

Chapter XVIII comparison between The Number of the Beast and The Pursuit of the Pankera

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TEXT FROM
THE NUMBER OF THE BEAST

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XVIII “—THE WHOLE WORLD IS ALIVE.”

Zebadiah:

Four Dagwoods later we were ready to start walkabout. Deety delayed by wanting to repeat her test by remote control. I put my foot down. “No!”

“Why not, my Captain? I’ve taught Gay a program to take her straight up ten clicks. It’s G, A, Y, B, O, U, N, C, E—a new fast-escape with no execution word necessary. Then I’ll recall her by B, U, G, O, U, T. If one works via walky-talky, so will the second. It can save our lives, it can!”

“Uh—” I went on folding tarps and stowing my sleeping bag. The female mind is too fast for me. I often can reach the same conclusion; a woman gets there first and never by the route I have to follow. Besides that, Deety is a genius.

“You were saying, my Captain?”

“I was thinking. Deety, do it with me aboard. I won’t touch the controls. Check pilot, nothing more.”

“Then it won’t be a test.”

“Yes, it will. I promise, Cub Scout honor, to let it fall sixty seconds. Or to three clicks H-above-G, whichever comes first.”

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meters even between themselves. Gay's reception is much better."

"Deety, you trust machinery; I don't. If Gay doesn't pick up your second command—sun spots, interference, open circuit, anything—I'll keep her from crashing."

"But if something else goes wrong and you did crash, I would have killed you!" She started to cry.

So we compromised. Her way. The exact test she had originally proposed.

I wasted juice by roading Gay Deceiver a hundred meters, got out, and we all backed off. Deety said into her walky-talky, "Gay Deceiver ... Bug Out!"

=====TEXT DIVERGES=====

It's more startling to watch than it is to be inside. There was Gay Deceiver off to our right, then she was off to our left. No noise—not even an implosion splat! Magic.

"Well, Deety? Are you satisfied?"

"Yes, Zebadiah. Thank you, darling. But it had to be a real test. You see that—don't you?"

I agreed, while harboring a suspicion that my test had been more stringent. "Deety, could you reverse that? Go somewhere else and tell Gay to come to you?"

"Somewhere she's never been?"

"Yes."

Deety switched off her walky-talky and made sure that mine was off. "I don't want her to hear this. Zebadiah, I always feel animistic about a computer. The Pathetic Fallacy—I know. But Gay is a person to me."

Deety sighed. "I know it's a machine. It doesn't have ears; it can't see; it doesn't have a concept of space-time. What it can do is manipulate circuitry in complex ways—complexities limited by its grammar and vocabulary. But those limits are exact. If I don't stay precisely with its grammar and vocabulary, it reports 'Null program.' I can tell it anything by radio that I can tell it by voice inside the cabin—and so can you. But I can't tell it to come look for me in a meadow beyond a canyon about twelve or thirteen clicks approximately southwest of here-now. That's a null program—five undefined terms."

"Because you made it null. You fed 'garbage in' and expect me to be surprised at 'garbage out'—when you did it a-purpose."

"I did not either, I didn't!"

I kissed the end of her nose. "Deety darling, you should trust your instincts. Here's one way to tell Gay to do that without defining even one new term into her vocabulary. Tell her to expect a three-part program. First part: bounce one minimum, ten clicks. Second part: transit twelve point five clicks true course two-two-five. Third part: drop to one click H-over-G and hover. At that point, if

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Not even an implosion Splat! Perhaps her non-spherical shape caused acoustic cancel-out by interference. Perhaps I would have heard something if I had been standing right by her. Or perhaps not. Magic.

So we started out. The sun was still high despite two engineering tests, considerable yak-yak, and making and eating Dagwoods. We headed for the nearest point of the old shoreline (if that is what it was), a hill that stuck out from the rest, perhaps two kilometers away and half a kilometer above the "sea bottom," judging by eye.

We were armed and in open patrol, and I was back in command. Not my idea—Sharpie's. She had asked, "Lifeboat rules, Captain?"

I had answered, "Uh ..." Jake had said, "Certainly!" and Deety had echoed, "Of course!" So I shrugged and accepted it.

"I'll head for that nearest hill. When I've gone two hundred paces, I'll raise my arm, and you, Hilda, start after me. Try to hold that interval; I won't hurry. Jake and Deety, start at the same time, but angle off to right and left and drop back. Try to form an equilateral triangle, with me at point, Deety and Jake right and left drag, and Hilda spang in middle. Talk only via walky-talky and keep it low; the range is short. Don't chatter, but report anything you see. Address the person you are talking to before you say what you have to say—keep it brief and always use 'Over' and 'Roger and Out!' This is a drill as well as sightseeing; we may do this on many planets ... and this looks like an easy place to practice. Questions?"

"Captain," asked Jake, "how long are we going to stay out?"

"I intend to have us back inside while the sun is still an hour high. I hope that we will reach the top of that hill and look around from there. But if I've misjudged the distance—or how fast the sun moves through the sky—I'll head back without reaching the hill. At a trot, if necessary. Or a dead run. However fast Hilda can move. But we're

what you described as your location is roughly correct, you will see her and can coach her to a landing without using Jake's twister."

"Uh ... twelve and a half kilometers can't be done in units often kilometers. Powered flight?"

"Waste juice? Hon, you just flunked high school geometry. Using Euclid's tools, compass and straight edge, lay out that course and distance, then lay out how to get there in ten-klick units—no fractions."

My wife stared. Then her eyes cleared. "Transit one minimum true course one-seven-three and two thirds, then transit one minimum true course two-seven-six and one third. The mirror image solution uses the same courses in reverse. Plus endless trivial solutions using more than two minima."

"Go to the head of the class. If you don't spot her, have her do a retreating search curve—in her perms, in an Aussie accent. Honey girl, did you actually do that Euclid style?"

"I approximated it Euclid style—but you didn't supply compass and straight edge! Scribe circle radius twelve point five. Bisect circle horizontally by straight edge through origin; quarter it by dropping a vertical. Bisect lower left quadrant—that gives true course two-two-five or southwest. Then set compass at ten units and scribe arcs from origin and from southwest point of circle; the intersections give courses and vertices for both major roots to the accuracy of your straight edge and compass. But simply to visualize that construction—well, I got visualized angles of two-seven-five and one-seven-five. Pretty sloppy.

"So I did it accurately by Pythagorean proposition by splitting the isosceles triangle into two right triangles. Hypotenuse is ten, one side is six and a quarter—and that gives the missing side as seven point eight-zero-six-two-four-seven plus—which gives you one course and you read off the other by the scandalous Fifth Axiom. But I did check by trig. Arc sine point seven-eight-zero-six-two-four-seven—"

"Hold it! I believe you. What other ways can you program Gay to find you, using her present vocabulary?"

"Uh ... burn juice?"

"If necessary."

"I would have her bounce a minimum, then maximize my signal. Home on me."

"Certainly. Now do the same thing without using juice. Just Jake's twister."

Deety looked thoughtful and about twelve years old, then suddenly said, "Drunkard's Walk!"—added at once, "But I would place a locus around the Walk just large enough to be certain that I'm inside it. Gay should plot signal level at each vertex. Such a plot would pinpoint the

going to be inside the car and buttoned up before sunset. Uh, Deety, got the time figured out here?"

"No, sir, not yet. I could make a guess by assuming that it matches Mars. But I don't know that it does."

"So don't assume that it does. Look back over your shoulder occasionally, and also watch your own shadow, and don't hesitate to tell me to turn back—you have, by far, the best time-sense of any of us."

"Yessir."

"Anymore questions? Hilda, watch for my signal." I started off, feeling like both Lewis and Clark—the comedy team, not the explorers. I was dressed in a pair of Jake's boxing shorts because they were more comfortable and cooler than the swim briefs I had worn as my first "Martian" costume. The rest was mostly sword belt and that wonderful sword. But the belt also supported walky-talky and gun, a police special of the caliber still called "thirty-eight" (9.65 mm). It did not have the punching power of the still older Army automatic. Jake carried on his Sam Browne opposite his saber—but I had hand-loaded the ammo and had converted the bullets into illegal (and highly effective) dumdums.

So Jake and I were equipped effectively alike. Hilda was in the center because she was armed solely with a hunting knife mounted on one of Deety's belts. Hilda had never learned to shoot, but we (and a dead alien) knew how well she handled a knife.

Deety was armed three ways: a knife at her belt, her Skoda fléchette pistol on the other side, and her own shotgun, a 12-gauge pump gun, with spare cartridges in her belt. Jake assured me she was a "natural" with it.

However, she had nothing but bird shot, so her range was less than that of Jake's pistol, and her striking power much less. I had placed her as right flank drag, but being the point farthest from the hills.

In putting on belts, weapons, and walky-talkies, our ladies had not removed one bauble of their barbaric jewelry. They delighted in being dressed "Barsoomian style," and there seemed to be no reason not to go along with their whim. Jewelry did not interfere with weapons—so why not? Bare skin seemed appropriate, too. This place might be cold at night, but it was warm once the sun was up and rather too warm now, mid afternoon.

I had fretted about shoes. Hilda's total choice lay between tennis shoes that had already started a blister and dancing slippers with high heels. Deety did have stout country shoes—but she had said, "Zebadiah, I don't need shoes. If you give me orders as our commander, I'll wear them. But you'll make me less able to defend myself."

(For an Absolute Monarch, I win very few arguments.)

Jake and I each had field boots. I got as far as putting mine on and lacing one up. But my feet seemed to have

signal source.”

“Which way is faster? Home straight in under power? Or Drunkard’s Walk?”

Deety answered, “Why, the—” —looked startled. “Those are solid-state relays.”

“Jake sets verniers by hand—but when Gay is directing herself there are no moving parts. Solid state.”

“Zebadiah, am I thinking straight? Using power, at that distance—call it twelve kilometers—Gay should be able to home on me in three or four minutes. But—Zebadiah, this can’t be right!—using no power and relying on random numbers and pure chance in a Drunkard’s Walk, Gay should find me in less than a second. Where did I go wrong?”

“On the high side, Deety girl. Lost your nerve. The first fifty milliseconds should show the hot spot; in less than the second fifty she’ll part your hair. All over in a tenth of a second—or less. But, honey, we still haven’t talked about the best way. I said that you should trust your instincts. Gay is not an ‘it.’ She’s a person. You’ll never know how relieved I was when it turned out that you two were going to be friends. If she had been jealous of you—May the gods deliver us from a vindictive machine! But she’s not; she thinks you’re swell.”

“Zebadiah, you believe that?”

“Dejah Thoris, I know that.”

Deety looked relieved. “I know it, too—despite what I said earlier.”

“Deety, to me the whole world is alive. Some parts are sleeping and some are dozing and some are awake but yawning ... and some are bright-eyed and bushy-tailed and always ready to go. Gay is one of those.”

“Yes, she is. I’m sorry I called her an ‘it.’ But what is this ‘best way’?”

“Isn’t it obvious? Don’t tell her how—just tell her. Say to her, ‘Gay, come find me!’ All four words are in her vocabulary; the sentence is compatible with her grammar. She’ll find you.”

“But how? Drunkard’s Walk?”

“A tenth of a second might strike her as too long—she likes you, hon. She’ll look through her registers and pick the optimum solution. She might not be able to tell you how she did it, since she wipes anything she’s not told to remember. I think she does; I’ve never been certain.”

#

Jake and Hilda had wandered off while Deety and I had been talking. They had turned back, so we started toward them. Sharpie called out, “Zebbie, what happened to that hike?”

“Right away,” I agreed. “Jake, we have about three hours.

spread during two weeks barefooted. And they were hot. I thought about the horrid case of jungle rot I had gotten wearing them in Kenya—no doubt fungus was still infecting them. I took them off. Jake re-stowed them—and his own.

Besides, I had found it difficult to stay balanced in them. We hadn’t had the time to jury-rig a way to measure local gravity (easy with a spring scale—we had no spring scale), but Barsoom’s gravity was certainly low, surprisingly low for its air pressure (about that of Snug Harbor according to my pressure altimeter). But low gravity is both an advantage ... and a snare. All our reflexes, all our walking, running, and jumping habits, are based on “mass equals weight.” When one kilogram mass weighs only three or four grams (my guesstimate), one can jump quite high—but it is safer to crawl like a baby.

Ten days on Luna with the Aussies had given me practice in one-sixth gee—but only old Moon hands lope in Lunar gravity: new chums use a clumsy two-footed hop. (That time on Luna is not part of my “official” record. There was a spare seat; my A.D.F. C.O. gave me two weeks leave and looked the other way—Aussies are born non-reg; they enjoy breaking rules.)

I had “mastered the art of walking on Barsoom—barefooted. But I suspected that those stiff field boots would trip me.

Our midget-sized walky-talkies were so small and light that they could be carried in-hand, strapped to an arm, placed in a pocket, hung on a belt, or slung around the neck. Short range, they could be hand-held; for long range, an ear button and a throat mic gave them around ten times the reach. Jake hung his on his Sam Browne and ran the wire up the digital strap, taped it at his shoulder. Seeing what her father had done, Deety placed hers on its shoulder strap, then belted over it; Hilda and I imitated her. It left us all equipped for long range, both hands free, at what was, in fact, short range—okay with the gain down to minimum, but we could still hear each other swallow. It did show that our party could spread out, long distance if need be, yet still be “together”.

We needed water canteens. The only suppliers were millions of kilometers and ten universes away.

I almost got cross-eyed trying to scan terrain ahead while watching where I put my feet—not only because low gravity and bouncy groundcover made me unsteady, but also through watching for the local equivalents of sidewinders or Gila monsters—which might look like rocks or lox. Sure, we had gotten nary an insect bite at breakfast—which proves that we had gotten nary an insect bite at breakfast. We were totally unsophisticated in terra utterly incognito; some “pretty little flower” might be more deadly than a bushmaster.

We ought to be buttoned up before sundown. Check?"

"I agree. The temperature will drop rapidly at sundown."

"Yup. We can't do real exploring today. So let's treat it as drill. Fully armed, patrol formation, radio discipline, and always alert, as if there were a 'Black Hat' behind every bush."

"No bushes," objected Hilda.

I pretended not to hear. "But what constitutes 'fully armed,' Jake? We each have rifles. You have that oldstyle Army automatic that will knock down anything if you're close enough but—how good a shot are you?"

"Good enough."

"How good is 'Good enough?'" (Most people are as accurate with a baseball as with a pistol.)

"Skipper, I won't attempt a target more than fifty meters away. But if I intend to hit, the target will be within range and I will hit it."

I opened my mouth ... closed it. Fifty meters is a long range for that weapon. But hint that my father-in-law was boasting?

Deety caught my hesitation. "Zebadiah—Pop taught me pistol in the campus R.O.T.C. range. I've seen him practice bobbing targets at thirty meters. I saw him miss one. Once."

Jake harrumphed. "My daughter omitted to mention that I skip most surprise targets."

"Father! 'Most' means 'more than fifty percent.' Not true!"

"Near enough."

"Six occasions. Four strings, twenty-eight targets on three—"

"Hold it, honey! Jake, it's silly to argue figures with your daughter. With my police special I won't attempt anything over twenty meters—except covering fire. But I hand-load my ammo and pour my own dumdums; the result is almost as lethal as that howitzer of yours. But if it comes to trouble, or hunting for meat, we'll use rifles, backed by Deety's shotgun. Deety, can you shoot?"

"Throw your hat into the air."

"I don't like the sound of that. Sharpie, we have five firearms, four people—is there one that fits you?"

"Cap'n Zebbie, the one time I fired a gun, I went backwards, the bullet went that-a-way, and I had a sore shoulder. Better have me walk in front to trip land mines."

"Zebadiah, she could carry my fléchette gun."

"Sharpie, we'll put you in the middle and you carry the first-aid kit; you're medical officer—armed with Deety's purse gun for defense. Jake, it's time we stowed these swords and quit pretending to be Barsoomian warriors. Field boots. I'm going to wear that same sweaty pilot suit, about equivalent to jump suits you and Deety wore—which I suggest you wear now. We should carry water

Not that I let it worry me; worry itself is a killer. But I was super-cautious by intent. We needed an armored Land rover, or a tank. What we had were shanks' ponies and scratch weapons. We did have a fast, armed-and-armored vehicle—Gay Deceiver—but with no way to juice her, her power must be conserved for emergency maneuvers.

In romances about interstellar exploration there is always a giant mother ship with inexhaustible power, plus long-range and versatile landing craft.

Somehow we weren't doing this "by the book." We should go back and re-equip. But home base was destroyed and we were "dead" and "the book" thrown away. We had no choice but to face the unknown with what we had. I trudged ahead.

While trying to scan that hill ahead, I tangled my feet in ground cover, tripped, and did a short, brilliant pas-à-seul that would have fetched applause to a clown in an ice show. Instead, I applauded myself.

Hilda's voice answered, "Why, Cap'n Zebbie! Such language."

"Pipe down," I answered grumpily. Thereafter I watched each step for fifty paces, stopped, searched ahead a second—and repeat. Endlessly.

During one such eyes-down interval I felt the ground tremble, felt it despite the spongy turf. Earthquake? Marsquake? Barsoomquake? I stopped to look.

Around the shoulder of that hill was charging at me a many-legged monster midway between a dinosaur and a rhinoceros that's had too many vitamins; astride this nightmare was a green giant twice as tall as I am and much uglier. His face had a built-in unfriendly look, not improved by eyeteeth that were tusks curling up almost to his eyebrows.

Couched at the ready in his two right hands was a telephone pole, sharp at one end—that end was aimed at my belly button. He was brandishing a big rifle in his upper left hand, but his attention was fixed on making shish kebab of me.

This takes many words to describe, but it was burned instantly into my brain in living holocolor—while my rudely awakened subconscious was tearing around inside my skull, beating on the bone, and screaming, "Le' me out o' here! Le' me out o' here! Look, it's all a mistake! I'm not a hero; I don't belong here—you got the wrong guy! Zeb! Zeb! Wake up! We're in the wrong dream!"

I said bitterly to myself, "Sharpie, this is the last time I'll let you name a planet—and this looks like the last time"—while another part of my much-split personality was considering: "How did the other Captain John Carter—the one without the 'Z'—handle this type of situation? Keep cool, boy, don't panic—use the tested tactic.

canteens and iron rations. I can't think of anything that would serve as a canteen. Damn! Jake, we aren't doing this by the book."

"What book?" demanded Hilda.

"Those romances about interstellar exploration. There's always a giant mother ship in orbit, loaded with everything from catheters to Coca-Cola, and scouting is by landing craft, in touch with the mother ship. Somehow, we aren't doing it that way."

(All the more reason to conduct drill as realistically as possible. Jake or I, one of us, is honor bound to stay alive to take care of two women and unborn children; exterminating 'Black-Hat' vermin holds a poor second to that.)

"Zebbie, why are you staring at me?"

I hadn't known that I was. "Trying to figure how to dress you, dear. Sharpie, you look cute in jewelry and perfume. But it's not enough for a sortie in the bush. Take 'em off and put 'em away. You, too, Deety. Deety, do you have another jump suit that can be pinned up or stitched up for Hilda?"

"A something, sure. But it would take hours to do a good job. My sewing kit isn't much."

"'Hours' will have to be another day. Today we'll make do with safety pins. But take time to do a careful job of padding her feet into your stoutest shoes. Confound it, she should have field boots. Sharpie, remind me when we make that shopping trip to Earth-without-a-J."

"To hear is to obey, Exalted One. Is it permitted to make a parliamentary inquiry?"

She startled me. "Hilda, what did I do to cause that frosty tone?"

"It was what you didn't do." Suddenly she smiled, reached high and patted my cheek. "You mean well, Zebbie. But you slipped. While Gay Deceiver is on the ground, we're equal. But you've been giving orders right and left."

I started to answer; Jake cut in. "Hilda my love, for a scouting expedition the situation becomes equivalent to a craft in motion. Again we require a captain."

Sharpie turned toward her husband. "Conceded, sir. But may I point out that we are not yet on that hike? Zebbie has consulted you; he has not consulted Deety and me. He asked us for information—darned seldom! Aside from that he has simply laid down the law. What are we, Zebbie? Poor little female critters whose opinions are worthless?"

Caught with your hand in the cooky jar, throw yourself on the mercy of the court.

"Sharpie, you're right and I'm dead wrong. But before you pass sentence I claim extenuating circumstances: Youth and inexperience, plus long and faithful service."

"You can't," put in my helpful wife. "You can plead one

Charge straight toward it and jump! Jump high—this is Barsoom—remember? You jump right over it. High! Stab his gun arm and, as you twist in the air to withdraw, splash at his upper lance arm—try to! You'll land beyond him and that beast is too big to turn fast—so jump again and slash again at his lance arms. Take him—then worry about his mount; it's big, but stupid.

So the red haze of battle veiled my steel gray eyes and I charged, sword at port and shouting my war cry: "Kartago delenda est! Smerts y Rosroushen yah! Illegitimi Nihil Carborundum!"—and leapt.

And caught my toe in that damned crab grass, went arse over teacup, and barely managed to roll aside as the pads of that preposterous pachyderm pounded past.

Breath was knocked out of me; I fought to get it back as I got to my feet—and saw a sight tragic and heroic: little Sharpie swarming up a giant green leg like a kitten up a tree and attempting to take that giant apart with her knife.

Nothing else for it—the clean-limbed fighting man charged again. "Allah il Allah Akbar!" If I thrust right under that beast's tail, would it confuse the situation enough for me to do something about Sharpie? The giant had let go his lance with his upper right hand, had her by the wrist and was keeping her from poking his eyes, while he held her waist with his lower left hand, almost spanning it.

He turned his head to look at me, and I lisped around his tusks: "Oh, I say, old chap, do speak English. If you know it."

I stopped charging the quick way—tripped again and picked myself up. "Certainly, I do! Put her down!"

"But I can't, you know. She's trying to blind me. And do please tell your friends to cease firing. It makes the thoats quite nervous. Quite."

A bullet kicked up leaves and dust between me and the giant, followed a split second by the Crack! of an old-style automatic. I flinched—when you hear the bullet before you hear the gun, you are on the wrong end of the firing.

Jake was about a hundred meters away, on one knee, steadying his weapon with two hands. "Cease firing! The very different Bang! of a shotgun sounded. I looked under the snout of the thoat, saw Deety standing, gun pointed toward us.

"Don't blast the mic," Jake answered, blasting the mic. "Did you give 'cease firing'?"

I lowered my voice. "Yes. Cease firing, both of you. You might hit Hilda. Both of you, stay where you are. I'll try to negotiate."

"Aye aye, Captain."

I heard a neighing squeal behind me, looked around—

or the other but not both. They can't overlap."

Sharpie stood on tiptoes and kissed my chin. "In Zebbie's case they do overlap. Do you still want to know what to use as water canteens?"

"Certainly!"

"Then why didn't you ask?"

"But I did!"

"No, Cap'n Zebbie; you did not ask and did not even give us time to volunteer the answer."

"I'm sorry, Hilda. Too many things on my mind."

"I know, dear; Sharpie does not mean to scold. But I had to get your attention."

"That baseball bat?"

"Almost. For an ersatz canteen—A hot-water bottle?"

Again she startled me. "In the danger we were in when we left, you worried about cold feet in bed? And packed a hot-water bottle?"

"Two," answered Deety. "Aunt Hilda fetched one. So did I."

"Deety, you don't have cold feet and neither do I."

Sharpie said, "Deety, is he actually that naïve?"

"I'm afraid he is, Aunt Hilda. But he's sweet."

"And brave," added Hilda. "But retarded in spots. They do overlap in Zebbie's case. He's unique."

"What," I demanded, "are you talking about?"

"Aunt Hilda means that, when you refitted Gay, you neglected to install a bidet."

"Oh." That was the wittiest I could manage. "It's not a subject I give much thought to."

"No reason you should, Zebbie. Although men use them, too."

"Zebadiah does. Pop, too. Bidets, I mean. Not hot-water bottles."

"I meant hot-water bottles, dear. As medical officer I may find it necessary to administer an enema to the Captain."

"Oh, no!" I objected. "You're not equipped."

"But she is, Zebadiah. We fetched both sorts of nozzles."

"But you didn't fetch four husky orderlies to hold me down. Let's move on. Sharpie, what was the advice you would have given if I had been bright enough to consult you?"

"Some is not advice but a statement of fact. I'm not going for a hike on a hot day swaddled in a pinned-up jump suit eight sizes too big. While you all play Cow-boys-and-Indians, I'm going to curl up in my seat and read 'The Oxford Book of English Verse.' Thank you for fetching it, Jacob."

"Hilda beloved, I will worry."

"No need to worry about me, Jacob. I can always tell Gay to lock her doors. But, were I to go with you, I would be a handicap. You three are trained to fight; I'm not."

and almost fainted. I was staring up into the red, piggish eyes of another thot. This is a bad angle to appreciate one. It was pawing the ground and rocking, apparently anxious to trample me. Then I became aware that there were three of them—three thots, three green giants, each one uglier than both of the others. Apparently they had attacked in Vee formation, and I had been too occupied to see the wing men. A fighter pilot can get his tail shot off making that mistake.

I didn't cringe—professional heroes can't afford to show fear. I simply moved around to the front, rather quickly, of the giant who had Hilda—but did not stand directly in front of this thot. Hilda was struggling, still trying to fit him out with tin cup and white cane.

"Sharpie!"

"Yes, Cap'n! Give me a hand!"

"Sharpie, I've got to negotiate this. Flag of truce and so forth."

"Half a second while I poke his eyes out and he'll have to negotiate!"

"Sharpie, there are three of them!"

"You knock 'em down, I'll knife 'em!"

"Hilda! Hilda, my darling," came Jake's voice by walky-talky. "Do what the Captain says! Please!"

Hilda stopped struggling. "Zebbie, did you say three?"

"Look around. Count 'em. But they aren't trying to hurt us."

Hilda looked around, counted. "Tell tell this smelly ape to take his dirty paws off me."

"What a rude remark from a lady." (It sounded more like "wude wemark.") "Apes are a dirty white. And utterly beastly. Not human."

"She didn't mean to insult you, sir. She's quite upset. Hilda, if this gentleman lets you—slowly!—lower your arm, will you sheath your knife and let him place you on the ground?"

"Cap'n Zebbie, are you sure that's what you want me to do?"

"Sharpie, it's the only thing to do. He doesn't want to hurt you—but he doesn't want his eyes put out, either."

"Well ... will he say 'King's X'?"

"I'm sure he will. Sir, 'King's X' means 'flag of truce'. No more hostilities."

"But there were no hotthilitieth until you attacked uth. We were thimply twying to give you the formal theremony of welcome when you yelled at me and she attacked me while I wath dithtracted!" (His lisp had become worse under grievance—but you try saying the letter "s" with both thumbs in the corners of your mouth. Go ahead—try it. When not excited, he compensated rather well. I won't spell it out again.)

He added, "Will she say 'King's X'?"

Sharpie turned toward me. “Captain, since I’m not going, that’s all I have to say.”

What was there for me to say? “Thank you, Hilda. Deety, do you have things on your mind?”

“Yes, sir. I go along with field boots and jump suits and so forth even though they’ll be beastly hot. But I wish you would change your mind about your sword and Pop’s saber. Maybe they aren’t much compared with rifles but they’re good for my morale.”

Hilda interjected, “Had I decided to go, Captain, I would have said the same. Possibly it is an emotional effect from what happened, uh—was it only yesterday?—but perhaps it is subconscious logic. Just yesterday bare blades defeated a man—a thing, an alien—armed with a firearm and ready to use it.”

Jake spoke up. “Captain, I didn’t want to take off my saber.”

“We’ll wear them.” Any excuse is a good excuse to wear a sword. “Are we through? We’ve lost an hour and the Sun is dropping. Deety?”

“One more thing, Zebadiah—and I expect to be out-voted. I say to cancel the hike.”

“So? Princess, you’ve said too much or not enough.”

“If we do this, we spend the night here—sitting up. If we chase the Sun instead—There were lights on the night side that looked like cities. There was blue on the day side that looked like a sea. I think I saw canals. But whether we find something or not, at worst we’ll catch up with sunrise and be able to sleep outdoors in daylight, just as we did today.”

“Deety! Gay can overtake the Sun. Once. You want to use all her remaining juice just to sleep outdoors?”

“Zebadiah, I wasn’t planning on using any power.”

“Huh? It sounded like it.”

“Oh, no! Do transitions of three minima or more, bearing west. Aim us out of the atmosphere; we fall back in while looking for places of interest. As we reenter, we glide, but where depends on what you want to look at. When you have stretched the glide to the limit, unless you decide to ground, you do another transition. There is great flexibility, Zebadiah. You can reach sunrise line in the next few minutes. Or you could elect to stay on the day side for weeks, never land, never use any juice, and inspect the entire planet from pole to pole.”

“Maybe Gay can stay up for weeks—but not me. I’m good for several more hours. With that limitation, it sounds good, How about it? Hilda? Jake?”

“You mean that female suffrage is permanent? I vote Yes!”

Jake said, “You have a majority; no need for a male vote.”

“Say it, Hilda—and cross your heart.”

They both said it, but the green giant could not cross his heart; all four of his hands were busy. He lowered her wrist, holding it well away from him, until she could reach her belt. She sheathed her hunting knife. He started to lift her gently down; she shrugged loose and jumped, landed lightly. I put an arm around her, she started to tremble. I said, “There, there, honey—it’s over. You were magnificent!”

“I was scared silly,” she whispered.

“It’s all right now, dear.” I went on to him, “I think explanations are in order. This is the Princess Hilda.”

“Kaor, Princess Hilda. Tawm Takus, at your service.”

“Kaor, Tawm Takus. Thank you.”

“And over there is Princess Deety. Princess Deety, “I emphasized, hoping that Deety would twig that I judged “Dejah Thoris” to be a name she should not use in this neighborhood. “To your right is Doctor Jacob Burroughs. The famous Doctor Burroughs,” I added. “Jeddak of Logan, Master of Time and Space, Explorer of Universes, Master Galactic Engineer, Veteran of the Pentagon, Emperor of Ruritania, Supreme Pontiff of the Nine Mysteries and privy to the Number of the Beast, First Commander of—but why go on? Everyone is familiar with his unparalleled distinctions.

“Yes, of course,” the giant agreed slowly. “But I never dreamt that I would have the privilege of actually seeing him.”

“You see him now and may talk with him—he’s quite democratic. And modest. A word to the wise, old chap—address him simply as ‘Doctor Burroughs.’ He prefers not to be reminded of his many honors. Detests formality.”

“Is he here incognito?”

“Let’s say semi-incognito. Prefers to pursue his scientific researches undisturbed by protocol. For example, I am in nominal command of his party ... so that the famous doctor need not waste time on trivial details. But I haven’t given you my own name. Captain Zebadiah Carter, of Virginia.”

Tawm Takus’ eyes widened; he started to say something, checked himself—then said, “The famous Doctor dislikes formality, you say ... Captain Zebadiah Carter?”

“As little as possible. He tolerates it when necessary.

“Do you suppose ... Is it possible ... In your opinion ... would he permit us to offer the ceremony of welcome? Start over, I mean, since it was broken off through a most unfortunate misunderstanding.” He sounded wistful.

I pretended to consider it, frowning. “How long does it take?” My guess put sundown two hours away—and it was a long walk back.

Deety’s voice spoke in my right ear: “My Captain, must we stand out here? We get your half of the powwow but

“Jacob!” his wife said reproachfully.

“Joking, my dear. It’s unanimous.”

I said, “Somebody just cancelled the election. Look there.”

We all looked. Deety said, “What is it? A pterodactyl?”

“No, an ornithopter. A big one.”

CHAPTER END

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only snatches of Tommy Tucker’s remarks. But he seems friendly.”

“Wait a half, Princess. Doctor Burroughs—igpay atinlay, el verde hombre-ci is antsy-pantsy à faire Royal Canadian Mounted Police drill avec vous cast as Hail Caesar. Copasetic? Or Box Cars?”

“I heard those bald-faced lies. ‘Veteran of the Pentagon! You’ll pay for that, Son. Now about this Maypole dance—Recommendation?’”

“Authentic Golden Bough stuff, je pense, Herr Doktor-Professor.”

“Hmm—Da solid, man. Mais schnell. Dig?”

“Pronto, amigo. Rally ‘round the flag, ici. Execute.” I looked up at the Jolly Green Giant. “The learned Doctor will grant your request if you can do it quickly. His time is extremely valuable.”

“At once, Captain Zebadiah Carter!” With no spoken command, the three thoats executed ‘Troopers left about!’ and headed at ground-shaking speed for the shoulder of the hill where they had appeared. Deety and Jake closed in quickly. Deety hugged me, banging me on the back of my noggin with the barrel of her shotgun in doing so.

“Oh, my Captain, I’m so proud of you!”

I kissed her. “Hilda is the hero, not me.”

“I’m proud of Hilda, too. Aunt Hilda, are you all right, honey?”

Hilda stopped nuzzling her man long enough to an answer. “That big lunk bruised my ribs. But he couldn’t help it. He’s rather sweet, actually. Handsome, too.”

“‘Handsome!’”

“Deety baby, you don’t expect a Great Dane to be pretty by the same rules as a butterfly.

Deety looked thoughtful. “That’s logical. I must look at him again, with unprejudiced eye.”

“Postpone the debate, girls, and listen. Jake, can you manage a sword salute?”

“Eh? Certainly!”

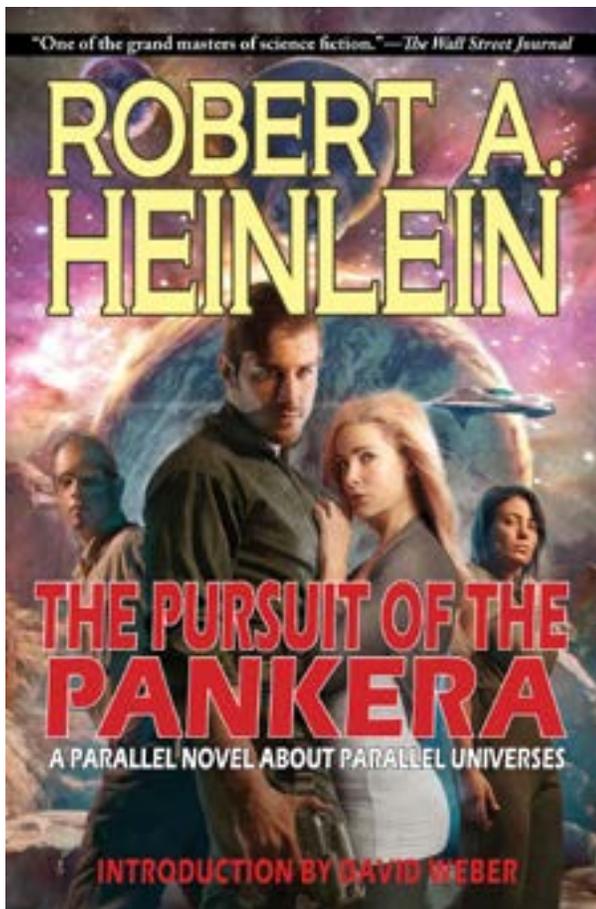
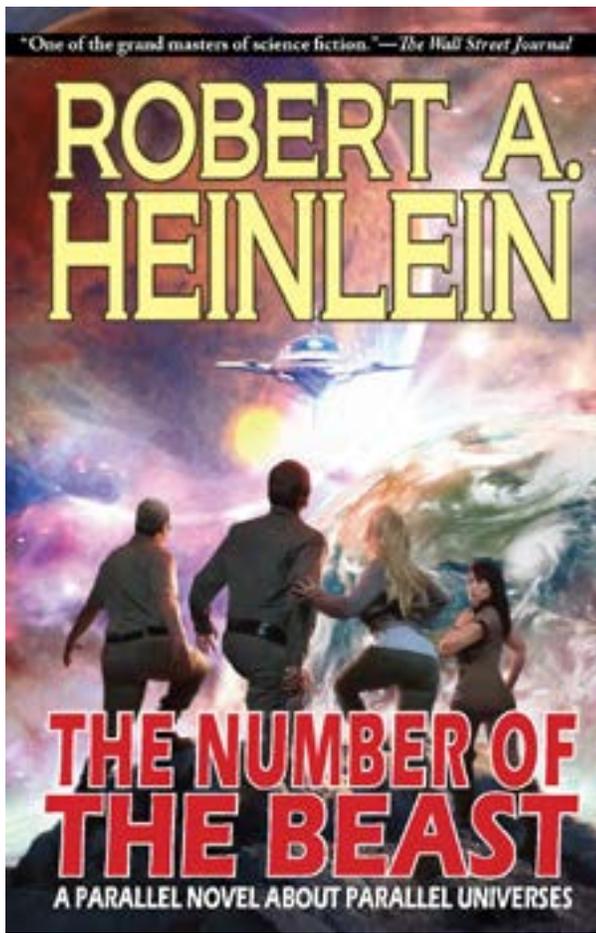
“Okay, here’s the drill. We line up, Jake on the right, Hilda next, Deety next, me beside Deety—Deety, you can ‘Present arms’ with a gun?”

“I’ve seen it. I can fake it.”

“Good. Hilda, all you have to do is a Girl Scout salute. I give ‘Draw—Swords!’ You gals do nothing; Jake and I draw and come to order arms in three counts. Then I give ‘Present—Arms!’ Jake and I do it, two counts, one for each word—but, Deety, don’t move until I say ‘Arms!’”

“I’ll be out of step, “ Deety objected.

“They won’t be critical. When I return ... swords!’ you come back to order arms—and I’ll say, “Fall out” and Doctor Burroughs—you’re Doctor Burroughs in public from now on and you two are always ‘princess’ and I’m always Captain. Protocol. Any questions? I hear them



coming.”

We lined up. The thundering herd rounded the shoulder and came straight at us, lances at charge, only this time it was the starboard wing man who was about to skewer me. They didn't slow and I was ready to beat the Barsoomian record for backward broad jump—but couldn't because both women remained rock steady.

When it seemed impossible that they could stop, the thoats slammed on brakes with all twenty-four legs, and stopped dead as three lances swung up vertically into perfect salutes. My boy almost brushed the tip of my nose with his, but upright his lance was four meters away.

“Draw!—Swords! (Grab—Draw—Down! Hup! two! three!)—and Sharpie tossed in her own variations. No Girl Scout salute for her—she followed our motions, right on the beat, with her hunting knife.

“‘Present!’ (hilts to three chins -) ‘Harmp!’ Blades flashed down while Deety chucked her gun into the air, caught it with both hands. I've seen it done more by the book, but never with more snap.

The three giants let out wild yells, which I chose to interpret as cheers. I waited a long beat, then dismissed by “troops.”

But the big boys weren't through. Tawm Takus glanced right and left, and suddenly bunting bloomed from those upright lances, joined together into one big banner (magnets? magic?), spelling:

WELCOME TO BARSOOM!
Greater Helium Chamber of Commerce

CHAPTER END

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