be a

master of them all? This place is killing me . . ." Suddenly he fell out of the chair, hitting his head on the magic box.

Jeff bent over him, but the man was unconscious. A thin trickle of blood seeped out of Ing's thick black hair.

"He is damaged," said Pera. "I sense a worsening of the abnormal brain patterns."

Jeff let her out of the cage. "Pera, I'll look inside for a suit, and you explore the damaged part of the ship, but beware of the rooted Biguglies. That's what we call them."

There was no suit, and Pera reported that the drive engines were too damaged to be able to function even if they'd been able to move them to the *Hopeful*. Jeff stripped off his own suit and put it on Ing.

"Take him over to the *Hopeful*, and bring the suit back for me," said Jeff. "Rinda's waiting. Give her the gun and tell her to watch Ing. Norby's . . ."

"Missing," said Pera. "I know, because I couldn't sense him. You'll tell me about it later, after we rescue Ing."

Coughing, Jeff watched in the viewscreen while Pera held Ing's limp body and, on antigrav, propelled herself so quickly to the *Hopeful* that the Bigugly relatives didn't have time to pinch the suit.

The contaminated air made it hard to move, but Jeff methodically explored every part of the intact half of the ship. The standard emergency airtight sealing partition had done its work well, coping with the splitting of the ship. It was the faulty air lock that had let in the outside air.

Jeff salvaged what he could, and there wasn't much that was portable, only a few papers and microdiscs, for everything else was built-in. As he waited for Pera, the lights grew dimmer and finally the viewscreen winked out. With the main engines gone, there wasn't enough emergency power left to keep the computer running. The life support system would be the last to go, but the faulty air lock insured that choking to death would happen before that.

Pera entered, bringing another volume of outside air

when the air lock opened again. Jeff put the suit on and, with Pera's help, was soon inside the *Hopeful*.

Ing was lying on a mattress in the control room, still unconscious, but breathing better.

"I thought we'd better have him in here so we can watch him, in case he gets worse, or if he recovers and attacks us. I can't seem to decide which is preferable," said Rinda, handing the gun back to Jeff.

Jeff did not tell her that it didn't seem to matter, since the life support system of the *Hopeful* could not continue recycling their air and water indefinitely. Eventually all three humans would die without rescue, for without Norby's hyperdrive the *Hopeful* could not go home, or even search for a better planet, if any existed in this universe.

"Pera, you watch," he said, giving the gun to her. "Rinda and I must sleep to restore our energies."

"Ing must have surgery to correct the malformation in his brain," said Pera. "Without it he may die."

"How soon?" asked Rinda.

"I do not know. Days, perhaps."

"While Jeff and I have weeks. Maybe months before we die, but then we will. I'm sorry, Pera, to leave you alone in a strange universe. After Jeff and I get some rest we'll concentrate on tuning in to Norby."

"I also," said Pera.

Jeff took Rinda's hand and they went back to the bedrooms together. She looked at him and smiled ruefully.

"Rinda, I didn't think you realized . . ."

"I may be just a spoiled little princess, but I'm intelligent and I can face dying. I think. Would it be all right if we took a nap on the same bed?"

"Sure."

"I wish I were your age. I wish we could be lovers. Couldn't we, even now?"

"It isn't that I don't want to, Rinda. It isn't that you are still very young and terribly royal . . ."

"Well what is it, then, my freckles?" She stamped her foot, and her red-gold eyebrows drew together.

He picked her up and carried her into the bedroom he always used. He put her on the bunk bed and lay beside her, holding her in his arms. "Go to sleep, Rinda. It isn't your freckles. It's that we should concentrate on being rescued."

"Oh, well," said Rinda, yawning. "We're too tired and besides, Mother would boil you in plurf."

Jeff held hands with Rinda and Pera while, on the other side of the control room, Ing the Ingrate snored. Jeff was discouraged. Even a three-way telepathic linking did not reach Norby, wherever he was.

"Ship approaching," said the *Hopeful's* computer, in its normal dispassionate voice.

Jeff broke the link and leaped to the viewscreen.

"Norby?" said Rinda. "The Others?"

Jeff couldn't answer, for his throat seemed to clog up. He just pointed to the viewscreen. The ship was long, high, and narrow, resembling a flat box tilted on its side. It was a shiny orange color, with no discernible windows or doors, but as it hovered above the ground between the "trees," eight huge metal legs extruded from the sides of the box and plunged down to provide stable support.

"But you've never seen the outside of the Others' ship," said Rinda plaintively. "How do you know it's not . . ."

"I've been on the inside, and there's a plastiglass section in front for the control room, and one in the back for the lounge. Besides, those metal legs resemble the ones the Biguglies use for arms."

When absolutely nothing happened for several minutes, Jeff took out his space suit and put it on again, while Oola howled and Rinda protested.

"If those are Biguglies, it's not safe . . ."

"They have hyperdrive and we don't. There might be

some way of using their ship," said Jeff, plucking off his chest a frantic all-purpose pet who wanted to go along.

"Oh, sure," said Rinda scathingly. "You're just going to go up to that ship and say you want it and they'll give it to you without a whimper?"

"I don't know what to do. I'm going over there so I'll find out."

Rinda turned to her robot. "Pera, we've got to stop Jeff from doing this."

"But I'm going to go with Jeff," said Pera. "Please don't order me to stop him."

"Thanks, Pera," said Jeff, shutting his helmet. "Come on, let's go visiting."

Behind them, Ing groaned, but did not open his eyes.

"Take care of Ing, Rinda, and if anything happens to me wait here."

"For what? For whom?"

"Rescue. I hope." Jeff waved goodbye and with Pera hovering on antigrav beside him, went out of the air lock.

No sooner did he step out onto the ground than lines appeared in the lower forward part of the alien ship. A rectangular section slid upward and a Bigugly came out, the first Jeff had seen that wasn't wearing a space suit.

This alien wasn't sickly yellow or orange, but a clear pale peach color, and the ten leaf-like structures at its top were larger and more luxuriant. The eight stubby legs seemed somewhat longer and stronger, while the trunk was smooth and girdled by a metal belt slung with what were probably weapons.

"Gosh," said Jeff. "I forgot that I can understand their language, but I can't speak it."

"Open your mind to me, Jeff. I will learn the language and endeavor to speak it for you."

"But there isn't time, and I'm wearing a suit."

He felt pressure from Pera's hand holding his gloved one, and then she spoke in his mind.

—Contact is contact. I will try to absorb quickly. It is my talent to record everything necessary. Try.

Jeff tried to relax and let Pera into his mind. He stared at the alien, who stood presumably staring at him, perhaps through visual organs in those odd leaf veins that Jeff had never noticed before.

Minutes passed. Many minutes. Jeff began to sweat inside the suit, but the moisture seemed suddenly cold when one of the alien's arms grabbed a pointed metal object from its belt and aimed it at Jeff.

"Lift up those two distorted extensors of yours to the sky, alien! Explain what you are doing in the Sacred Grove of the Twintas before I blast you into nothingness."

# 13

## Enemy or Friend?

—Pera, if you're able, tell him we had an accident and need help. Tell him we didn't mean to land in a sacred grove . . .

—Not him.

—You can't translate?

—I can. I meant that that alien is not a him. It's a she. It's very clear from the slight bulge on the biggest back leaf, can't you see?

—I don't know anything about Biguglies . . .

—Yes, you do, Jeff. Search your mind while I explain to her what you said.

As Pera repeated Jeff's words in the Bigugly language, Jeff realized that he did recognize male from female Biguglies. When knowledge of the language had been given to him, so was other knowledge—of course! You had to know about the difference in the sexes in order to understand the language, because the peculiar changes in verbs often referred to slight variations in Bigugly anatomy.

"Accident?" said the Bigugly. "Impossible. There are strict rules about the use of space and you have obviously violated them. Not only that, the damaged portion of one of *your* ships has damaged one of the *Twintas*. You are in deep trouble."

"We're very sorry," said Jeff in Terran Basic, repeated by Pera in the Bigugly language. "We are new to this uni—to this area of space, and we now have an injured crewman to take care of. Have you any doctors aboard your vessel?"

"What are doctors? Your translating device, which speaks

our language with an abhorrent accent, uses an unfamiliar word. Every intelligent being in this universe speaks our language—why do you need both a space suit and a language device?"

"It's a long story," said Jeff. "My body can't tolerate your air, but I do understand your language. My speech organs are inadequate for speaking it, however."

"You have not explained the word 'doctor'."

"They were beings who take care of the sick and injured, helping them heal themselves."

"You come to *this* planet, yet you ask for a doctor? You can't be *that* ignorant. You must be here to uproot and steal a Twintas. Well, we won't let you do that!"

"Then you are police?"

There was a pause while the alien absorbed the word that Pera had used for "police." In the Bigugly language it translated as "persons in charge of arrest and correction."

The Bigugly's leafy top shook as if she were shaking with a strong emotion, like rage or disapproval. Jeff wondered what he had said wrong, and then he saw that four more Biguglies were running out of the ship toward him. He tried to make it back to the *Hopeful*, with Pera pulling him, but they caught him and brought him back to the leader.

"Pera! Stay Free!" shouted Jeff, not daring to struggle in the grip of the pinchers because if his suit finally tore he wouldn't be able to breathe for long.

Pera zoomed out of reach, above the pinchers of the Biguglies trying to grab her.

"Miniantigrav," said the first Bigugly. "Fascinating."

"Don't go into our ship," said Jeff. "You can't breathe our air any more than we can breathe yours." Pera spoke at full volume in translation.

"You probably have much equipment we can use. And we'll take your undamaged ship," said the leader. "Tell your crew to put on suits so we can evacuate the bad air and go in. You are our hostage, so your crew had better listen to my

orders. I'm the Captain and I am called Blifzz. . . ." The captain's name went on for stranger syllables than Jeff would ever be able to manage.

"We have only this one suit," said Jeff. "Please don't kill my crew by taking their air. And may I call you Blif?"

"You are a presumptuous creature, but since you are vocally inadequate, you may call me what you like." The Bigugly Captain gestured to one of her crew. "Have you scanned this ugly ship of theirs? What's inside?"

"There are two other biological creatures like this one, with two horrible long legs each, and no ortawes on top. There is also a much smaller green creature that cogitates little."

"Interesting," said Blif, "and this one is not wearing a weapon of any kind. I'm not impressed by the danger. Go get my space suit so I may investigate the aliens and their ship."

"But Captain . . ."

"At once!"

When encased in a transparent suit, the Bigugly Captain told Jeff to go into the *Hopeful* ahead of her.

Inside, Jeff took off his helmet and breathed deeply. "Where's Oola?"

"I was watching on the viewscreen," said Rinda, pale but carefully standing just in front of the low shelf where she had put the stun gun, "and when you were captured, Oola made such a fuss about going out to help you that I had to put her in the bedroom. Please, Pera, I know you have to translate Jeff's words to the alien, but come here and hold my hand so I'll understand telepathically what's being said."

"This member of your species is slightly different," said Blif, pointing to Rinda. "What is the matter with it?"

"She is female, and nothing's the matter with her."

"A remarkably puny female!"

"She is young," said Jeff, while Rinda giggled in spite of her fear. "She comes from a very important family."

"That's what anyone says who has anything to do with the M.C." said Blif.

"What are the M.C.?" asked Jeff.

"Don't pretend you don't know," said Blif, drawing a weapon. "You have obviously learned the M.C. style of our language and that makes you their creatures, or at least in their pay."

"But I . . ."

"Stand back while I learn about you from your computer memory bank [except that she actually said "the stored words"] because it has features similar to ours."

"Convergent evolution of technology," muttered Jeff.

Since Pera automatically translated, Blif heard this and paused before one of her arms touched the computer. "Do not speak as if your inferior species could in any way be similar to ours. You have probably developed your technology from the M.C. None of it could be original." She touched the computer and was obviously absorbing information.

Rinda raised her eyebrows and said softly in Izzian, "I think this Captain Blif's personality is like Mother's."

"I hope not," said Jeff.

At that moment, Ing rolled over and jumped to his feet, snatching Blif's gun and stooping to remove his own gun from the shelf. He jammed both weapons behind the back of Blif's space-suited trunk.

"Monsters have taken over my universe," shouted Ing, "but I'll kill them all! And you, Wells—you and the girl are in league with them. You thought I was asleep, but I've been watching and waiting for my chance. Now, all of you, leave my ship so I can go . . . go . . ."

"Stop it, Ing," said Jeff, while Pera went on translating to the Bigugly. "If you damage her space suit she'll die in our air, and Rinda and I will die if you force us outside. Besides, what can you possibly do in a universe not your own? Where can you go?"

"Poor Threezy," said Rinda cooingly. "You'll be all alone

in a big, lonely, strange universe and there won't be anybody to applaud when you sing and dance and juggle. Nobody to clap and laugh. So sad." She allowed a small tear to squeeze out of one eye, and came closer to Ing.

"Threezy's dead," said Ing harshly.

"Not quite. Tell me he's not," said Rinda, almost up to Ing and Blif now. "I admired him so."

"A clown!" Ing's mad eyes rolled up in the mock despair of a clown. "Stupid, when I could be a god . . ."

Rinda smiled and flipped her fist up into Ing's nose while at the same time kicking him much lower down. As he let go of Blif and doubled over, Rinda dug her thumbs into his neck at the carotid arteries until he passed out. She plucked the guns from his limp hands and gave them to Jeff.

"Mother always insisted that a Royal Princess should know how to protect herself."

"I am glad that even young human females are brave," said Blif. "I did not learn as much from your computer as I wished, but enough to know that you are called humans, and that this is not your universe, as you said."

"Blif, how much longer will your suit's air hold out?" asked Jeff.

"Two hours more."

Jeff handed Blif's gun to her. "Then let's talk. I want to tell you the truth and I want you to tell me about the M.C."

"Well—you may talk like someone of the Master Cult, but you don't act like them," said Blif. "We'll talk. I wish to know how and why the Masters taught you their style of our language without completely indoctrinating you with their point of view. You did not let the older human kill me."

"The Master Cult of your species penetrated to our universe and conquered it. Eventually it conquered *them* through disease, but by then everything had been changed for the worse."

"When did this happen? We have had no word of it."

"It hasn't happened yet," said Jeff, "but it will if the M.C. find us, if we don't get home somehow."

# 14

## The Master Cult Arrives

Half an hour later, Blif detached herself from Pera and Jeff began to worry even more. After explaining everything he knew to Blif, he'd made the decision to let the Bigugly tap into Pera's memory bank as well as into that of the ship's computer. If she were a possible ally, then knowledge was essential.

He touched Rinda's arm.

—Have I made a mistake? We know that the Biguglies will steal Pera in the future and use the metal in her to travel to our galaxy. Suppose Blif is the one?

—Pera trusts Blif, I can tell [*said Rinda, in his mind*]

—But suppose that becomes the problem . . .

—Jeff, you worry too much. Anyway, isn't it time we asked Blif a few questions about herself?

Shamed, Jeff cleared his throat and asked Pera to translate carefully what he was about to say to Blif.

"Now that you know how we were captured by the Master Cult and how they forced me to learn their style of your language, please explain to us how you differ from them."

"So you can think of me as a good Bigugly, and the M.C. as the bad Biguglies?" asked Blif, her leaves rustling so much that Jeff had the distinct impression that she was laughing.

"I forgot you'd find out from Pera what we named you."

"I don't mind," said Blif. "And I will tell you why we don't trust anyone who might be a spy for the M.C. The M.C.s were once the official spies for our government, until they took it over. Judging from the history of your species—and

your Pera is remarkably well-informed—you could think of the M.C. as a sort of Central Spy Agency gone wrong.”

Jeff remembered, thanks to Norby’s foolishness, that Pera had absorbed information from Space Command’s Secret Service files. “And what are you, Blif?”

“You might as well think of me as one of the underground, as I believe it would have been in your history. That plus a bit of a pirate, for we live in space ships and steal our livelihood from planets and ships controlled by the M.C. It is difficult and dangerous, for the M.C. have developed nasty powers including the ability to hurt creatures at a distance.”

Blif paused. “Speaking of hurt, I believed I can now hear what sounds like a creature in pain.”

“That’s our all-purpose pet, Oola, who’s started to howl. She wants to be let out of the bedroom—go do it, Rinda.”

When Oola bounded in, she sniffed at Blif and began to take the shape of a nununiy. Blif petted her gingerly and said, “Amazing that this creature could have killed the Master of Mars.”

Oola promptly reverted to cat form and sniffed at Ing. She sat back on her haunches and meowed.

“Ing’s not breathing right,” said Rinda. “I think he’s going to die.”

“Perhaps the Twintas can help,” said Blif. “They are the life-form on this planet. Our ancient government established several such refuges for our distant relatives, the Twintas, and we visit them when we need healing. Look in your viewscreen and you will see how it is done.”

Biguglies from the pirate ship had carried out two of the crew and put them down under the Twintas branches, which were now bending to grasp each injured Bigugly.

“I gave orders for the healing to proceed, once I found out that you are not spies from the M.C.,” said Blif. “I have kept in touch with my ship by means of my suit mike. I’m not so brave that I would walk into an alien ship without being able to inform my companions about what’s happening.”

“But how can Ing be taken out there?” asked Rinda.

"I think I know how," said Jeff. He found one of Fargo's scuba masks and attached an oxygen canister. "The outside air will irritate Ing's skin, but he won't breathe it."

Later, suited up and watching the Twintas wrap branches around Ing, Jeff was touched by the now unsuited Blif, and to his surprise, he heard her telepathically.

—Our species has only rudimentary telepathy [*said Blif*], but those of us who have the most become leaders. I am one of them, and I wish to speak to you privately. If you think your thoughts carefully, I will understand even though you cannot speak my language out loud.

—I'll try. Why privately?

—Because, according to what you have told me, Pera is the key to the invasion of your universe. I know that I will never attempt such an invasion, for I know from your knowledge that it would doom us. In the future that you have visited, the M.C. captured Pera. The question is, when? How soon?

—I don't know.

—I fear that my ship may bring the M.C. to this planet, for we had a battle with them yesterday, wounding two of my crew. We thought we had escaped them, but they know that we must seek one of the Twintas planets for healing and if we stay here too long they will find us. And they will find you, if they dare to land.

—Why dare? Don't the M.C. use Twintas planets?

—No. The Twintas are intelligent, in spite of being rooted, and they oppose the M.C. In retaliation, the M.C. have destroyed many Twintas. That is why the M.C. are so sickly, for they have no healers. Perhaps that is also why, when they do find Pera, they will want to go to a different universe in search of immortality."

—They won't find it. What shall we do? How can we protect Pera?

—Jeff Wells, it is too late, for already they come!

Jeff looked up and saw a fleet of alien ships winking into view one by one, high in the atmosphere of the Twintas

planet. These ships were also like tall boxes, but each had a curious pointed attachment like the beak of a bird.

—The hurt comes from that point, said Blif, after sending orders to her crew. They concentrate their minds to hurting and controlling . . . Jeff, go into your ship at once!

Jeff was doubling over in pain and could not move.

Blif picked him up in three of her arms.

—We have a few built-in defences against the control, but you do not.

She ran with him to the *Hopeful* and, as Pera dragged him into the air lock, he heard Blif shout "Bring your ship into ours! It's your only hope!"

"Ing—we've forgotten Ing," gasped Jeff as he tore off his helmet and ran to the control room.

"Let me out, Jeff," said Pera. "I will get him."

"Pera, you are the danger. Can't you see that we can't let you out? We must hide you and protect you at all cost."

Seated at the control board, Jeff turned on the engines and lifted the *Hopeful* on antigrav.

"Look," said Rinda, pointing to the viewscreen. "The good Biguglies are taking Ing inside their ship. How long will his oxygen supply last?"

"Not much longer," said Jeff, turning the *Hopeful* toward the pirate ship, where a large opening had appeared in the side. "We must get there."

"Traction beams on ship," said the computer.

"Oh no! Not again!" said Jeff.

"Jeff," said Pera, "let me out and I will go to the Master Cult. They will let you go once I lead them to think that I am the only useful object here. And then I will destroy myself so that they cannot invade our universe."

"No!" cried Rinda.

"Wait," said Jeff. "Something's helping us. Something's fighting the traction beams."

"It's the Twintas!" Rinda clapped her hands. "Look—the branches are around us, and they're passing us from one tree to another, towards Blif's ship!"

# 15

## Searching for Norby

Jeff, wearing a space suit, stood in a part of the pirate ship that he took to be the control room. The viewscreen was like a huge flower opened to the sun, but in the center of it he could see clearly everything going on outside.

Sheets of flames shot out from M.C. ships, pounding upon the energy shielding of Blif's ship. Below them on the planet, some Twintas withered and died, but the rest fought back in ways Jeff could not fathom. And the pirate ship fought with what seemed like old-fashioned cannonballs that turned into great crawling things that appeared to bite the M.C. ships.

—You're shooting live things at the enemy! said Jeff, touching Blif's trunk for telepathic communication.

"Everything is alive," said Blif. "And what is not, like the hulls of our ships, our guns, and certain parts of our machinery, has been manufactured by living creatures. Even what you would call our computers are all made from living organic material. We have nothing like your Pera and Norby, the purely inorganic robots you depend on. That is another reason why reason tells me that we should stay in our own universe, for here we are all connected in life."

—Perhaps even in our universe everything's connected, organic and inorganic, if it has some intelligence.

"And even if it doesn't," said Blif, gesturing to a crew member to shut down part of the ship where one of the energy shields had collapsed. "I'm sorry, Human Jeff, but I seem to be losing this battle."

—Go into hyperspace.

"I would like nothing better, for then you and your ship

would be safe also, but with part of our shield down, we are in the grip of a traction beam, one of the closely guarded secrets of the M.C. Didn't you tell me that even your Norby was unable to vanish into the safety of hyperspace when the M.C. focused on the ship or on him?"

—Yes. Wait—send for Pera. She may be able to help your computer take your ship away from the traction beam. She herself has no hyperdrive, but she certainly helped bring Ing's ship here. We must try.

In a few minutes, Pera arrived from the inside dock where the *Hopeful* was moored. She hooked herself to the ship's computer, and after another few minutes she spoke.

"I cannot break the hold of the traction beam, which is growing stronger. Furthermore, the animals that make up your computer are themselves weakening, although each says it will die rather than surrender to the Master Cult."

Blif's peach coloring faded momentarily. "I did not know that the computer animals could speak as individuals."

"They can't," said Pera. "Not exactly. I'm sorry, Blif, but I can't help you."

"Then we pirates and you aliens are doomed," said Blif. "Once our shields are completely down, the M.C. will blast us with rays that destroy organic minds."

"The Master Cult must not find me," said Pera. "Please, Blif, arrange to have me destroyed at once. Since I am not organic, I would go on living when all of you are dead, and then be captured."

Jeff grabbed Pera and held her close to his space suit. The contact with Blif broken, the Bigugly reached for him—but only gently, one of her pinchers touching his helmet.

"What is it, Jeff? You seem to be thinking hard, but I cannot follow your thoughts."

—Our only hope is Norby.

"But he is lost in your own universe, or in hyperspace."

—We must reach him. We must augment our power, *my* power. Perhaps if your crew lined up, touching each other,

from your computer to mine, with Pera the link between our atmospheres . . .

Blif did not argue. "Yes. It is a possibility." She gave orders.

Jeff and Rinda held hands tightly, their free hands upon the *Hopeful's* computer. Wires led from it to the air lock's microphone, where Pera waited, touching it and a Bigugly pincher outside the open outer door. A few of Blif's crew were lined up, extending to the nearest computer terminal in the dock wall. And up in the other control room, Blif and the rest of the crew touched each other and waited.

"I'm scared, Jeff," said Rinda. "What if I can't concentrate and my uncontrolled thoughts make this impossible?"

"What if this is just a silly idea of mine and isn't possible at all?" asked Jeff. "It's crazy, like one of those old stories you see on hycom, where at the last minute the cavalry comes to rescue the wagon train . . ."

"Concentrate!" said Pera through the receptor. "I am receiving a message from Blif. She feels some of your emotions through the chain, and she says pessimism will defeat us."

"Comet tails!" said Jeff.

Suddenly Rinda grinned at him; her freckled nose wrinkling up. She leaned toward him and pressed her lips on his with a loud smacking sound. Then she chuckled, shut her eyes, and her face smoothed out, becoming calm and concentrated.

But Jeff could not relax. Something kept nagging at his mind and he felt sure he'd forgotten something important.

Where was Oola? Had he left her in the bedroom where he'd locked up the sleeping Ing?

Oola, bioengineered by robots of the Others. Pera, made by the Others. Oola and Pera. Oola and Pera and the bad human, Ing. Bad Ing. Dying—or was he going to live? Ing . . . Ing . . .

The words reverberated through Jeff's mind, while Rinda seemed to be placidly asleep and the *Hopeful* silent amid the battle still raging outside the larger ship in which it was hidden. He shut his eyes to concentrate, but he heard a noise that sounded like a door breaking open.

Ing stood in the doorway of the control room, holding a limp Oola in his hands. She looked like a dead hound dog.

"When I was a kid I had a foxhound I used to train to play dead," said Ing. "Did you know that I was giving magic acts even then?"

Oola yawned, licking Ing's hand, and jumped down. She trotted over to Jeff, becoming more catlike the nearer she approached him.

"Ing, we're in desperate danger," said Jeff, letting Oola climb up into his lap and settle down, purring. "We need help and we're trying to join minds to reach my robot, but I can't concentrate because of you."

"What is it, a big magic act?" said Ing, his arm swinging out so he could finger the stun gun that Jeff had forgotten to put in his own belt in case Ing woke up.

"Yes."

Ing yawned. "Funny thing, I can't seem to remember much except the magic tricks. Can I join this one?"

Rinda opened one eye. "Sit down, Threezy, and take my hand. Jeff, you keep your other hand on the computer. Threezy, do as I say at once!"

Ing shrugged and sat down, one hand outstretched to hers. They clasped hands and Rinda said, "Close your eyes, Threezy, and think about small robots that would make a good part of your magic act. Think hard."

It was quiet once more in the *Hopeful's* control room.

Until Norby arrived, of course.

# 18

## The Way Home

Only Norby's voice entered the *Hopeful*, but relief swept over Jeff as he heard his very own robot shout, "Jeff, are you inside the ship that's being conquered?"

"Yes, and can you help?"

"We can," said another voice.

"Rembrandt!"

"Look at the viewscreen," said Rinda, her voice slightly shaky. "Now we know what a ship of the Others looks like from the outside."

The *Hopeful's* viewscreen, linked to the computer of the pirate ship, showed what was happening outside as the battle was fought above the Twintas planet. And now something else had been added to the scene.

"It's enormous!" said Jeff. Rembrandt's ship was like a huge oval cloud that shimmered in the light of the planet's star. It was so big that all of the M.C. ships were in its shadow, and soon they began to shake as if something from the Others' ship were vibrating them.

One by one, the M.C. ships disappeared into hyperspace, fleeing the unknown enemy.

"Come aboard," said Rembrandt.

Blif went with the *Hopeful* when it entered Rembrandt's ship, and walked fearlessly with the humans as they entered the vast room at the stern of the Others' enormous space ship. When Jeff sat down beside her, he was aware of a faint, pleasantly pungent odor from her suit, completely different from the sickening smell of the diseased Bigugly Masters.

Best of all, Norby looked just the same. He even sounded the same.

"I couldn't help it, Jeff."

"I know, you got mixed up."

"Maybe. One minute I was in the *Hopeful*, and the next I could feel my hyperdrive come on and there I was in hyperspace, totally lost. I couldn't find you, and I couldn't seem to get out into normal space. Fortunately, I used my superior intelligence."

"Oh?"

"I remembered that Rembrandt—the young Rembrandt—this one here . . ."

"Yes, yes . . ."

"Anyway, he could detect things in hyperspace, so after concentrating on you and not finding you, I concentrated on Rembrandt and he found me."

Rembrandt nodded. "And then we linked minds, so that I knew what had happened and a little of how to follow you. It took hard work to change our ship in the manner the old Rembrandt told Norby, but we managed. Yet even then, we would not have been able to jump through into this universe without the pull from all of you." He bowed to the humans, Pera, and Blif.

"Don't forget Oola," said Ing, pointing to the green cat curled up in Rinda's lap. "She was the first thing I saw when I woke up. She took the shape of my favorite pet and I was a boy again."

"And what are you now?" asked Norby. "Ing the Incredible Ingrate again?"

"Ing? I think he was somebody I invented. It seems so long ago. Rinda says I'm a good clown. Am I?"

"Yes," said Jeff.

"Then can I be Threezy? I like being Threezy."

Rinda rushed over to him and threw her arms about his neck, pushing her face into his beard. "I love Threezy. Please come back to Izz with me. You'll be the hit of the Palace. My

father, the King, will enjoy your act, and Mother—well, when I tell Mother that you helped rescue me, she'll make you Crown Jester."

"Crown Jester!" said Threezy. "Sounds good."

"And there's always plurf if he misbehaves," muttered Norby.

"I hate to interrupt all this jollity," said Jeff, "but has anyone noticed that we're still in the parallel universe? Does anyone have any idea how we're going to get home?"

"Simple," said Norby. "The way we got here."

"Not so simple," said Rembrandt. "The changes I made in our ship to give us the power to get here, were a one-time operation. We'll have to have extra power from some other source to get back into hyperspace and out into our own universe."

Blif, listening to the conversation by holding Pera (who could translate telepathically), said, "This time we will need more than the linked minds of all of us in our two ships. We will need the whole Twintas population."

"How will we link Rembrandt's ship to the Twintas?" asked Jeff.

"Ah," said Blif. "You do not understand. I mean the entire Twintas population of this universe. They can link with each other, planet to planet, and provide enormous power, but only if they are persuaded that it is important. I will go back down to the planet below and talk to them."

Rembrandt leaned forward. "Is it dangerous?"

"How did you know that?"

"I surmised that it must be, since I would guess that you have not done it before, not even to save yourself from the Master Cult."

"If I link my ship and yours to the Twintas of this planet and they link with the other Twintas planets, the force may be enough to send you to your own universe. But it may not."

"I meant is it dangerous to you?" asked Rembrandt.

"I do not know. The Twintas are strange creatures, opposed to our enemies, the Master Cult, and willing to heal those of us who are hurt. But perhaps they would prefer that all of us Biguglies became extinct, leaving them alone in this universe."

"I will talk to them," said Rembrandt, adding, "with Jeff's and Norby's help."

"Mine?" said Jeff.

"We have the memories of Rembrandt as he might have been," said Norby. "We are linked to him closer than anyone else. Let's go, Jeff."

Jeff and Rembrandt, both in space suits, followed Pera and Blif as the pirate led the way from the Others' lander to the central grove of the Twintas. Jeff's gloved hand touched Rembrandt's for telepathic contact.

—Rembrandt, for some reason Blif reminds me of you.

—Possibly because I am descended from pirates.

—I can't believe it! The Others are so good . . .

—Jeff, the Others have had their own social history, including a period of tyranny that was eventually overthrown by an underground that called themselves pirates. Tyranny is always possible when an intelligent species becomes too populous and too powerful before it becomes wise.

—But that must have been long ago. You Others have become so very wise . . .

—We now have enough wisdom to control our population and our power, and we strive to learn and grow, for improvement is always possible, young human. Never become self-satisfied. I learned from Norby that the Biguglies who conquered our universe in the false future thought they could be all-powerful, but they succumbed to disease at last. Nothing is invulnerable. There's always change.

—Sometimes I've seen so much change that I feel we humans won't learn to cope with it.

—Don't cope. Move with change and enjoy the ride. Rembrandt laughed.

—Is your art part of the way you enjoy the ride?

—Yes. I hope that those who see my art discover that the living universe is wonderous and should be cared for.

Blif halted in front of an immense Twintas that looked like the oldest specimen on the planet.

"Ancient One," said Blif aloud, while at the same time touching one of those oddly jointed arms that Jeff still thought of as branches.

"We need your power. You Twintas who remain alive on this planet know that the aliens helped drive off the Master Cult ships. Now these aliens must return to their own universe, but this requires much power. Can you help us?"

Jeff could understand the conversation, although Blif spoke in what was probably an archaic form of the Bigugly language. He could hear no answer from the Twintas.

Blif waved one of her rear pinchers in the direction of Jeff, Norby, and Rembrandt, who stood hand-in-hand behind her.

"The Twintas say they will not help, for in touching you aliens, they have learned what will happen if you cannot get home. The M.C. will return, take Pera, and leave this universe for yours. The Twintas want this future to come into being."

"It isn't the correct future for our universe!" said Jeff.

"The Twintas say that is no concern of theirs. They wish to get rid of the Master Cult completely, and this is a way."

"But not the only way," said Rembrandt. "I can show the Twintas how to concentrate their power, not only to send us back home, but to protect themselves from the Master Cult." He turned to Norby. "Please go to my ship and return with my crystal-light sculpture."

Norby left, while Jeff wondered what could possibly persuade the Twintas to help, when helping meant staying vulnerable to the Master Cult's attacks.

"Here it is, sir," said Norby, his arms stretched as far as possible to hold the sculpture. "May I join it?"

"Yes, Norby."

Jeff saw, with horror, that Norby had somehow melted into the sculpture, that the sculpture had apparently become fluid enough to wrap itself around Norby.

"Norby! Come back!"

"I do not understand," said Blif.

"Wait," said Rembrandt. "I create works of art to be enjoyed by all. And Norby is also, in his way, a work of art. The two can join, and then . . . watch!"

It seemed to Jeff that Norby was frozen inside the crystal sculpture, but he was still alive, for the robot's eyes shut, and then opened. The crystal began to spin, sending out fine tendrils that glittered in the sunlight. When it stopped, Norby was no longer visible, for the crystal was cloudy.

"What's happened to Norby? Bring him back!" shouted Jeff.

The Ancient One of the Twintas seemed to bend as all of its pinchers grasped the crystal tendrils. The nearest Twintas touched the trunk of the Ancient One, and reached with their own arms to touch comrades who were further away.

Suddenly Jeff felt that the whole planet was united, each Twintas touching another, perhaps communicating mentally with the rest of the Twintas planets. But was Norby dead?

And then, so easily that it seemed ridiculous, the crystal sculpture shook itself and Norby dropped out.

"Hi, Jeff—were you worried?"

"Oh, Norby, you're all right?"

"Of course I'm all right. I just gave all my knowledge to the Twintas, courtesy of that peculiar object Rembrandt devised. It's going to be a permanent part of this planet now, and no Master Cult will ever be able to touch it."

The crystal sculpture had taken the shape of a Twintas, some of its tendrils pushing into the ground and the rest of them wrapped around the trunk of the Ancient One.

"My gift to your universe," said Rembrandt, Pera translating again for Blif. "We Others believe that your universe is developing in an interesting way, with a technology based

on living creatures that voluntarily join with you. My crystal-light gives you knowledge and increases the power of the Twintas to protect themselves and you pirates from the Master Cult."

Rembrandt paused, both sets of arms outstretched toward the Ancient One. "Oh, Twintas, the elders of this universe, will you not help us return to our own universe? We do not wish to contaminate yours, and you should not try to get rid of the Master Cult by aiding them to invade ours. You now have more power. Help us!"

Jeff held his breath, for the Ancient One seemed to shiver, the vibration passing from one Twintas to another. It seemed to last forever.

"It's okay," Norby announced. "They say yes."

"How do you know, Norby?" asked Rembrandt.

"I can understand them. They're not so bad. They appreciated all my knowledge. There's only one trouble."

"They want you to stay—is that it?" asked Jeff. "Well, I won't have it. You've got to come with me, Norby . . ."

"Oh, they don't want *me*, now that they have my knowledge. They want to see Threezy perform. There are no jesters in this universe—yet."

"We must remedy that," said Blif. "Humor and song are valuable aspects of a universe, and although we have them, a professional minstrel and jester would be a useful addition."

Rembrandt must have given orders through his suit mike, for the next thing Jeff saw was Ing/Threezy, inside a transparent flat-bottomed bubble big enough for him to stand erect and move about a little. The bubble floated out of the Others' ship and was passed along to the Ancient One by the nearest Twintas.

"What in blazes is going on?" roared Threezy, his beard quivering and his handlebar moustache flaring out. "Those three-eyed, two-armed bandits shoved me into this thing—say, Jeff, can you hear me?"

"Loud and clear," said Jeff. "If you can hear me, please listen carefully. A universe is at stake. You must perform for the—ah—trees. They are intelligent and will help us go home if you do."

"Well I won't!" shouted Ing. "I've remembered being Ing, and why should I become Threezy to please a bunch of idiotic-looking monsters who can't possibly have the power . . ."

Norby disappeared, reappearing almost immediately inside Ing's bubble. "What ho, villain!" said Norby. "What's it to be, a duel to the death, or a dance for our supper?"

Norby bowed, or rather his jointed legs did, and he fell smack on his face, two-way feet waving behind him.

There was a rustling sound, and Jeff saw that Blif and all the Twintas were vibrating their leaves and arms, apparently with laughter.

"Don't get in my act, robot," said Ing.

"I'm a better clown than you," said Norby, rising on antigrav and spinning slowly, his domed hat rising and falling. "And I can sing, too."

"This universe's a funny place,  
But so's the one we know,  
Therefore I think it's no disgrace,  
To laugh at friend or foe . . ."

Ing grasped one of Norby's hands and began to spin too.

"You sing off key, you robot twerp,  
Your villainy is weak,  
My place on stage you can't usurp,  
For Threezy is unique!"

Jeff saw that Pera was holding one of Rembrandt's hands, and also touching the Ancient One, probably giving them both a telepathic translation of the words.

Ing took a couple of silver disks from his pocket, picked up Norby, and began juggling all three of them, aided, of course by Norby's use of antigrav. Norby winked at the Ancient

One every time he bobbed upward, and for some reason it was very funny, especially since Ing kept singing.

"From worlds down here to space above,  
There's danger, death, and doom,  
So sing of happiness and love,  
And take away the gloom."

Ing snatched the balls out of the air and made them vanish, while juggling Norby with his other hand. He grinned fiendishly at everyone, stood on his hands, and kept on rotating Norby with his feet.

"The Master Cult's a silly bunch . . ." sang Norby, off-key as usual.

"Ridiculous riff-raff!" warbled Ing in falsetto,

"So when they come to punch and crunch—" sang Norby,

"Defeat them with a laugh!" finished Ing.

The show went on, and Jeff began to relax, for the Twintas were obviously pleased, and Ing was obviously Threezy after all. He was laughing at Norby's next antics when he felt the mind touch of Blif.

—How did they know?

—Know what?

—That the Twintas gain power when they laugh.

—I guess none of us knew that, but maybe it's true of anyone in any universe.

Norby and Jeff stood on the carpet in front of Admiral Yobo's desk in the great rotating wheel of Space Command. The Admiral scowled at them.

"So you didn't capture Ing."

"Well, we did, sort of," said Jeff, "but Rinda wanted to take him back to Izz and the Queen thinks he's cute . . ."

"Bah," said Yobo. "I will suspect the worst. And by the way, Fargo's back and wants to know if you've been taking care of Oola, because she's missing from the apartment."

At the sound of her name, Oola opened her eyes and meowed at the Admiral. Then she yawned and went back to sleep in Jeff's arms. Evidently she thought traveling from one universe to another an exhausting business.

"I suppose I'll have to hear all the boring details of why you brought the Hopeful to Space Command for repairs to the hull. Looks like you'd shot her out of a cannon."

"Not exactly, sir," said Jeff. "You see, when we found that Space Command didn't exist . . ."

"What!"

"I mean, in the future that wasn't, or wouldn't be . . ."

"Cadet!"

"Wait," said Norby. "I will explain everything, in one simple sentence."

Yobo groaned. "Go ahead, Norby. I'll regret I let you, but go ahead."

"Okay, sir. I—Norby the Magnificent—saved the universe!"



BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY  
  
3 9999 01822 292 5

**WITHDRAWN**

No longer the property of the  
Boston Public Library.  
Sale of this material benefits the library.

NORDY FINDS A VILLAIN  
PZ7  
A836NNI/1987

87041671-22

BR

**Boston Public Library**  
**BRIGHTON**  
**BRANCH LIBRARY**

The Date Due Card in the pocket indicates the date on or before which this book should be returned to the Library. Please do not remove cards from this pocket.

## The Authors

Janet and Isaac Asimov became a team in 1973 when they married each other. Since then they have each written individual books and collaborated as co-editors on *Laughing Space*, an anthology of humorous science-fiction stories and cartoons (Houghton-Mifflin) and *How to Enjoy Writing* (Walker). Mrs. Asimov is also a graduate of the William Alanson White Institute of Psychoanalysis and is the author of *Mind Transfer*, which will be published by Walker next spring. She has also written *The Second Experiment* and *The Last Immortal* (Houghton-Mifflin) and *Mysterious Cure* (Doubleday) under her maiden name Janet Jeppson as well as many short stories and articles.

A leader in the field of science fiction, Isaac Asimov became interested in the subject when he was nine years old, and he has expanded that interest through the years. His other writings—over 350 books covering every branch of science as well as history, humor, biography, and autobiography, for readers of all levels and ages—include the *How Did We Find Out About Series* (Walker), *The Collapsing Universe* (Walker), *The Complete Robot*, and his best-selling *Foundation* trilogy (both Doubleday), and many more. Asimov's next Walker book, due later this year, is *Beginnings*.

*The Norby Series* is the first fiction collaboration of this creative husband-wife team.

Jacket design by Laurie McBarnette

Jacket illustration by Richard Rehbein



Walker and Company

720 Fifth Avenue

New York, NY 10019

**Don't miss these titles in the Norby series!**

### **Norby, the Mixed-Up Robot**

"A charming set of characters have some unique adventures to protect the world from the Ingrate . . . Short and sweet adventure."—*School Library Journal*

### **Norby's Other Secret**

". . . a fast-paced, futuristic action/adventure yarn . . . the Asimovs have bulwarked their story with an array of space-age technological gimcracks that will grab young readers' imaginations."—*Booklist*

### **Norby and the Lost Princess**

"The Norby series is shaping up to be one that appeals not only to middle-grade youngsters, but also to their older brothers and sisters."—*VOYA*

### **Norby and the Invaders**

"Robotics fans and those who enjoyed Norby's earlier adventures will find this fast-paced plot equally diverting . . . a funny, light-weight science fiction tale . . ."—*Booklist*

### **Norby and the Queen's Necklace**

"Cheerfulness, humor, and excitement abound. As usual, the Asimovs have crowded history, science, and a good yarn into a few short pages."—*Kirkus Reviews*

ISBN: 0-8027-6710-9 Trade  
0-8027-6711-7 Reinf.