

A PENNY FOR YOUR THOUGHTS

Presents

PRESS



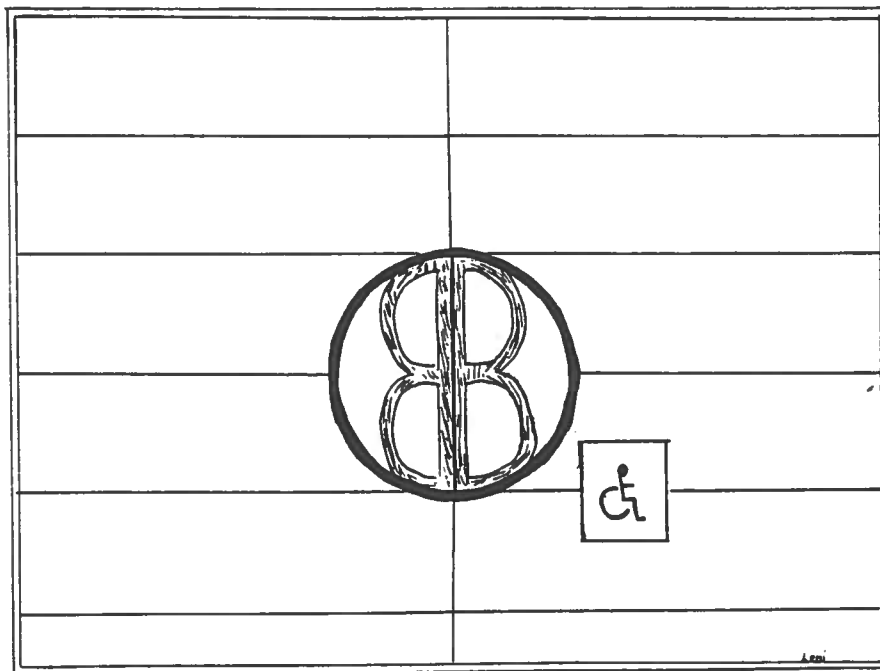
The Penny
Parade

2

A BUCKAROO BANZAI
FANZINE

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My mom, Cary Sommer. All Zine editors and writers should have a parental unit this supportive, but until I perfect the cloning process, the prototype is MINE!

Peggy Spalding, for making this perhaps the best illustrated Zine in fandom, with the exception of her own (if you want my opinion), for coming up with plots, riding the unrideable colt, polishing the fruit in the bottom of the bowl when company was coming, and generally being an all-round good friend.

Richard Carpenter, for helping me understand the Rawhide Death Cult. Those of you fortunate enough to have attended Omacon in 1986, or who have the good taste to subscribe to "A Shot in the Dark" will instantly recognize the influence this charming man has had on my work.

Dr. Linda Cano, who, like our favorite hard rocking scientist, is part Japanese and part Texan, and tolerates all my eccentricities both personally and professionally.

Winnie Hegwer, for introducing me to "Rejoice in the Lamb".

Tammy, Rich and April, for enriching the Banzai Universe.

And, as always, all of you, the readers, for keeping the Universe alive.



Dear Friends,

It's been an exciting year at A PENNY FOR YOUR THOUGHTS PRESS. "The Penny Paradox" was very well received, and is now in its second printing, and I feel that I've gotten to know many of you personally. Thank you for your letters, and if I haven't answered all of them, it wasn't from lack of desire. As always, your input is valued, and I look forward to hearing your reactions to this latest effort.

I am pleased to be featuring three new writers in this issue. Hopefully, their works will inspire some of the rest of you out there. It's gratifying that Fox and Cait were so warmly welcomed into the Banzai Universe, but although Tammy and Rich chose to have them put in appearances in their stories, this is not required. In fact, submitted works do not have to be in agreement with any of mine in any way except for the issue of Rawhide's death. Writer's Guidelines from Issue #1 still hold, although we can work around the requirement that Reno narrate, if the story warrants it, such as if any Lectroid manuscripts are unearthed. Poetry and Filks are not bound by this guideline, in any case. Any questions, just drop me a line, and enclose a SASE.

The following organizations and Zine may also be of interest to you:

ON WINGS OF LIGHT, a Phoenix fanzine
Solstice Press
607 West Jefferson
Waxahachie, TX 75165

The League of Lectroids for Lizardo
c/o April Anderson
4425 Greensboro
Corpus Christi, TX 78413

Robin of Sherwood, NAB (fan club)
P.O. Box 37654
Omaha, NE 68137

Well, read, enjoy, and let me know what you think.

Namaste,



I salute the light within you.

BANZAI INSTITUTE FOR BIOMEDICAL ENGINEERING AND STRATEGIC INFORMATION

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TO THE READER

Once again, I fear that the cynics of the world, especially those who find the activities of Buckaroo Banzai suspect, will find the accounts of our exploits recounted in this volume to be pure sensationalism, designed merely to incite panic amongst those easily excited. Many will, in fact, doubt their veracity, wondering how I came by my information, and opining that these adventures could not possibly have taken place. Suffice it to say, that I have my sources, and much detail has been provided by the participants in these events. And certainly, B. Banzai, who values truth and honor above all else, would not allow any falsehoods to be published in his name.

Much has been made, again, by the above-mentioned cynics, of the fact that many of us at the Institute use assumed names, that our pasts are "shrouded in secrecy". There is nothing sinister about this. We simply use the name that has been given us by our compadres. And if a man or woman chooses to start a new life along with a new name, who are we to question this?

Reno



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18 of 100

BUCKAROC BANZAI AND THE GEMINI AFFAIR

by

Rich Drees

CHAPTER ONE

It should have been your typical Hollywood movie premiere. Tuxes, limos, pretty women, and a great party afterward. It was the kind of a thing that we at the Banzai Institute for Biomedical Engineering and Strategic Information really enjoy. And we had indeed planned on enjoying that evening, which was why the actual turn of events caught us off-guard.

It all happened late last June, about a year after we had routed the Red Lectroid menace from New Jersey and finally confirmed that we are, in fact, not alone.*

It had been a quiet year, with our arch nemesis, the depraved Hanoi Xan, only making two attempts to try to somehow harm Buckaroo.**

Research of both the standard and the off-beat continued. One of the most important projects that was going on at the Institute was the study of the newly hypothesized fifth natural force, Hyperforce. Perfect Tommy thought, and perhaps this was stimulated by the President's Space Defense Initiative, that if one could harness this force that it could be used as a defensive weapon, finally realizing the old science fiction deus ex machina: the force or deflector field. This new development in cosmology has also consternated Buckaroo and his own personal theory of consciousness as the fifth force of nature.

When I saw The Boss puzzling over the whole thing one March evening after everyone had gone to bed, I reminded him of the words of J.B.S. Haldane. "The universe is not only stranger than we imagine, it's stranger than we CAN imagine."

He just looked up at me and smiled with that smile of his and said, "Yeah. Too bad that's the truth."

The night of the premiere, Buckaroo was running late, as is usual for a man of his schedule. I was standing outside his door, waiting for him, listening to him whistle as he dressed. Finally, he shot out his door, heading for the steps. "Come on, Reno. We'll be late," he called back to me.

"That's what I've been trying to tell you," I insisted, following.

We arrived in the front hall of the Institute just in time to hear the end of yet another one of Perfect Tommy's Foreign Language Puns. "'But monsieur,' the waiter replied. 'In France, one egg is always un oeuf.'"

Groans reverberated through out the house. "Where's your tie at, Tommy?" I asked, pointing to his shirt, which had the top three buttons undone.

"I don't wear bowties," replied Tommy.

*for details, see "Across the Eighth Dimension". --Rerp

**These two adventures will be chronicled at a future time.

"Where are the girls?" wondered New Jersey out loud. "It's almost time to go." New Jersey, despite his easy-going manner, has a thing about arriving at functions early.

As if on cue, in walked Penny, Pecos, Mrs. Johnsonohson, and Fox. Each wore a stunning evening gown, fashionable and accenting the beauty of its wearer. Penny's, surprisingly, was not as low cut as some of the past creations she had worn, but would still most likely ellicit embarrassed whispers from among older, more prudish members of society. Behind them trooped little Caity, wearing a pretty, fashionable party dress.

Penny, Fox and Pecos immediately slipped their arms into the waiting crooked elbows of Buckaroo, New Jersey, and myself, respectively. Caity came up and took Perfect Tommy's hand while he signed with the other that she looked very pretty this evening.

Suddenly, a young voice called from down the hall, "Get off my girl, Tommy, or I'll drink your blood!"

All looked up the hall to see Scooter Lindley, followed by his father, Casper, each in tuxedos, coming from the guest room where they were staying for the weekend.

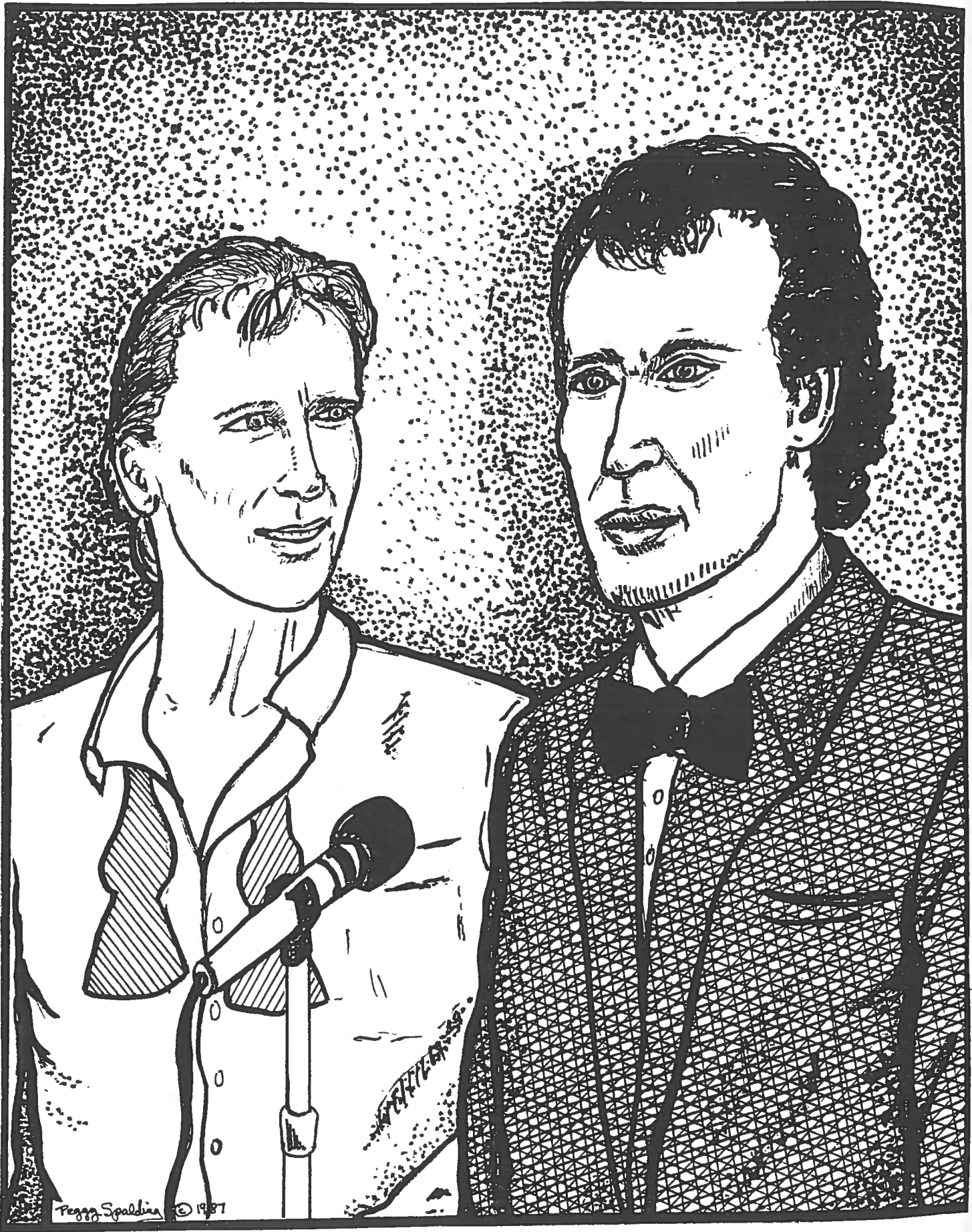
Tommy raised his hands and put on a look of mock-guilt and surrender. Scooter sidled up to Tommy and whispered with a knowing wink, "When you got it, you got it." He then took Caity's arm and started for the door as if nothing had happened.

"Oh....," said Tommy with a tone in his voice that sounded as if someone had just told him The Supreme Truth of Life. Tommy then turned and gallantly offered his arm to Mrs. Johnsonohson, who took it. On that note, all left for the premiere.

Whatever misgivings Buckaroo might have had about the Banzai Institute's first venture into the motion picture medium, they were dispelled by the premiere of "Across the Eighth Dimension". The premiere was attended by members of the Institute, Hollywood stars and members of the world press, who had a field day with Perfect Tommy's new hair color. Perhaps the most important guest, at least in our eyes, was the winner of a contest among the Blue Blazes as to who would get to attend the premiere. The Blue Blaze, "Tiger Lily" Cartwright, was an eighteen-year-old, down-to-earth girl from Cranston, Rhode Island. She was, like Buckaroo, of Japanese-American descent, her mother being from Harbin, Japan, and her father from St. Louis. I knew she had to be a level-headed girl when she didn't gush all over Buckaroo when introduced. She did, however, blush a bit when introduced to Tommy.

The trouble of which I chronicle here all started at the reception afterward. It was held at Artie's Artery, with Billy and the Beaters providing the music, intermittently joined by one or two Cavaliers, as the song or mood permitted. There was also plenty of food and drink.

[Parents please note: The Banzai Institute was, even before it became fashionable, and still is, an advocate against drunk driving. As is usual at all Institute functions such as this one, those who are of legal drinking age are given a card which they must give to the bartender each time they get a drink. The bartender punches the card and after three drinks the bearer of the card is cut off. Since this system has been in effect, there has not been one incident of drunk driving or disorderly conduct connected with the Institute. It has also kept the bar bills down.]



It was about nine thirty. The party had been going for almost an hour and was really starting to take off. While most of the Residents were busy talking to their movie counterparts, I sat at a table with Art Michelson, the writer/editor of the Buckaroo Banzai movie comics, Earl Mac Rauch, Neil Canton, W.D. Richter, Fox, Pecos, and Mrs. Johnson. Pecos, Mrs. Johnson, and myself were recounting the adventures that involved either us or adventures we had learned of second-hand. Although the four men were listening partly due to professional interest, I could tell by the looks on their faces that they were listening mainly out of genuine personal interest.

Meanwhile, up on stage, Peter Weller and Perfect Tommy had just completed accompanying Billy Vera and his group on the STYX song "Leading a Double Life". After acknowledging the scattered applause, Peter stepped up to the microphone and said, "Uh, Buckaroo? Would you mind coming up here and joining me in a song?"

From where I sat, I could see Buckaroo look up for a second with a confused look on his face, not really hearing what had been said. As the crowd started to coax him to the stage, only then did he realize what had been asked of him. The Boss hopped up on stage and it was then I noticed how much the two men looked like each other. Buckaroo whispered something to Peter Weller, which I later found out was "Why don't we do 'Since I Don't Have You'?"

Peter answered, "Would you believe I don't know how it ends?"

Laughing, Buckaroo motioned to one of the stagehands to hand him a guitar. Taking it, he strummed a cord, adjusted the tuning slightly, strummed again and was satisfied. A hurried conference decided what the song would be.

Then, just as the drummer began the lean in, the lights suddenly went out and several shots were fired. Instinctively, everyone hit the floor and fell silent, waiting for the cry of the wounded, or for orders.

On stage there was the sound of a scuffle and the discordant crash of a dropped guitar. I pulled my Colt .45 from its holster (we at the Institute are seldom, if ever, unarmed) and slowly edged toward the stage. Pecos was behind me, her high heels off and a Baretta from her thigh holster in her hand.

As we neared the stage, I heard Tommy cry, "I got 'em." Then someone found the emergency lights and turned them on. Light flooded into the room again, and everybody brought their hands up, shielding their eyes.

As I blinked, temporarily blinded, I heard from the stage another voice cry out, "Let me go, you idiot. It's me!" Looking up, I saw who had been caught. It was Billy Vera, effectively incapacitated by Tommy's full nelson. Fortunately for Vera, he hadn't struggled, or Tommy would easily have made him the proud owner of a broken neck. Upon realization of what he had done, Tommy quickly let go and mumbled an embarrassed apology.

It was then that I noticed that one person was missing from the stage. So did W.D. Richter. "Peter?" he asked.

"No way," I said. "It's Buckaroo. Isn't that right?"

The debated man stepped up to the microphone and with a weak smile said, "Uh, yes on one, no on two. I'm Peter."

A sudden chill pierced through my whole being. Someone had done the one thing everyone at the Institute had dreaded.

Buckaroo Banzai had been kidnapped!

CHAPTER TWO

Although there is no formal system of rank at the Institute besides the Apprentice/Intern/Resident system, there is an informal seniority ranking system that is used. It was thus that the mantle of responsibility fell upon the Residents of the Institute, especially Perfect Tommy, Pecos, and myself. We naturally called upon Fox and New Jersey for their thoughts, as well.

Fortunately, we'd had no media coverage at the party, as members of the world press had been invited to the premiere only. This would allow us to operate without the hinderance of reporters or others who would insist on staying with us.

The first thing we had to do, obviously, was to come up with a plan to free the Boss. We had to do it quickly, for we did not know if the greatest mind of our time was already on his way to the most criminally depraved mind of our time--Hanoi Xan.

[note: You, the Reader, may wonder why we automatically assumed at the time that Hanoi Xan was behind the kidnapping. At all Banzai Institute public affairs, Pinky Carruthers has a small but very effective security force that keeps an eye out for anything unusual. The only two things to have gotten past this cordon were the Red Lectroids and some of Hanoi Xan's men. I say some, for Death Dwarves tend to stand out among normal-sized people.]

"I have an idea," Pecos started hesitantly. "And believe it or not, I got it from you, Reno."

"Me?" I questioned, taken aback.

"Well, out with it," snapped Tommy. He was still upset for being right next to Buckaroo and not being able to stop the abduction.

"Well, we're going to need Mr. Weller's help," she continued to stall.

Controlling my own impatience, I said to her, "Now, Pecos, you have been at the Institute long enough to know that no idea, no matter how off-the-wall it is, is too stupid or ridiculous for consideration. So quit stalling and spill the beans."

"We could say that Xan's men kidnapped the wrong guy and that they actually have Peter Weller. We arrange a trade and free the Boss." Pecos smiled weakly.

"That's got to be the most stupid and ridiculous thing I've ever heard!" exclaimed Tommy. Mrs. Johnson elbowed him in the gut, while Cait and Fox pommelled his back.

"Actually," New Jersey piped in, "it's not such a bad idea. I mean, providing Mr. Weller agrees to help."

"I agree, too," I said. "But we're going to have to move fast."

We quickly ironed out the details of the plan, then called Peter Weller over and quickly outlined what we had in mind.

"Count me in," he said without a moment's hesitation.

The first part of our plan called upon the services of all the local radio and television stations, so the call quickly went out to all the station managers that their help was needed. As the World Watch One personel, led by Big Norse and assisted by Ed and Al, began the summons, Casper Lindley came up to me and asked if he could talk to me for a moment.

"I hope you can spare me for about an hour," he said.

"Why?" I asked.

"I want to take Scooter home," he answered.

"What for?" I questioned. "He's a good fighter, and we could sure use him if we need to."

Casper shook his head. "But that's the whole point. He's still a young kid. An impressionable young kid. When we both joined the Blue Blazes, I thought it would be something good for him. But this past year, it seems he's being exposed to all this fighting and violence and stuff.... I'm afraid it could start affecting him."

I put my hand on Casper's shoulder and said, "If there's anyone who has been exposed to a lot of violence, it has been Buckaroo. From seeing his parents killed, to witnessing the deaths of many of his friends, he's been able to keep his cool almost all the time." I purposely avoided the topic of Peggy's death. Still seeing a trace of doubt in Casper's face, I continued. "Look, if after tonight you still think the same way, I'll arrange a meeting between you, Scooter, and Buckaroo, and then you can work it all out between yourselves. Okay?"

"Okay," he answered. "And you can count us both in for tonight."

"That's the spirit!"

As he walked away, I noticed that Pecos had been watching the whole exchange. "Wadda you want?" I barked in a comical grouchy voice.

"Oh, I was just thinking," she answered, walking over and slipping her arms around my waist. "When we get married, and if we decide to have children, I know you'll make a damn good father."

I gave her a hug and a kiss on the forehead and said simply, "Thanks."

However, the tender moment was interrupted as Ed tapped me on the shoulder and informed me that all the station managers were here. Holding on to her hand, I turned and led Pecos back to the main part of the room.

10:57 p.m.

The station managers mill about the room in various states of dress, from pajamas and bathrobes to jeans and a dress shirt. The sight looks vaguely comical, as if Artie's Artery was throwing a 'come-as-you-are' party. But the situation here is very serious and the station managers want to know what is going on.

Peter Weller

Good evening, gentlemen. I know some of you, and since I feel safe in saying you all know me, I shall get right to the point. Earlier this evening, there was made, by parties unknown, an attempt to kidnap me.

(The station managers look around as if wondering what this all had to do with them. A couple look as if they want to call their news departments.)

Peter Weller

Their attempt, however, was not a complete failure. The kidnappers abducted Peter Weller, an actor who looks remarkably like me. Therefore, I would like to use the services of your stations to broadcast a message to the kidnappers, informing them of their mistake and asking them to contact us, so we can arrange a trade. I, and all of us here at the Institute are upset that our own personal battles have intruded on the life of an innocent person. I trust, gentlemen, that I have your complete support.

There isn't a negative answer in the room.

As the managers and some Blue Blazes set up the video and audio recording equipment, Peter took me to one side and asked, "How did I do?"

"You did fine," I told him. "They bought it. Now all we have to do is sell it to Xan's henchmen."

CHAPTER THREE

What follows in this chapter is based almost exclusively on the testimony of Buckaroo Banzai himself, with a few supporting details gleaned from the evidence found on the scene.

As soon as the stage went black, Buckaroo immediately dropped his guitar and went for his gun. Before he could move, however, two hands firmly grasped his arms in vices of steel, while a third hand slapped a chloroform pad across his mouth and nose.

When Buckaroo awoke, he found himself bound in a hard wooden chair. He looked around. He was in a small room of a much larger log cabin. On the wall in front of him, a black youth lay reclining on a couch, reading a porno magazine. A large portable radio sat on the floor in front of him playing rap music. The youth looked up.

"Hey, boss mon," he called. "This dude's awake."

"Well, well, well," came an oriental voice from the kitchen. Buckaroo twisted his head around to try to identify the voice and nearly toppled his chair.

"Now, now," came the voice again, the speaker now moving around to face Buckaroo. "We don't want you damaged now, do we?"

"Chang Si," Buckaroo spit out, as if getting rid of a disgusting taste from his mouth.

Chang Si bowed in mock politeness. "I am pleased that my reputation preceeds me so. I assume that your associates Reno and Pecos told you of our little run-in in California last June."

"They told me enough to know that you're pretty low on the evolutionary ladder, as far as human beings go," retorted Buckaroo, not the least bit intimidated by his captor.

"Flattery will get you nowhere, I'm afraid," mocked Chang Si. "The only place you'll be going is Sabah to see my master, Xan."

Buckaroo chose to ignore the comment and instead nodded his head toward the black youth, who had returned to his magazine, totally ignoring the conversation. "Hiring outside help?"

Chang Si shrugged. "He's expendable, along with his partner upstairs. However, I did bring along one Bravo with me who is patrolling the forest surrounding this quaint little cottage."

"But he's also expendable," Buckaroo stated, not questioned.

"True," conceded Chang Si. "However --- "

"Hey, boss," the youth on the couch interrupted. "Lissena this. We made the radio. Listen." The youth turned up the radio and all in the room were astonished to hear Buckaroo's voice issue forth.

"Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. For those of you who don't know me by my voice, I'm Buckaroo Banzai. Earlier this evening, an attempt was made by enemies of mine to kidnap me. Unfortunately, there was a mistake in the heat of the moment, and the kidnapers abducted Peter Weller, an actor who bears a striking resemblance to myself. I am here to ask the kidnapers, if they're listening, to contact me at World Watch One--I'm sure you know how to do it--and arrange a trade. I am deeply distressed that Peter was pulled into my own private battle with evil. Again, I say to the kidnapers, your quarrel is with me, not the man you hold captive. Contact me, and I'll offer myself in exchange for Mr. Weller's freedom. Thank you."

The radio then returned to its regular schedule of urban street music.

Needless to say, Chang Si was enraged. Buckaroo was not quite sure of what he did after the announcement, because he was smacked so hard by Chang Si that he lost consciousness. However, I was able to reconstruct that Chang Si did make a phone call to a number in Yonkers, New York. Further investigation showed that the call was then relayed through a number of lines from a bake shop in Scranton, Pennsylvania, to a funeral home in Connecticut. The call's ultimate destination was the United States headquarters of the World Crime League. There, I surmise that the call was relayed by satellite to Hanoi Xan at his citadel in the Orient, as the lank-haired savage never leaves his den of hiding.

It can be further assumed that Xan told Chang Si to go ahead with the swap, for when Buckaroo awoke, he found himself tied up in the back of a van, going down a bumpy road. Chang Si was leaning over him.

"Welcome back, Mr. Weller. We are on our way to the rendezvous site now to trade you for Buckaroo Banzai, and then take you both back to my master. He has some very interesting plans for you, Mr. Weller. Very interesting, indeed."

CHAPTER FOUR

After Chang Si called and arranged the trade, the Institute immediately mobilized into action. Perfect Tommy and myself agreed that we would use a small team of Interns and seasoned Blue Blaze Irregulars. Among the fighters from the Institute were Spartacus, the Greek geneticist, and MacDuff, the young black physicist from Scotland who cameod as himself in "Across the Eighth Dimension," playing drums in the Artie's Artery scene. Local Blue Blazes in our fighting force included Dancin' Jack, Proud Mary, and the footloose Uncle Joe, who can be one of the fiercest people to ever wield a pair of nunchaka.

Using the coordinates supplied by Chang Si, we immediately began finalizing our plans for an ambush. Mrs. Johnson dug into the archives and, in no time flat, had the correct topological maps. We dispatched Casper, Scooter and Cait, who insisted on being in on the action, to the scene with a copy of the maps to check their accuracy and to see if there were any changes in the area, courtesy of Chang Si. They were also to return with some aerial photographs to give the rest of us a chance to check for traps, just in case they missed anything.

The rest of us at the Institute prepped the Interns on the night's happenings and on what was to come. We then broke out equipment (the standard things--assault rifles, survival kits, first aid kits, plus special night goggles and the Infra-red Night Scopes which we had originally developed for the military.) and loaded up the bus.

A short time later, we were headed north toward the rendezvous site in the Sparta Mountains near Lake Hopatcong. The drive took us forty-five minutes, including the ten minute break when we met with Scooter, Casper and Cait outside of Morristown. They reported that the area was just as the maps showed, and that no one was there. They then returned to their helicopter and thence to the lake to continue monitoring for any signs of ambush.

It was close to two o'clock in the morning when we pulled up to the small picnic area that was to serve as the exchange point. As Perfect Tommy and Pinky Carruthers dispersed our small fighting force into the surrounding area, Pecos and I went to the upstairs level of the tour bus, where we found Peter Weller sitting in the lotus position on the floor of B. Banzai's room. "Nervous?" I asked him.

"You were expecting me not to be?" he asked in return, smiling weakly.

"No," I confided. "Actually, you've surprised me. A lot of people would have refused to go along with this altogether."

Peter looked up at us and said, "One thing I may have learned while working on the movie was that one can never be too giving of oneself."

Pecos and I nodded in agreement.

From below came Perfect Tommy's voice, "The slime ball's here."

Peter, Pecos and myself emerged from the bus, our hands hung loosely by our sides to show that we were unarmed. Chang Si had come in a van, and he was leaning against the front of it as his Bravo was removing Buckaroo from the crate in which he was held in the back. As our group approached, Chang Si spoke.

"Aaahh . . . I now definitely see the resemblance. Very impressive. The film makers are to be congratulated for their fine work in finding an actor whose countenance so resembles Banzai's. Bring Weller forward."

As Chang Si barked the order to his Bravo, Peter Weller moved to step forward. I caught him by the back of the shirt collar and hissed in his ear, "Uh, Buckaroo, he means the other 'Peter Weller'."

The Bravo brought Buckaroo and presented him in front of us. "I'm okay, Reno," he said to me.

"I've kept my side of the bargain, now you keep yours. Step forward, Banzai," Chang Si hissed with pleasure.

Peter Weller stepped forward three paces, approximately half the distance between our group and Chang Si, and placed his hands on his head. On that signal, about twenty Blue Blazes and Interns, led by Fox and New Jersey, sprang from the encircling bushes and surrounded Chang Si and the Bravo.

"I wouldn't move if I were you," I told Chang Si.

"Very ingenious," said Chang Si as he raised his hands and placed them behind his neck. "However, not good enough." With lightning-quick speed, he touched his watch and then threw himself on the ground.

"Get down!" Buckaroo yelled. "The Bravo is going to explode!"

"We all hit the dirt, just as the Oriental trooper lived up to his oath and gave his life for his master.

When the debris settled, no one was seriously injured, but a lot of clothing was going to have to be washed. A few of the younger Interns caught sight of one of the larger remains of the Bravo, and began to get sick. Unfortunately, Chang Si escaped.

Wearily, we all got back on the bus and headed for home.

The next day, after an extremely long sleep, Buckaroo called Peter and myself into his office.

"Uh...", he started to say.

Peter interrupted him. "You don't have to say it."

"Say what?"

"'Thank you'," Peter answered. "I would have done it anyway."

"I was going to say you did a good job portraying me" countered the

Boss. "But I was also going to say 'thank you'."

"Now it is my turn to say thank you," said Peter. "It's just that when I signed the contract for the movie, I didn't expect to be method acting!"

The joke caught us all by surprise and we had a good laugh, little knowing that Hanoi Xan was already plotting another plan to dispose of Buckaroo Banzai.

From Peggy's
Notebook

16



KNIGHT OF THE LESSER BOULEVARDS

(the source of Perfect Tommy's second nickname)

He's the Knight of the Lesser Boulevards,
combing the back streets,
pacing eternally the ways
in search of he-only-knows.

Ever vigilant,
minute-ready,
virtue slightly clouded,
he does not tread the open road.

Quick as a flash,
twice as silent,
the soundless knight comes stealing.
Dare to leave your window open.

Chasing women,
elusive melodies,
he's some kind of chameleon,
sulking, smiling, ever-changing moods.

He's a Knight of the Lesser Boulevards,
riding the off-roads
and the alleyways.
Put him at your back or be a fool.



RAWHIDE

They call him Rawhide.
(real name unknown)
the quiet shadow,
trusted friend.
A modern-day Tonto,
his saddlebags always packed and ready.
Hints of the westerner,
world traveler,
and philosopher.
They call him Rawhide,
that's all they really need.
Pretty much says it all.



HORNBLOWER

He's everywhere you need him,
 everyplace at once.
 He's sullen,
 often brooding,
 concentrated,
 intensity on the red leather hoof.

Taking notes on every move,
 a think-tank on the loose.
 A jazzed-up,
 spaced-out,
 down-to-earth
 hornblower from who knows where.

"What's your name?" asks McKinley,
 He's as glitzy as it implies.
 A contradiction,
 a repetition,
 an original besides.
 "Reno Nevada," comes the reply.

THE HIDDEN WARRIOR

Shy Dr. Sidney never dreamed
 New Jersey lurked inside.
 Confidence waning,
 Always unsure,
 He waffles every time.

Bare to the waist and bleeding,
 he never stops to think.
 The unseen warrior,
 waiting within,
 rose to every challenge.

Now he sees what he really is,
 what he's always been.
 Confident, knowing,
 doubts no threat.
 B. Banzai always knew.

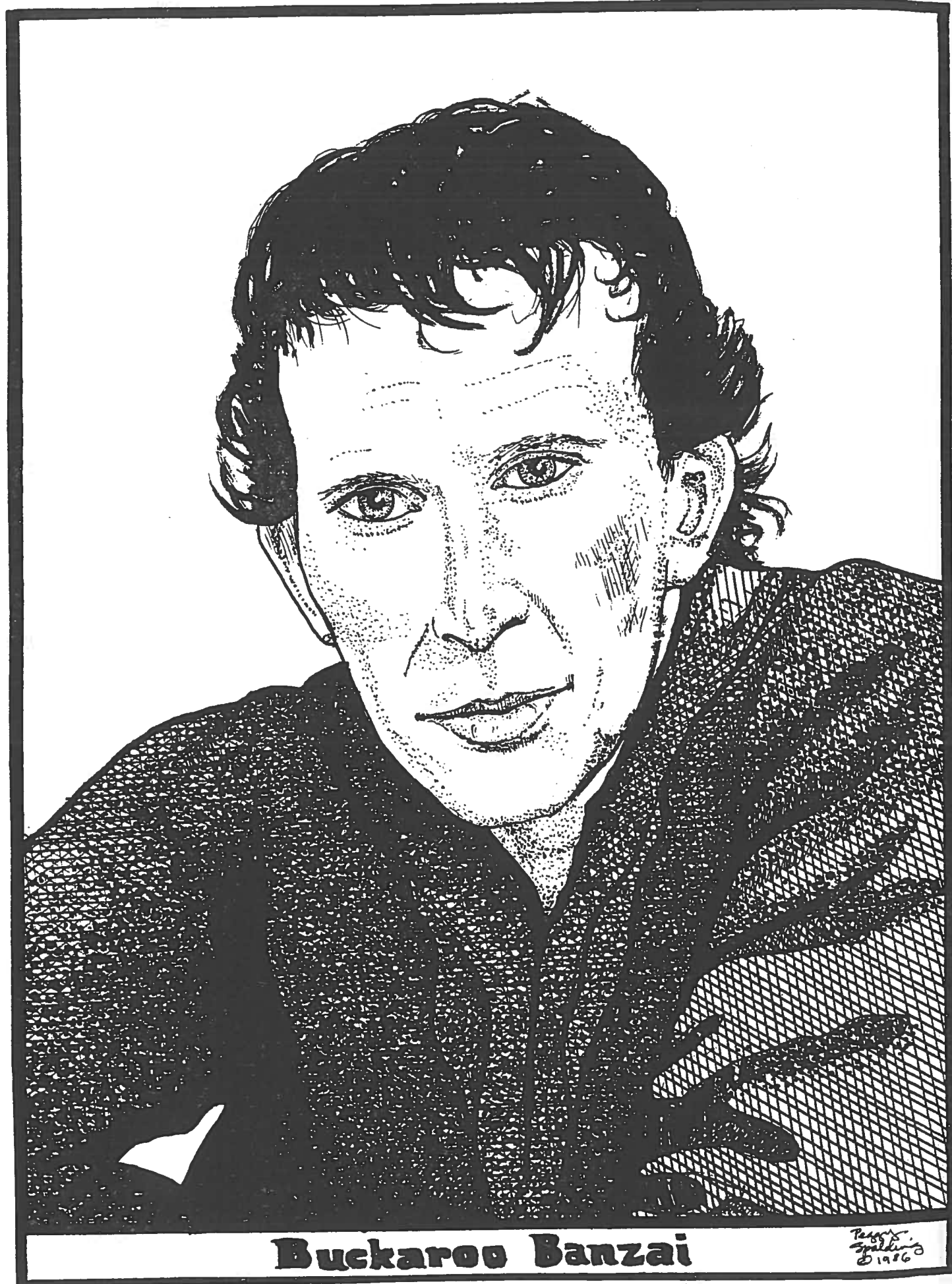


April Anderson

THE MONGOL

Mongolian blood runs through the veins,
so many try to splice.
Raised to Japan on American pie,
he's master of a dozen arts.
Orphaned early,
eyes on the sky.
Friend of the world and followed by thousands,
he groups the brains of the extraordinary,
just so they can think.

Hounded by Xan,
does the nightmare never end?
No one is really safe
but still they come.
To live, work and rock beside
A man from out of both worlds.
Buckaroo Banzai,
Savior of millions,
man of a thousand sorrows, lives in joy.



Buckaroo Banzai

*Perry's
Spelling
© 1986*

RIDDLE OF THE SPHINX

by

Tamara R. Fincher

Now that we have finally cleaned up the Institute, perhaps I can relate the events of the past several months. The horrible events leading up to the near destruction of the Institute and most of its inhabitants. But I'm getting ahead of myself. As B. Banzai would say, "It is always best to start at the beginning and follow events to their end."

Just after dawn on a clear May morning, a woman was found unconscious in T.C. Jester Park in Houston, Texas. According to police records, she was 5'2" in height, weighing approximately 100 lbs. with short brown hair and brown eyes.

Her age was judged to be around 30. She was clad only in jeans and a plaid shirt, no shoes, socks, or no jewelry. The reporting officer found no identification and a preliminary search of the area divulged no clues to her identity or her method of arrival at the park. After attempting to rouse the woman, the officer called for an ambulance. Upon returning to his station, he filed his report.

The ambulance proceeded to Hermann Hospital Trauma Center with its cargo. Doctors performed various tests to determine the cause of the, for want of a better word, sleep. For although unconscious, the woman was not in a coma, rather in a type of abnormal, very deep sleep. It was decided after three days of extensive testing, to contact Dr. Buckaroo Banzai. Dr. Banzai had recently published an article in the New England Journal of Medicine on nerve disorders causing abnormal sleep patterns.

The staff at Hermann merely wished to consult with B. Banzai by phone. But had they known Buckaroo as we at the Institute know him, they would not have been surprised when he showed up on their doorstep. He could no more pass up the chance to help another human being in trouble, than Perfect Tommy could pass up a new female intern.

So it was that Dr. Buckaroo Banzai strode into the hospital exuding confidence that belied the exhaustion he felt. He had just stepped off a plane at Intercontinental Airport to be whisked off by helicopter to the medical center. The head neurologist met him on the helipad to lead him to the room where the young woman lay connected to various monitors.

"We did not expect you to come in person." Dr. Georges apologized. "We would have had someone meet you at the airport."

"No time to let you know," B. Banzai replied, "I was able to schedule a stop here on my way from the Texas School of Mines to the Institute in New Jersey. Now, what seems to be the trouble here?"

"We get normal readings on all tests, the EKG is fine and the CT scan is clear. No evidence of trauma exists. Technically, there is nothing wrong with the patient - but we cannot wake her." The neurologist sighed. "Of course, there is still so much about the brain that we do not understand."

"May I do a complete exam?" B. Banzai requested.

"Of course, if you think it necessary. But, we have covered all possibilities."

The equipment and staff requested by Buckaroo were sent up. As he bent down to turn the patient's head, his eyes narrowed. The neurologist wondered what he could have missed that was so obvious to Dr. Banzai. All he saw was a series of tiny scars behind the left ear. The scars were not recent. They could not have any bearing on the condition of the patient, could they? Dr. Banzai felt the scars with his first two fingers and bent to examine them more closely. He then turned to look behind the right ear -- more of the same scars.

Buckaroo Banzai straightened wearily, "I would like to take the patient to the Banzai Institute. We have an infirmary capable of monitoring her condition and I feel that we may be able to help her where no one else can. You are aware of my research into nerve damage and transplants?", he paused while Dr. Georges nodded. "Well, I think we may have the answer to the patient's sleep, but I will need my team and equipment, and I want to be available to monitor her personally. I will be able to do this only if she is at the Institute."

"Of course, you will have to take full responsibility for the patient. We will not be liable for your actions." In truth, the neurologist was happy to have this probable failure out of his hands and off his budget.

"I take full responsibility, there is no other course of action available. I would like to work with the police in discovering her identity as well."

"We will prepare her for transfer, while you sign the necessary forms and make your arrangements. When would like to pick up the patient? Oh, and would you like one of our staff to accompany you?"

"I will take her with me today. And as Dr. Sidney Zweibel will be ready and waiting at the other end, I will

not need to trouble your staff any further. Thank you for all your help."

As usual, Buckaroo gave the people around more of his own attributes than they deserve. He is generous to a fault where others are concerned, and modest regarding his own behavior.

The Banzai Institute's 727 carried the patient, Dr. Banzai, and the other members of Team Banzai, who had accompanied him to the test site, home to New Jersey. Dr. Zweibel had prepared a room for the patient as the Boss had requested. The two of them attached the necessary monitors to the patient, secured her in the bed and posted a schedule to maintain a 24 hour watch for any signs of activity. Buckaroo Banzai then called a meeting of everyone currently at the Institute to explain the situation.

"We have new evidence of Hanoi Xan's work," he began. "In the infirmary is a patient, female, approximately 30 years old, in a deep sleep - not a coma - but the sleep induced by a recent nerve implant."

None of us could move. We were all too familiar with Xan's implants and their evil consequences. Penny Priddy, in truth our own Peggy Banzai, had been the first evidence of this vile experimentation. Now, here was another human guinea pig. Another example of Xan's cruelty and his cunning. The woman had obviously been planted, no other word is accurate, in Houston at the precise moment when B. Banzai was near enough to lend his expert aid. I don't have to tell you that we were all worried about how this would affect the Boss.

I asked the question that I think was in all of our minds." Do you know this person, Buckaroo? After all, in the past, Xan has always preferred to use people you know in order to hurt you the most. If none of us, especially you, know her, this just isn't his style."

"Reno," he explained carefully, "the only thing predictable about Hanoi Xan is his ability for evil. No, I do not know the patient, yet. But, she has crossed our lives now and we will help her if we can. Maybe, in doing so we will open Xan's box of horrors, maybe, this is exactly what he wants us to do - But, maybe, just maybe, we will finally be able to put him and his evil plans to rest."

"Tomorrow, New Jersey and I will do exploratory surgery to discover the exact location of the implants and to remove them, if possible. Perhaps then the patient will awake and tell us Xan's latest plan. Above all, we must be prepared for Lo Pep or some other of Xan's minions to make an

appearance to trigger some action on the part of our mystery guest. Now, New Jersey and I should rest for the surgery. Good Night."

We broke up. But, in pairs, most of us discussed the implications of having hundreds or thousands of people running around under Kan's control. A few, however, kept their own council. Some fears are made real by being voiced. Finally, we went to bed and tried to get some sleep in spite of our very active imaginations.

B. Banzai woke with a jerk, propelled himself off his futon, and down the hall. I heard footsteps charging past my room, leapt up myself and looked out the door. At New Jersey's door, Buckaroo yelled, "Sidney, to the infirmary - NOW!" and ran on. Being quite awake, I decided to join in the parade. When the Boss reached the infirmary, he asked the guard if there was any change in the patient. Pecos, who had this watch replied no, then turned to look at the patient. She had turned onto her side! Buckaroo dashed to the bed. The heart beat had changed. It was faster - as though she was waking up. New Jersey stumbled into the room.

"What's up Buckaroo?"

Just then, New Jersey's eyes flew wide open - the patient had opened her own eyes. She looked all around her very slowly. Everyone was too astonished and, perhaps fearful, to speak.

"Where?" just one word broke the silence and that word came from the young woman in the bed. Everyone stared at her. I guess she thought no one understood her. She began a frenzied recital.

"Donde? Ou? Kuda? Wo? Where?"

Finally, B. Banzai found his tongue. "Relax, calm down. We speak English. You are at the Banzai Institute. I am Buckaroo Banzai, this is Sidney Zweibel, Pecos, and Reno. You are in no danger here. How do you feel?"

"Banzai Institute? Buckaroo Banzai? Where - no, how did I get here? Who - who am I?"

We looked at each other. Where to begin without causing the patient to become unduly excited. And, there was much that the Institute needed to know as well.

B. Banzai spoke, "We do not know who you are, but we are ready to help you find the answers to all your questions as soon as you are ready. For the present, you have been in

an accident, for want of a better word. You have been asleep for some time, we do not know how long. The police found you in Houston, Texas, asleep. I was called in as a consultant. Right now, what you need is to rest and gain strength. Try to remain calm throughout the next few days while we try to determine how we can help you. We will also fill you in on the events of the last four days. We want to help you all we can. Can you tell us how you feel?"

"I don't understand anything you are telling me. But, how do I feel? Well, I'm hungry more than anything else - except for confused. Can I have a sandwich or something?"

"How about some soup, for starters," Buckaroo laughed. "Reno, would you call Fox and see if she can find any of her chicken soup around? Now, may I give you a short exam to see what your physical status is?"

"Oh, all right." She accepted, a little too easily I thought, and relaxed.

As my help was no longer needed. I padded off to find Fox and deliver my message. I can always be a waiter if times get hard.

New Jersey's medical report states that the exam was routine and that he and Dr. Banzai found everything to be normal. After the patient had eaten some soup and drunk a little apple juice, she fell into a normal and easy sleep. Surgery was postponed until the patient was informed more fully about her situation. And, with a little time, perhaps she would be able to tell us more about herself.

B. Banzai and New Jersey then returned to their rooms to get some sleep. But, Buckaroo Banzai did not sleep any more that night, nor for several nights to come. He felt the cold touch of Hanoi Xan in the Banzai Institute.

The next day, the patient joined us for breakfast after a short check by Buckaroo. I can testify that her appetite, at least, was normal. All of us present at breakfast were introduced to her. We promptly christened her "Sphinx" for obvious reasons.

New Jersey and B. Banzai then took her off to ask their questions and answer a few of hers. Fortunately, a tape of the proceedings was made. I transcribe it here.

Buckaroo: You are doing very well. Can you help us out with a few questions we have?

Sphinx: I'll try, but I seem to be such a blank.

Buckaroo: Can you tell us anything about yourself? A

name, place, anything?

Sphinx: I don't know anything. I don't know who I am, where I came from. I don't really seem to know anything. But it's very funny, I don't feel any great need to know anything anymore. Yesterday, well, I panicked when I woke up in a strange place. But today, I feel very safe here, as though I belong, as though I had been here before, or had been told about all of you. Told about you so much that I almost know you. I can almost anticipate what you will say. But,....."

Here, the tape degenerates into a some uncontrolled sobbing. The sobbing of someone totally hopeless or in great fear.

m, Buckaroo: Calm down. Sh, sh, sh. It's okay. You can tell us anything. Breathe deeply, now. What is the matter?

Sphinx: Don't make me go. I have no place to go. No one wants me. I have no place where I belong. Don't make me leave. I ask for sanctuary - PLEASE. I can't go out there, it's waiting for me."



Buckaroo: "You don't have to go. You are safe here, and we will help you until you are safe to go. Be calm, be calm."

B. Banzai's strong, calm voice brought peace to the young woman after some time.

Buckaroo: Better now? Good. Let's stop for now and get you settled in. We'll assign you a room of your own and find you some clothes. Everyone here works and since work is good for the mind as well as the body, we will assign you some duties to do as well. That way, you will be contributing to the Institute, not just existing here. In time perhaps your memory will return, or perhaps we will find out enough about you to help you learn about your life before your --accident. But for now, you are one of us, and you will be safe here."

That evening, we all listened to the tape. Buckaroo was clearly concerned about some things that had happened. This "Sphinx" was too changeable, too malleable for my liking. And what on earth was she afraid of? "It's waiting for me?" she had said. What is IT?

Buckaroo put us on our guard to listen carefully to all that she had to say and to watch for any behavior that was bizarre. To me, all of her behavior was bizarre, and I was not the only one to notice that.

But as time passed and nothing untoward happened.

Sphinx began to become one of us. She tended to her housekeeping duties and assisted with research in the library when requested by members of Team Banzai. Routine stuff, nothing confidential. B. Banzai encouraged her to read and study about anything that interested her as much as possible. He hoped that such research would trigger past memories, but nothing seemed to work. It was as if she had no past life, as if she had been born that morning in Houston.

One day while straightening up the music room after a lengthy jam session, Sphinx sat down at the piano. Buckaroo and I were still talking in the back of the room. He motioned me to silence. Her fingers sure and steady went to the keyboard and began to play "Sonata Pathetique". At first, she seemed to be watching her hands as though they belonged to someone else, then she joined with them and brought passion to the sounds. As she played, tears began to run silently down her cheeks. She finished, then sat and wept silently. Finally, Buckaroo walked up and touched her shoulder. His face registered all the pain she was feeling, all the pain he was feeling with her.

"You play beautifully. And it is easy to see you have had a lot of training. Do you remember something to make you cry so?"

"No, I cry because I don't remember. I cry for my lost past, my lost self, I will never regain any of it."

In his unique way, Buckaroo knew that there was nothing more to say. He turned to leave. Sphinx followed him out. But, she began to play almost daily, always classical pieces. She played out of hope, I think, looking for a glimmer in the dark, but I guess, she never saw any light.

We were all beginning to get a bit jumpy. Time passed altogether too quietly. We heard nothing from Xan or any of his minions. He seem to have dropped out of the world. And we were all waiting for his next move.

The Hong Kong Cavaliers were discussing an upcoming concert. Fox had prepared an absolutely marvelous meal, as usual. And we had settled down to do it justice. We intended to discuss some new music, but were having a hard time agreeing on any. The stress of waiting was beginning to show on everyone.

"Buckaroo, I have to go to that concert. I need to be there." Sphinx spoke up.

"You are free to go where you wish. But, why the sudden change? You haven't wanted to leave the Institute before now. Are you no longer afraid of the outside world?"

"I am still afraid, but I feel that this is something that I must do, that I have been waiting to do. I must go to the concert."

We were all on edge. She had been waiting for this! Well, we had been waiting, too. We all saw the hand of Xan behind this sudden desire of hers.

"We will see," Buckaroo hesitated. "I think you and I need to have a talk first. New Jersey and Peggy, would you bring Sphinx to my room in half an hour. Reno, maybe you should be there, too."

When we arrived, Buckaroo was just finishing up a short mediation. He got us all settled, then, in his direct manner, started right off.

"Sphinx, we have to explain something to you. We know a little bit more about you than we have told you so far."

"What! What have you been keeping from me? Do you know who I am? Is it that bad?"

"Oh, no, nothing like that! Just calm down and we will tell you what you can understand. Some of this stuff is very technical." He paused, sighed and went on, "You have some scars behind each ear -just like the ones behind Peggy's. We are positive they are the work of an evil genius known as Hanoi Xan. In Peggy, he implanted artificial nerve fibers. These fibers allowed him to erase her memory, substitute a contrived one, and control her as he wished."

Sphinx gasped. "But, I"

"Just wait until I finish," Buckaroo broke her off. "New Jersey was able to remove the fibers, but Peggy still has incomplete memories of the past. You apparently have some memories - of languages, music, sewing, etc. Therefore, we feel that if we remove the implanted fibers, you might regain most of your past. The surgery is difficult and the outcome uncertain, but it is something that we can do. What do you say?"

Sphinx took a deep breath. "What do you want me to say? I'm afraid to say either yes or no. If I agree, I may find out that I am merely a pawn in a very dangerous game with no rules. If I say no, I may still be a pawn in that same game. Ok, yes, but I don't know that I want to find out everything."

The next day, B. Banzai and New Jersey ran some tests. But they were more puzzled than before. The results showed no evidence of any implants.* The Boss had Peggy check all of Sphinx's toiletries, but she had only stuff from the Institute's stores. She had nothing with her when she was found in the park. Both doctors admitted that they have no idea where to go from here. And, after our little chat, Sphinx had begun to be afraid of the dark. She kept her light on - day or night.

I don't mind telling you that I was getting real spooky myself. Every shadow seemed to hide Lo Pep. And then came the concert.

* See "Obsession", The Penny Paradox, Vol. 1.

the Boss decided to let Sphinx join us. She was clearly excited about the outing, like a kid going to the toy store. The Hong Kong Cavaliers were on edge. We clearly thought that Xan would make his move at the show.

The concert was to be given at a local high school. It was a fund-raiser for some worth-while group that B. Banzai could not turn down. As we went in to set up, Sphinx froze in her tracks. I was chilled through my whole body just looking at her.

"I have been here before!" she murmured. "I remember it!"

She walked down the center, awake - and yet, asleep, almost like before. She was under the control of someone else. We were sure of it, and we were sure we knew who. She reached the fifth row of seats from the front - and collapsed. She just dropped to the ground like a puppet whose strings someone had clipped. She just lay there and called for Buckaroo Banzai.

"I have a message for Banzai from the mighty Xan." (We all stared at each other at this pronouncement.) "Death is near - the world will be mine. I have the power, you cannot even guess at it. I want you to know, when the end comes, who it is that has beaten you. Goodbye, Buckaroo Banzai!"

Sphinx delivered this message in the tones of a sleep-talker. Her face was a mask, devoid of all life or feeling. Then suddenly, she dissolved into tears. Her eyes were staring at something or someone that we could not see.

"Sphinx, Sphinx", Buckaroo's voice cut through all our fear. It was light, dissolving the shadows around us. He called her back from where ever she was.

"Oh, Buckaroo," Sphinx sobbed. "There is more I must tell you. I don't understand it, but I don't think I am supposed to know it. Take me someplace where there is a lot of light and quiet. Take me alone and I will tell you."

I don't need to tell you the uproar we caused. There was no way we intended to let the Boss go off alone with someone in Xan's tender power, but he wouldn't be swayed. Finally, we talked him into going to a dressing room and letting one of us (me) stand behind a curtain. The rest waited outside the door. I know that hands were on that doorknob at all times, just in case.

"I am in a cave." Sphinx began, "It is so dark, dark with fear. There is a black robed figure - he sticks me with a needle.

"Lo Pep," Buckaroo whispered.

The name triggered something in Sphinx.

"Lo Pep," she was using the same harsh, false voice she used to deliver Xan's message. "We have found the means to crush B. Banzai and all his work. This is the answer, B.S.P.*, with it we can destroy all that Buckaroo Banzai holds dear. I will create a mausoleum for him. One that he will inhabit until I choose to let him die." Here her voice changed back to her own. "Get them out, NOW."

I burst through the curtain. "Buckaroo, it's got to be part of Xan's latest plan, whatever that is. This may be our one chance to put a stop to all his plans, we know more than he thinks we do."

"Either that, my friend, or he has planted a very clever false trail. We can only hope that his foul methods have backfired on him and allowed some special, secret knowledge to escape. Let's give our concert, but immediately after, we return to the Institute and find out what B.S.P. is. It could be a drug, a place, a name - anything. It could be a red herring. We have to know."

Throughout our discussion, Sphinx had remained silent. No questions, no tears. We suddenly noticed this and turned to her. She was asleep, just like before. B. Banzai jumped to her side and sat her up. I guess he caught her before she had gone totally under. Her eyelids fluttered open.

"I delivered my message, didn't I?" she seemed confused. "Yes, I remember, I did. Then it is time for me to sleep. I will get my reward, my peace."

Buckaroo forced her to look him directly in the eyes. "You will not sleep," he commanded. "You have not completed your mission. You will not sleep, yet."

"I have no mission other than my message. I have delivered my message. Now I may sleep. Goodbye."

 * The name of this substance has been changed. The chemical composition is too dangerous and too easy to duplicate.

"No, not goodbye," Buckaroo struggled with her, "this is not the end yet. You will rest, not sleep, just relax. No cares, no worries." His voice became hypnotic. He began to gain control.

"Oh, I'm not worried -to worry, there must be hope." she murmured as she tried to avoid his eyes, but his steady gaze, his power, his will controlled her weakened being and she stayed awake.

"Sidney, I need some stimulants quick. Whatever we have in the bus's first aid kit. If she goes to sleep now, I think that she will not wake up ever again. I'm sure that Xan's reward is death."

New Jersey dashed to the van and returned with a hypo. He gave the contents to Sphinx, who remained in a semi-catatonic state. Although her eyes were open, I was not sure that she was awake. New Jersey said that it was the best we could do and that the hypo would keep her awake for six or seven hours at least. New Jersey and I led her to the van and strapped her into one of the seats. He stayed to monitor her progress. There was nothing else I could do and it was time for the concert to start, so I joined the others preparing to go on stage.

Buckaroo was absent. I went into a panic - I had left him alone after such an ominous message from Xan. If anything had happened, well I don't know what I would have done. But all was well, he had just gone to call Peggy and relate the recent events to her, and to have her prepare the infirmary for our arrival.

The concert was a success. I doubt if anyone knew just how worried the Boss was. Worried is perhaps the wrong word. His philosophy and oriental nature allow him to accept a fate even while he is working to change or improve it. In any case, he kept his fears from the rest of us and was, as always, able to buoy our sagging spirits just by being his own incomparable self.

We returned to the Banzai Institute within an hour after the concert. Usually, the Boss likes to hang around the young people at the concert to discuss the precepts of the group. Tonight, however, he had us slip out the back door as quietly as possible. He had instructed New Jersey to have the van waiting for us.

The first thing, B. Banzai did was check on the progress of Sphinx. She was about the same as before, awake but barely so. At the gate, she had a near relapse to total sleep, but once again, Buckaroo talked her through while New Jersey applied more stimulants.

"Buckaroo, she should not have needed any more stimulants for at least two hours," New Jersey shook his head. "What is causing these crises? It's almost as though our return home triggered this one. How can Xan control her so effectively? We did not find any evidence of an implanted transmitter."



At this point, B. Banzai and New Jersey went to the back of World Watch One to discuss Sphinx's mental condition in more privacy. So, I didn't get a chance to mention any of my observations to the Boss.

It was odd, but no one was waiting to let us in. I had to get out and use the passkey to open the gate. Things were awfully quiet, but I figured that maybe since we were so early, no one had come down from the barracks yet. And, of course, I didn't know what Buckaroo's instructions to Peggy were. They may have required a lot of hustling to get everything in order by the time we returned. Still, there was this nagging little feeling of my hairs standing on end on the back of my neck. B. Banzai and New Jersey were still busy with Sphinx, so I just put the rest of the Cavaliers on guard as a precaution.

As we proceeded through the grounds, everything remained just a little too quiet. As Sphinx became more stable, even B. Banzai noticed it. He motioned me to him.

"Something is wrong," he whispered. "Something is very wrong."

Just then we passed the stables. Now, usually, we can see some of the horses standing in the paddocks, and frequently, one or two of them race up to the fence to see what is going on. But tonight, we couldn't see a thing moving, or even standing. There were only some lumpy shadows close to the ground. My first thought was of death dwarves.

"Get down," I yelled and drew my pistol. The entire crew threw themselves to the floor and followed my lead in drawing their hardware. But nothing moved.

"Reno," the Boss stated very calmly, "the horses are dead. You see only their bodies. There are no death dwarves here."

How he knows these things is beyond me, but of course, he was right. A couple of the Cavaliers went out to verify the truth. The horses were dead, but there was no sign of a wound on any of them. I will admit that I was beginning to get a little spooked. And, I wanted to know what the heck was going on in the Institute building proper.

Buckaroo ordered us into combat formation. We spread out and did a thorough search of the immediate area surrounding the Institute. We found nothing alive, except vegetable matter. Every insect, bird, animal, everything was dead. Just dropped dead where it had crawled or flew or stood.

We met back at the Institute's main entrance. Our faces were ashen and more than a few of us were shaking. We did not want to enter the Institute. I think we all knew what we would find in there. Our "Happy Home" had become, in Xan's very words, a mausoleum, a tomb for our friends, our comrades, in some cases, our only family.

Or so we thought. We were wrong. There was not a person in the place. No one was dead, but there was no one alive either. The whole building was empty, except for some dead experimental mice and other animals, we found nothing.

Our worst nightmare had just become even more horrible, more unbearable. Xan had them all.

We stood staring at each other in total shock. Even the great Banzai could not do more than stare and shake his head. Xan had his perfect revenge on us all. To think of our nearest and dearest in the clutches of that monster, nearly drove us to madness.

How long we stood there is anyone's guess. Time did not exist for us. Only fear, pain and finally, incredibly, the absurdly insistent ringing of the telephone.

In our stupor, we all stared at it, except for Perfect Tommy. He picked up the receiver, said hello, then turned to Buckaroo Banzai and said,

"It's for you, it's Peggy."

This latest shock caused more than a few of us to sit down rather suddenly in our tracks. But, Buckaroo dashed to the phone and grabbed it from Tommy, who looked as if he answered the phone like this everyday.

"Peggy," Buckaroo said, obviously using his training to control his voice, "are you alright? -- And the others? -- Where are you? -- OK, we'll meet you there in 10 minutes and you can give me the full story."

We all bombarded him with questions at once. He waved us to some order and said,

"Everyone is alright, they are waiting for us at Artie's. Let's do a final check of the grounds and get over there. New Jersey, help me get some equipment from the infirmary to get Sphinx stabilized."

Even through all this mess, the Boss remembered the little messenger who may have triggered the whole process. The man is simply amazing.

By the time we had reconnoitered the grounds and met back at the van, New Jersey had Sphinx hooked up to all kinds of monitors and an IV. She seemed to have a little better color, but in the dark it was hard to tell. Anyway, the two doctors seemed pleased and had relaxed their vigilance over her somewhat. We loaded up and headed for Arties', and some answers. We had expected B. Banzai to fill us in a little, but promptly after the bus started up, he disappeared into the back to meditate. Apparently, the recent series of shocking events had proved too much for his equilibrium. So he needed to restore balance to his psyche. The rest of us tried it, but without much success. We wanted some concrete explanations. Well, we would just have to wait.

The parking lot at Arties' was empty, except for the Institute's other bus. Given recent events, I can not be faulted for being a bit on edge. I called all the Cavaliers to combat readiness and sent them and myself out to reconnoiter the place. I had just about reached the front door to break it down, when the Boss called out.

"Reno, what are you doing?" He seemed genuinely baffled.

I went back to the bus.

"We are making sure that everything is safe." I said, perhaps a bit sarcastically.

"It is. You can be sure."

The happenings at the Institute did not give me much confidence that this was the case, but I called back the others anyway and we proceeded into Arties' just as we would have on any ordinary night.

Peggy, Fox, Mrs. Johnson and all the rest were seated at tables throughout the room. They were talking, a few even laughing, and incredibly, eating and drinking what appeared to be a late night supper. This was too much for me.

I turned to the Boss. "Will someone please explain to me what has happened tonight? Or do I have to stay in the dark a while longer."

Peggy laughed.

"It's very simple, Reno. The Institute had a cyanide gas bomb exploded over it. But, because of something Sphinx said, I was able to figure out what was going to happen. So, I just got us all out before the thing exploded."

My jaw dropped to about my knees. Pretty simple, alright.

"Reno," I felt Buckaroo's hand on my shoulder, "sit down and Peggy will explain everything in complete detail to all of us."

Well, it seemed that Peggy had a few hidden memories of her own from her visit with Xan. When B. Banzai called her and told her the details of Sphinx's message, she started to think.

"I began to remember someone else going through "programming" as Xan called it, at about the same time that I was leaving. She was being prepared for a special mission, but like me, she would not know that she had a part to play. Lo Pep was bragging that I would be the perfect topping to the whole plan.

'After all,' Lo Pep sneered, 'Buckaroo Banzai will have just regained his true love, when' and here he laughed, 'a most wonderful bomb will destroy his disgusting happiness and at the same time leave a divine monument to my master's genius.'

It dawned on me that what Lo Pep had bragged of had indeed happened. My darling Buckaroo had found me. And now Sphinx had delivered her sinister message at a time when Buckaroo was far from home, and unable to concentrate on impending doom. Even the message was calculated to make Buckaroo feel that the warning was not of immediate importance. I decided to get everyone out of the Institute, which seemed to me to fit the definition of a divine monument, and head for someplace that Xan would not suspect. Arties' was perfect, I never go there without Buckaroo and he was playing at the school. We had not gotten more than 5 miles away when we heard the explosion. Pecos seemed to think that the explosion was too small for anything but a gas bomb. And after we had a few cups of coffee and thought about things, we decided that the Bhopal accident wasn't really an accident at all. Xan had killed hundreds of innocent people just to have a practice test of his plan for the Institute. And so here we are."

We all sat in silence for a few minutes, then the questions began. Suffice it to say that it was more than a few days before we were all satisfied with the answers. By that time, we had nearly finished the clean-up of the Institute.

Dr. Banzai and Dr. Zweibel had kept Sphinx under constant surveillance. But the danger of her just lying down and dying seemed to have passed. She remained in a catatonic state most of the time, but could be roused long enough to eat. On occasion, the Boss could get her to respond to simple questions of the small talk type. But usually she just sat unseeing and uncaring.

Perfect Tommy had begun to clean-up the lab which we had saved until last, as no major experiments were in progress. It was more important to restore order to our daily lives after the near collapse of our organization.

"New Jersey," Perfect Tommy called. "Do you still need these samples? Or can I throw them out? They look spoiled to me."

New Jersey went over to check the test tubes. They were marked for Sphinx. His eyes widened, he grabbed up the rack of tubes and called for B. Banzai.

"Buckaroo, look at this. I think something has separated out. What do you think, could the explosion have caused this?"

"I don't think so. Let me see -- B.S.P.!", whooped Buckaroo. He ran for the spectroscope and some slides. "Here, help me make some slides of this stuff."

New Jersey and B. Banzai spent the rest of the day and a large part of that night analyzing the different components. They finally had enough results to feed into the computer. When the print-out appeared, Buckaroo broke into a grin.

"We can make an antidote to this stuff. Sphinx will have to take it until we figure out a more permanent solution to her memory loss, but now we will have the time."

He went to tell her the good news. New Jersey remained behind in the lab to prepare the antidote, which was a fairly simple process. Then he studied the computer results in more depth. There was more to this stuff than Buckaroo thought. Sphinx's body was producing the chemical on its own. The intercom broke into his thoughts.

"New Jersey, get to Sphinx's room quick. We're losing her."

New Jersey grabbed the print-out and the antidote. When he got to the infirmary, he demanded Buckaroo's attention.

"Listen, did you happen to look at this? Her body is producing the chemical. She will have to take the antidote everyday of her life and even then, there is nothing we can do to restore her memory. She was born that day in the infirmary when she woke up."

B. Banzai turned to face the wall. He was obviously struggling to collect himself. This was a defeat he had not anticipated. Xan had won another battle. Finally, he turned, his voice tired, resigned.

"We can at least give her a new life from that day forward. Help me get an IV started with the antidote. When she is ready, we can give her some choices."

It was two days before Sphinx became her old self again. B. Banzai sat down with her to explain what had happened.

"Sphinx, we have some answers to your many questions. We have found out what caused your memory loss. Unlike Peggy who had artificial nerve fibers soaked in a chemical, B.S.P., implanted in her brain, you were hooked up to a direct feed of the chemical. This brought on a reaction in your body causing it to produce B.S.P. spontaneously. We have been able to produce an antidote which you must take every day for the rest of your life. This will allow you to proceed on with a normal life. However, you will never recover your memories of the past. You have been permanently changed, but you are released from Xan's control. Do you understand most of this?"

"I think so. But, where do I go from here?"

"We want you to intern here at the Institute. I think you have the qualities we want on our team. And you are nearly a member of our family already."

"Yes, I would like to stay here and help you fight Xan and others of his ilk. When can I start?"

"I think you had better recuperate a little first. Then you can return to your quarters and begin training in earnest."

When Sphinx joined us at supper the next day, the doubts that remained in some minds were put to rest. She was more in control of herself than we had ever seen her. The only reminder of her link with Xan was the powder she mixed in her Dr. Pepper each day. **BB**

42
FOUND ON THE BATHROOM WALLS AT YOYDYNE

by April Anderson

ODE TO LIGHTNING

Oh to be struck by lightning.
And feel the power of the sky.
The wonder of the ages inside.
To feel it rushing, crackling through
The membranes, organs and nuclei,
Where antibodies rage and war.
Where generals of virus square
Against the familiar, welcome hosts,
Who happily accept the dare.
Overcome by kilo-megawatts
In twinkisating pleasure. Many fall,
Die, envied by their brothers
As those who died, satisfied.

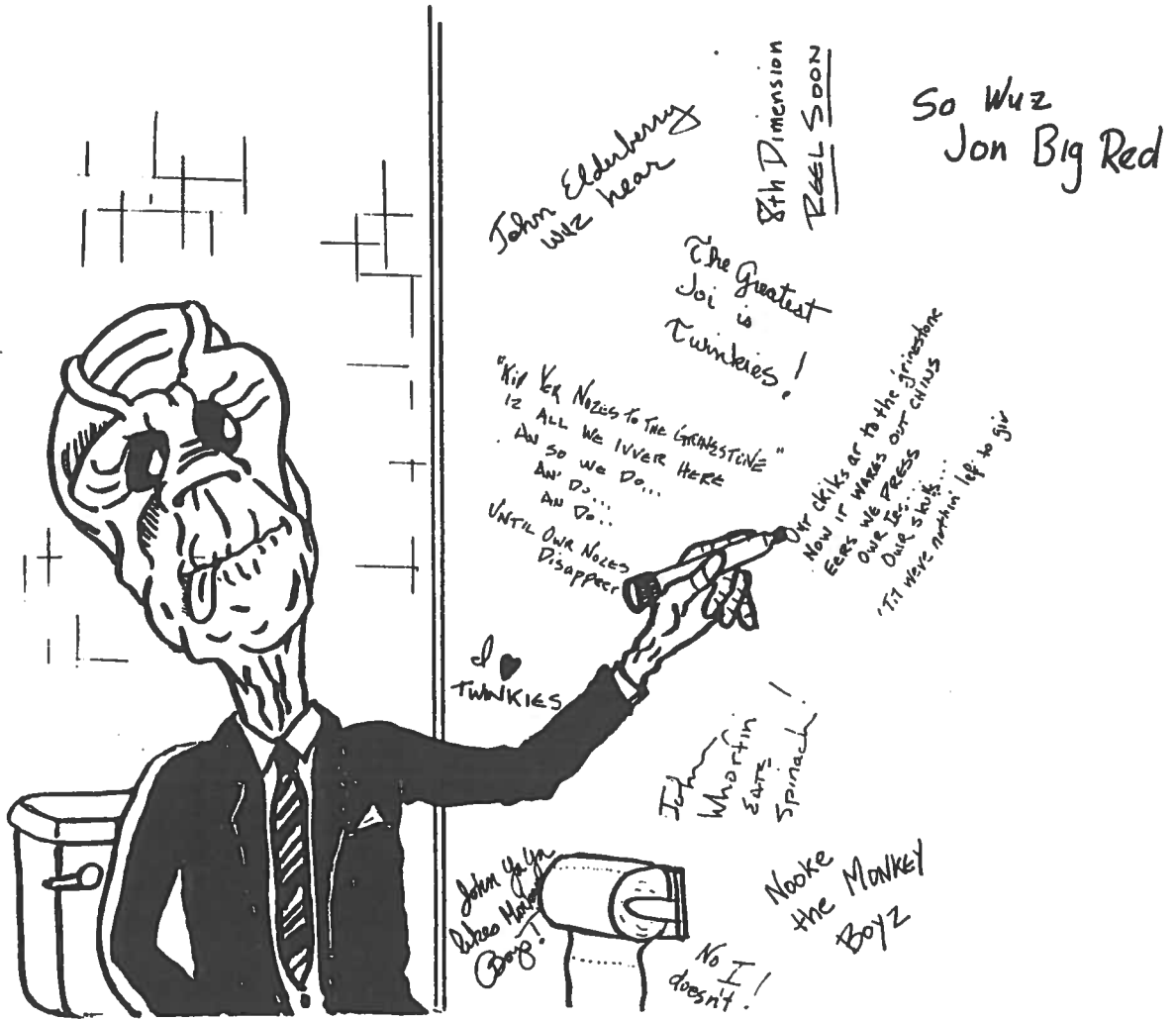


JOHN ABSENTEE: Red Lectroid from Planet 10. Will not be appearing in this adventure. Went "home" to the 8th Dimension.

The more I grows,
The less I knows,
Until I don't knows nothing.

But the more I knows,
the more I grows,
. . .maybe I knows something.

"Keep your noses to the grindstone"
 Is all we ever hear.
 And so we do,
 And do. . .
 and do. . .
 Until our noses disappear.



(in different handwriting)

Our cheeks are to the grindstone.
 Now it wears out chins.
 Ears we press,
 Our eyes. . .
 our skulls. . .
 'Til we've nothing left to give.

BAD VIBES FROM SALEM TOWN

or

Buckaroo Banzai and the Temple of Doom

(With absolutely no apologies to George Lucas or Steven Spielberg! And no Indiana Jones, either.)

by Leni R. Sommer and Peggy Spalding

The Institute was in an uproar. One of our Blue Blazes, a young man named Marty, had been working on an archeological dig in south central Illinois as part of his college course work. A few days earlier, he had gone on a solitary hike in the woods during his lunch break and had returned to find his associates brutally and sadistically murdered, the site plundered, and all means of communication and transportation destroyed. Plummeted into a deep state of shock, the young man wandered in the woods for days until he was found by the search party. Confused and disoriented, and suffering from exposure, he was barely lucid enough to call for his section chief who, after assessing the situation, quickly arranged for Marty to be flown to the Institute.

Fortunately, Marty's condition wasn't serious, but apparently, the information he had to give Buckaroo was. The Boss came out of the infirmary looking especially grim, and carefully holding a faded and soiled sheet of paper. He handed it to Pecos.

"This look familiar to you?" he asked her. We crowded around to look as she smoothed the paper flat on the table. "The kid had it clutched in his hand the entire time. I was barely able to get him to give it to me."

Pecos studied it intently for several seconds, then looked up at Buckaroo. "We'd better get to Peru," she said finally.

Buckaroo nodded. "Tell the Swede to get the jet ready to go. Fox, you're keen on old stuff, you'll enjoy this. Sidney, I don't suppose you'll want to stay home if Fox is going. Reno, you'd better come along. Peggy, will you come, too, please?" It was going to be a rather romantic trip, with the couples all together. "Okay, people, let's get going. I want to leave as soon as possible."

Pecos went off to call the Swede and make her preparations for the trip, but the rest of us paused for a moment to take a better look at that piece of paper.

"This is weird," Fox was saying. The drawing was so faded, I couldn't make heads or tails of it until she started pointing out different things on it. "By the shape of it, I'd say it was a sarcophagus, a coffin. This over here is a bennu bird, the Egyptian version of the phoenix. It symbolizes immortality through the rebirth of the spirit. But these pictures are Hopi and Navajo symbols, and Marty's dig was in Illinois! And now we're going to Peru? I don't get it, at all."

"Well, I get it less than you do," New Jersey told her. "I guess the only way we're going to find out what's going on is to go along." There was no disagreeing with that, so we went our separate ways to get our gear together. I could hear the others muttering, "Peru? Why Peru?"

There was no time to ask questions on the flight down--Buckaroo kept us pretty busy reading various archeological treatises and rechecking our

survival gear. It seemed he expected us to be roughing it. We landed at a remote airstrip just barely big enough to handle the 727. I noticed that New Jersey was a little green as the plane came to a halt scant yards from a stand of banana trees, but he quickly revived in the fresh, though humid air when we deplaned. We then off-loaded a jeep for our trip into the jungle, and were soon on our way.

The road was surprisingly good, a fact which seemed to puzzle and displease Pecos and Buckaroo. And they were clearly shocked and dismayed when our destination turned out to be the site of a well-developed archeological dig. A quick display of our credentials, and we were allowed, rather grudgingly, I thought, onto the actual site.

"This looks like it might be a burial chamber," Buckaroo remarked to one of the workers. "You find anything interesting?"

The man shrugged sullenly, replying that he had been hired only a few days earlier as a digger. He had no sooner finished speaking when a man who was obviously the leader of the project swaggered up to us.

"If you Anglos want any information," he sneered self-importantly, "I suggest you speak with Dr. Diego De Varga at the Department of Antiquities in Lima." While Pecos glared at the man, and Fox and New Jersey looked around as if to say 'Anglos? What Anglos?' (of the members in our party, only Peggy fit that category), Buckaroo thanked the man with more courtesy than we had received, as was his usual practice.

The hostility we had encountered at the site was nothing compared to that with which we were greeted in Dr. Diego De Varga's office in Lima. No sooner had Buckaroo introduced himself than the Peruvian launched into a bitter tirade that I could barely follow, even though his English was flawless. I caught something about Yankees thinking that they can just come down and rob a poor country of its national treasures, and the name 'Ward Frazier' seemed to come up a lot.

"Is that the Dr. Ward Frazier of the National Center for Astro-Archeology?" Buckaroo broke in politely. The question precipitated still another tirade, during which Buckaroo again showed more courtesy than he had received. Finally, it ended and we left.

Soon we were back on the plane: our heading Los Angeles this time. As Buckaroo was busy in the cockpit, and had not left us with anything he wanted done, we were free to converge on Pecos.

"Okay," I said equitably, "you want to tell us just what the hell this is all about?"

She hesitated briefly, as if to organize her thoughts. "Well, it started back in '79 or '80, I think. Buckaroo was still studying at Oxford, but was home for the summer. He had just met Peggy, and was missing her terribly," Pecos glanced quickly at Peggy, who smiled encouragingly. After all she had been through, Buckaroo's wife was a strong and beautiful woman, capable of facing her past. "Gee, I just realized. We were all dying of curiosity about this girl who had finally captured our leader's heart, but Captain Happen was the only one who had the audacity to keep asking Buckaroo about her. I think Bennu even tried to warn us about the Captain, but I guess we just didn't understand."

"Bennu?" Fox sat up, startled, and I remembered that she had called the little bird in the sketch a 'bennu'.

"Will you just shut up and let her talk?" New Jersey chided her fondly. She sighed and leaned back against him.

"Where was I? Oh, yeah, in Peru. Rawhide and I took a group of BBI's down for a jungle survival seminar,"

"Rawhide never mentioned a trip to Peru in his journals!" If anyone would know that, it would be Fox. She had studied them very carefully last

year.

"That's because, at Benu's request, Buckaroo gathered, sealed, and locked away all records of the whole affair. Now, will you do as the man said, and shut up and let me talk?"

Well, as I said, it was the summer of '79 or '80. Buckaroo was back home, and Rawhide and I were in Peru with a group of BBI's for a seminar on jungle survival. Things had been going well, and then one day, when we were about a mile and a half from camp, we were hit by an earthquake. It couldn't have measured more than a couple of points on the Richter Scale, but it was strong enough to knock us around pretty good. We must have been almost right on top of the fault. Once the tremors were over, we stopped to count heads and discovered that two of our people were missing. Fortunately, we could hear them calling. The quake had opened up a fissure in the side of the mountain, and had thrown them into it. They were unhurt, but we needed ropes and flashlights to find them and get them out.

You can imagine my surprise, when Rawhide lowered me down to them and I found myself in a large cave on something. After we got the two Blue Blazes out, I glanced around at what appeared to be wall paintings. I wanted to stay and explore, but I knew that there was still a danger of aftershocks, and I didn't want to risk being trapped down there. I gave a tug on the rope and had them pull me up. After I had a chance to tell Rawhide what I thought I had seen, he and I sent the Blue Blazes back to camp and we stayed to explore. We waited a couple of hours, checking in from time to time on the GO-PHONE to see if there were any reports of more seismic activity in the area. Finally, they reported that things seemed to be stable, so we called the camp to say we were going back in. Rawhide and I lowered ourselves back down into the fissure. It was really dark down there and our flashlights weren't powerful enough to provide proper lighting for true appreciation of the incredible sights that surrounded us. The earthquake had opened what could only have been an ancient tomb that had, until now, lain undiscovered and unexplored. The stone walls were covered in glyphs painted in primary colors, unfaded from their long stay in total darkness. It was so quiet that I could hear the sound of my heartbeat in my ears. I almost jumped out of my skin when Rawhide spoke.

"Pecos," his voice sounded puzzled, "I don't know a whole lot about archaeology, but these look Mayan--"

"That can't be," I interrupted him and leaned past him to get a closer look. "We're in the middle of Inca Territory!" But as I examined the chamber walls more closely, I discovered he was correct--only there were strange differences--differences for which neither of us had a logical explanation. But nothing in even our vast experiences as members of Team Banzai prepared us for what we found in the next chamber.

Gleaming dully under a thin layer of dust was an enormous gold sarcophagus of a design I'd never seen before. There was some sort of raised emblem on the lid and we leaned over to brush away the dust and get a better look. The emblem was of a phoenix, which I suppose wasn't all that unusual, but inscribed around it were characters that could only be Egyptian! Needless to say, we were floored. As I said before, our electric torches didn't do much good, so Rawhide tried to call back to the camp to have someone bring us some lanterns, but his GO-PHONE didn't work. All he got was a lot of static. We figured maybe it had gotten damaged somehow--Rawhide did get knocked off his feet when the quake struck, and it had gotten whacked a couple of times during our descent--so we headed back to camp to get the stuff ourselves, and to trade Rawhide's GO-PHONE for one that worked.

Several of the blue stagers were intrigued by the find, so we had a lot of help when we went back. But none of them expected to see what they did. Well, you all saw the cave wall drawings, yourselves. And to top it all off, with the better light, we were able to really see the sarcophagus.

"This is impossible," I told Rawhide. "The Mayans had their own gods, they wouldn't put a bennu on Osiris on their sarcophagi. It must be some kind of a joke."

"No, I don't think so. The sarcophagus is real gold. And the rest of the stuff in here looks authentic. That'd make it an awfully expensive hoax. And look at all the dirt and dust all over everything. This place's been too well hid--no one's been in here for centuries. Let's see if we can get the lid off this thing. See if whatever's inside's been mummified Egyptian style."

After trying for about fifteen minutes, and not getting it to budge, Rawhide decided to call back to camp and have them start trying to raise Buckaroo on the shortwave. But, for the second time, Rawhide's GO-PHONE didn't work, and we had to head back to camp again. Funny thing, but as soon as we dragged ourselves back outta that hole, we got a call on the GO-PHONE from the people we left at the camp! And they were using the GO-PHONE we had left behind--the one that hadn't worked before!

"Natural magnetic field causing electrical interference?" I suggested.

"Now, this is too localized. We'd still be experiencing at least a little static if that was it. You know, I think it has something to do with that sarcophagus. The malfunctions only seem to occur when we're around it." It sounded crazy, but I was forced to admit that I couldn't think of a more logical explanation.

Anyway, Buckaroo had gotten word of the quake and was calling in to make sure we were all okay, so we hurried back to tell him about our find.

"Go ahead and try to get it out of that cave and into a clearing where we can get a better look at it. Flyboy and I will be down in the chopper as soon as we can get there." The Boss spoke pretty calmly, but we all knew how excited he could get by this sort of thing, so we really wanted to hustle to get the coffin out in the open before he got there.

It was incredibly heavy and ended up taking every able body we had. This one guy was really lucky I managed to keep from doing serious bodily harm to him before the job was done. He kept going on and on about ancient astronauts coming down in fiery chariots. Really got on my nerves. Somebody finally got him to shut up, but as it turned out later, I decided he wasn't as full of bologna as I had thought.

We were only expecting Buckaroo and Flyboy, so when we saw that they'd brought the Future Mrs. Johnson with them, we decided it was open season on Flyboy.

"Aw, hell," he finally said after several minutes of our good-natured ribbing. "What could I do?" She wanted to come."

Meanwhile, Buckaroo had already begun inspecting the sarcophagus, and had had no better luck than we in opening it.

"Okay, let's pack it up and get it home. We're going to need Sluggo and his electronics know-how for this one."

"But Buckaroo," Rawhide hastened to remind him. "It's against international law to take antiquities out of a country without the permission of its government."

"I know that, Rawhide. Don't worry, we'll give it back. We'll give it back! But I'm afraid that if we let the Peruvians take over, they won't have the expertise to keep from damaging something. And if word gets out about all this gold, the site could get looted by cretins who wouldn't hesitate to melt down these priceless artifacts just for their karat value."

Back home, Sluggo studied the thing for a week before he even figured out where to start. Then it took him another three days before he got it open. He insisted on working alone, so we were all clustered in the hall outside his lab when he finally stumbled out.

"I did it, but I don't believe it!" he finally managed to say. We pushed past him and crowded around the sarcophagus.

Floating inside it, in a pool of what Buckaroo later said was artificial amniotic fluid, was the most beautiful human being I had ever seen. It was a man, blond, well-built, with sensitive, almost delicate, though still incredibly masculine features. He was wearing only a medallion, and was so well preserved that you never would have guessed that he had been in that thing for almost a thousand years.

We all began talking excitedly when we were interrupted by a scream followed by a thud. The usually unflappable Future Mrs. Johnson had fainted dead away. I looked back into the sarcophagus and felt a little woozy, myself. The man's eyes were now open!

"H-H-He's alive!" Captain Happen stammered before I could say anything.

"Come on, people," Buckaroo immediately took control of the situation. "Let's get him out of there and to the infirmary where we can get him stabilized, stat!"

This efficiently accomplished, we all offered to stay and monitor the unusual patient, but as the Institute's only M.D., Buckaroo felt that that responsibility should be his alone.

All conversation came to a complete stop at breakfast the next morning when Buckaroo came in with the mysterious young man, the latter now wearing a TEAM BANZAI T-Shirt and a pair of Buckaroo's jeans.

"This is Berru," the Boss said, introducing us, "and he says we have to put him back where we found him."

"Say what?" Sluggo sputtered.

"He has explained the situation to me, and I am forced to agree with him. Besides, it is not our way to hold a man against his will."

"Well, it'll take a while," Sluggo mumbled. "The coffin thing--I took it apart. I wanted to see how that thing worked, though damned if I'll even figure it out. I'll need at least a couple of days to get it back together." Berru took a hard look at him, then nodded as if satisfied about Sluggo's integrity.

"In the meantime, Berru," Buckaroo offered, "make yourself at home. Feel free to use any of our facilities. Computers, books, musical instruments, the horses--just help yourself."

Berru did just that, though he seemed to spend most of his time in the greenhouse on the solarium, or sometimes just sitting outside where the sun could shine on that medallion of his. When I asked him, he said that the plants helped him breathe, and he needed the sun the same way the plants did. And there was another funny thing I didn't notice at the time. Berru was friendly enough with all of us except Captain Happen, who seemed even more eager than the rest of us to spend time in his company. But Berru actually seemed to shun him, and I believe he may have even tried to warn Buckaroo that something about the Captain was not quite right. Boy, if he could have been more definite, it sure could have saved us a lot of grief.

The next night we had a gig up-state. Having discovered that Berru loved music, we invited him to come along. The gig went real well, I mean, we were really hot. And Berru seemed to enjoy himself, though I noticed that the cigarette smoke seemed to bother him. He went out several times for fresh air.

The gig lasted pretty late, and well, you all know how we are when we're performing. While we're playing, we're high on adrenalin and can go forever, but once the instruments are packed up, it's time to crash and burn. So most of us were sacked out before the bus even left the parking lot. I don't know for sure, but I think it must have been about half an hour later that things started happening.

"No, Pinky, don't stop," I heard Berru call out.

Groggily, I opened my eyes and looked out the window. By the side of the

road, I could see a station wagon with its hood raised and emergency flares lit. As is our custom, Pinky had slowed down to stop and render aid. But as Bennu called out his warning, Pinky must have seen the flash of gun metal in the headlight's beam, and too late, tried to speed up again. As he did so, a gas cannister came crashing through a window, quickly rendering most of us incapacitated by coughing fits and tearing eyes. I felt the bus crash into the station wagon and come to a halt. Rawhide got the cannister back out almost immediately, but that meant he got the biggest dose of the noxious stuff of all of us and was out for the count. And I'm afraid most of the rest of us weren't in any better shape. I learned later that Pinky had been knocked cold by the crash. Only Buckaroo and Bennu were able to get out of the bus unscathed.

I couldn't tell for sure what was going on outside, but thought I saw several flashes of bright light, and heard the terrified screams that followed. I was still trying to stop the burning in my eyes when two Bravos came on board. One of them grabbed Captain Happen, who was sitting up near the front, dragged him out of his seat and savagely threw him down in the aisle while the other drew a bead on him with his side arm. Struggling against his captor, the Captain managed to raise his head and look at the Bravo with the gun. Seeing his face, the two Bravos inexplicably released him, and were about to select another victim when Buckaroo and Bennu returned. The Bravos were so terrified that one dove through the nearest window, breaking his neck in his haste to leave. The other pushed past Buckaroo and out the door. But just before he headed across a still unplanted field, the Bravo stopped and pulled some sort of weapon, aiming it at the bus. Before I could cry out a warning, I saw Bennu turn in his direction, put one hand to his medallion and stretch the other towards him, and suddenly it looked like the Bravo's weapon was struck by lightning. Harvi Kan's minion was knocked to the ground. Whether he was alive or dead, I didn't know.

"Boy, that gas was really something," I told Buckaroo minutes later, as he came around to make sure that we were all essentially all right. "It must have done something to my eyes--I kept seeing bright bursts of light."

"It wasn't the gas," Buckaroo told me, but would say no more. He had stopped first to tend to Pinky, who had sustained a nasty cut on the head, but then had moved on moments later, leaving Bennu leaning over our teammate, one hand clutching his amulet, the other placed on Pinky's forehead.

Finally satisfied that no one was seriously hurt and the bus was operational, the Boss took the wheel and drove us home.

Naturally, the attack was the main topic of conversation the next morning, especially the lack of a mark on Pinky's forehead after we had all seen his face covered with blood the night before. Then Sluggo, who had stayed at home and worked on the dismantled sarcophagus all night, came in and announced that he had it all back together. After checking it over himself, Bennu congratulated him.

"You did a fine job, better than I did the first time I had to assemble it. And I appreciate all the time you spent on the job." Sluggo, who was very rarely at a loss for words, was most definitely tongue-tied.

Bennu did not go back into the sarcophagus until we reached Peru. While the others were returning it to the chamber, I found him in a clearing, standing in the sunlight and catching its rays with that necklace of his one last time.

"I'm sorry I can't. But it's going to be hard, much harder than I thought it would be."

His words startled me. I had been about to tell him it wasn't too late to change his mind. To cover my confusion, I made a feeble attempt at humor. "You'll be asleep. I'll bet a hundred years on so will seem like no time." He

smiled and went to the cave.

"We all have our own calling," he told Buckaroo before entering it. "Part of yours is to finish your father's work. You will succeed."

Only Buckaroo and Sluggo were there to help him with his final preparations. We all felt a profound sense of loss and grief when they came out and we began to disguise all signs of our intrusion, and to fill in the opening the earthquake had made.

"We have lost a friend and comrade today," Buckaroo said, making his words sound like a eulogy. "But when we think of those who are to come after us, and not just ourselves, we know that we have done the right thing."

Later, I asked Buckaroo what this mission of Benu's was, but he said he didn't know.

"He only told me that he was sent here to help our civilization survive a coming crisis, one that we would not be facing for at least another hundred years. Also, he's to work with a partner who is buried somewhere on our continent. He did not tell me exactly where, and I did not ask him--if I were to break under torture and divulge that information, the results would be disastrous."

I tried to tell him that we all knew he'd never break, but you know how he is. With so much at stake, he'd refuse to take the risk.

Dr. Ward Frazier was obviously delighted that we had decided to pay him a visit.

"This is a great honor, Dr. Banzai," he said, rising from his desk and offering his hand. "I'm curious, though, what brings you all the way to L.A.? Surely, it wasn't just to see me?"

"Let's just say, we decided to make a short detour on our way home from Peru," the inscrutable B. Banzai replied.

At the mention of that South American country, Dr. Frazier's smile froze. "What were you doing in Peru?"

"Looking for something that looks very similar to this." Buckaroo handed him the sketch.

"Let's cut out the word games, Buckaroo," Pecos said impatiently, "and just ask him where Benu is!"

"Where did you get this sketch and what do you know about Benu?" These were questions I had anticipated.

Now we were treated to Buckaroo's version of the adventure, followed by an account of the more recent events in Illinois.

At this last piece of information, Dr. Frazier turned white as a ghost and had to sit down. He gestured towards the paper. "If this means what I think it does, we have to find him. He'll know what to do."

"We were hoping you could tell us where he is."

"He contacts me now and then, but with agents from two governments after him, we agreed it would be best if he didn't tell me his plans."

"Agents from what governments?" Pecos demanded angrily.

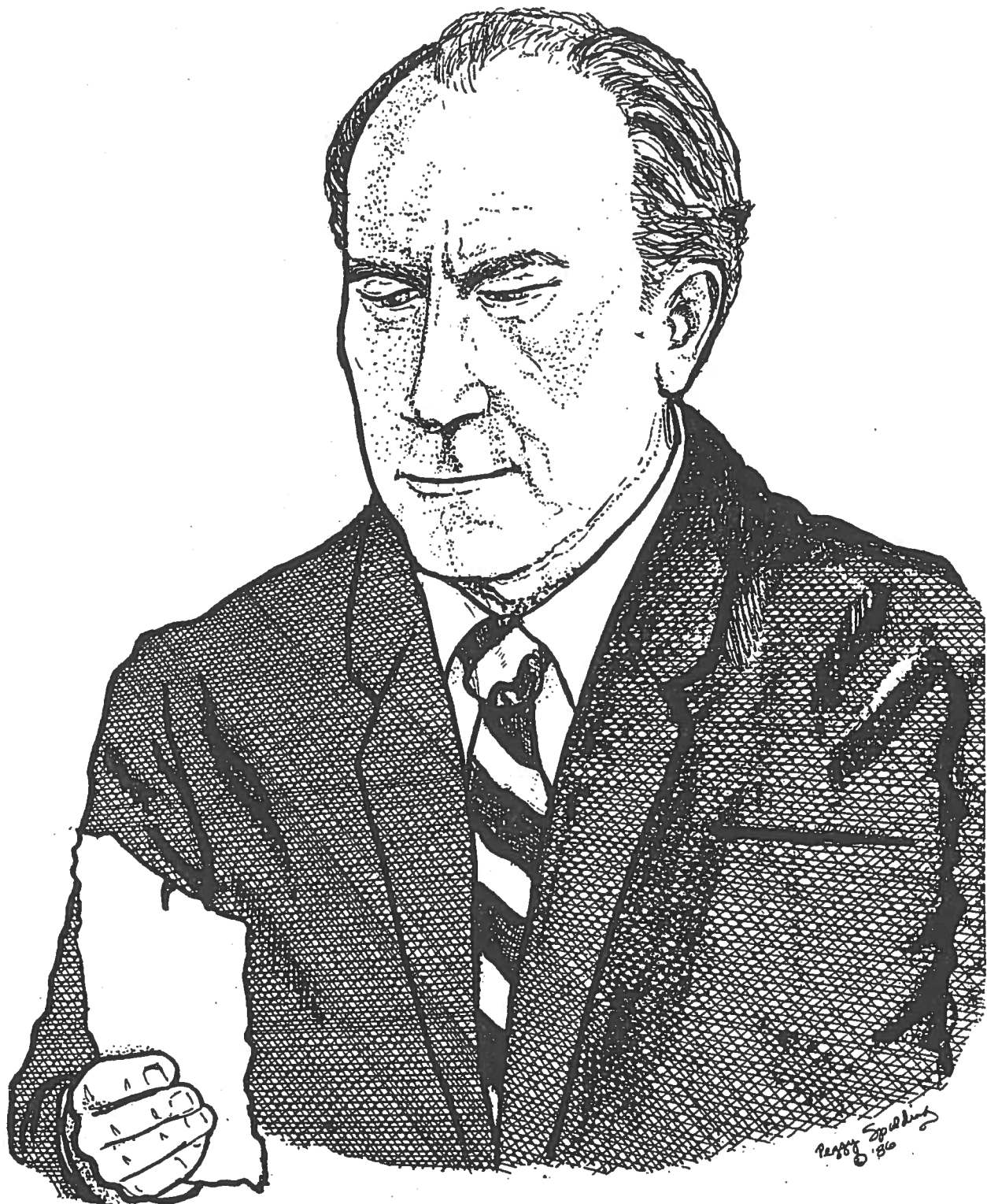
"Ours and Peru's."

"But why do they want him?"

Sometimes I just couldn't believe Fox's naiveté.

"You've seen what he can do, or at least heard about it. Why do you think? Our government wants to put him under a microscope and see if it can figure out how he is able to do those things. And De Varga seems to think he's some kind of a god. You know, sometimes I'm not so sure the Peruvian is wrong. But he wants to keep Benu in a glass cage."

"Then all the more reason for us to find him and help him," Buckaroo stated with quiet resolve. "Can't you give us any information we can use?"



"All I know is that he's checking out Indian burial mounds. So far, he's been just barely able to keep one step ahead of his pursuers. Last time I heard from him, he was in Missouri."

"Uh, Buckaroo," the reticent New Jersey spoke up, "why don't we take Dr. Frazier back to the Institute? Then we can all put our heads together, and maybe something someone says will spark his memory."

"I'll be glad to come, if you think it will help," the older scientist said eagerly. "Just let me stop by my house to pick up a few things, and I'll meet you at the airport. Oh, and please, would you all call me Ward?"

The old doc was true to his word, and we didn't have to wait long before commencing our flight home.

Billy listened eagerly to what we had to tell him. "All I have to do is break into their computer files on him. Once we know what they know, we can keep one step ahead of them. I'll get right to it. If I'm not out in thirty-six hours, come in and check on me." Perfect Tommy, who's no slouch at hacking, and Caity, who (like all little girls with big crushes), goes where Tommy goes, volunteered to help him.

"Better have Big Norse help you, too," Buckaroo called after them absent-mindedly. There was a moment of profound silence as we all remembered that our brilliant mathematician was in Houston, working to analyze the data from the Challenger explosion.

Suddenly, some of us realized that we had spent the last three days on an airplane, and the jet-lag hit us like a ton of bricks. Peggy, ever the perfect hostess, suggested that perhaps Ward might be tired from his trip, and insisted on seeing to his comfort before retiring to her room. We all slept soundly and deeply, knowing that once things started cooking, we might not get another chance until it was all over.

"I did it! Piece of cake," Billy's jubilation woke us a few hours later. We stumbled downstairs to find the three computer hackers dancing around, waving a map and reams of print-out paper. They stopped when they saw us. "And the news is good. Right now, as far as the Federales are concerned, the trail is stone cold. They haven't a clue. Even their chief bloodhound, Preminger, is just running around chasing his tail. But even better, I was able to get a listing of all the sites Bennu is known to have already visited..."

"Which I fed into the UNIVAC," Tommy broke in. Caity reached up and punched his arm. "Er, I mean, ~~we~~ fed it into the UNIVAC, and got back a neat little systematic search pattern that Bennu appears to be using."

"From that, we are able to predict which sites he is most likely to try next." Billy glared briefly at Tommy as he opened up the map. "They cover a three-state area. Here. Here. Here. And here. All we have to do is get some of our people to each site, and wait for him to show up."

"Okay, Pecos, you and Ward go with Reno and help him put together a sketch of Bennu," Buckaroo was making plans even as he spoke. "Tommy, you alert the Blue Blazes in the target areas. Fox and Mrs. Johnson, start assigning the teams. Peggy, Cait, you're staying here. Someone has to hold the fort." These latter two were obviously not happy about their assignments, but when the Boss has THAT look on his face, everyone knows better than to argue.

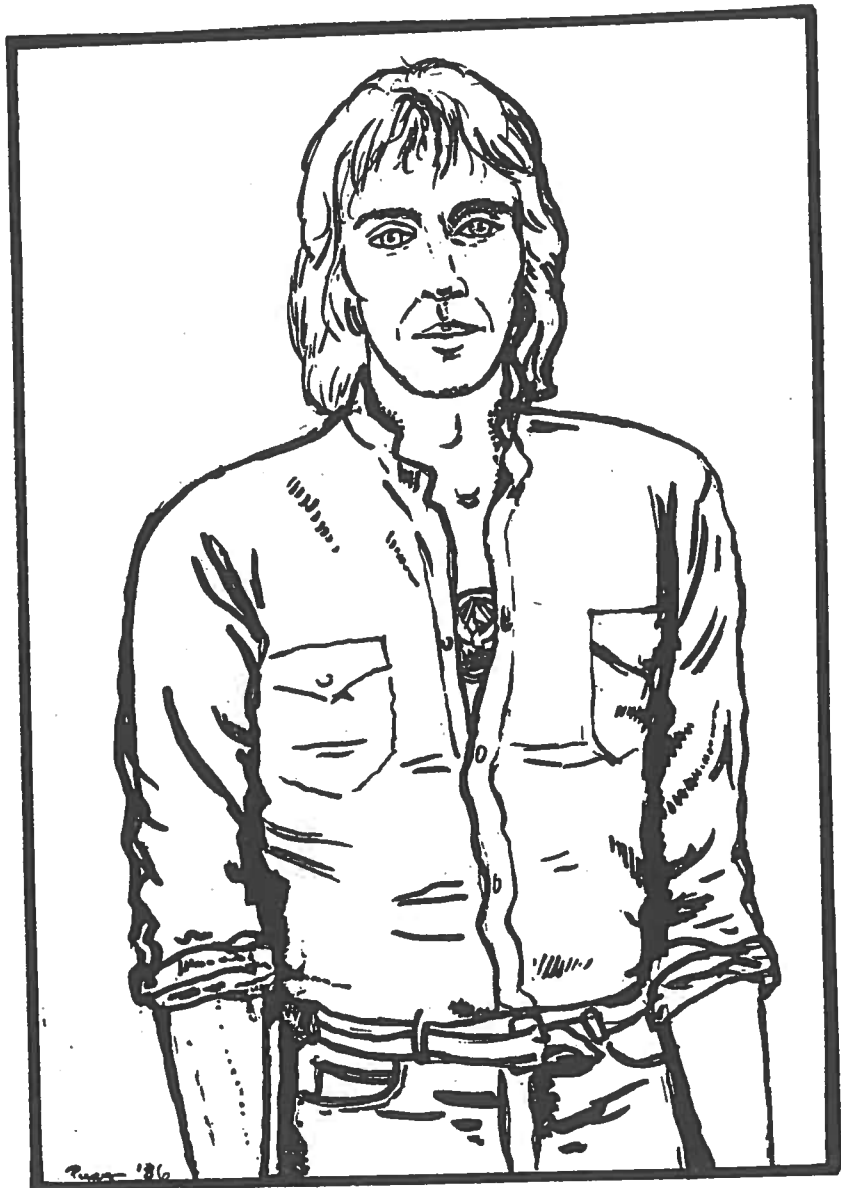
I suspected that he had other reasons. As I said before, we all knew that Peggy was a strong and brave woman, but she had been through alot, and still seemed awfully fragile at times, and Buckaroo was over-protective. And as for Cait, he probably did it as a courtesy to Fox, to not let her daughter get on the wrong side of the Feds at such a young age. There probably wasn't really much of a chance of that, but Fox also had a tendency to be over-protective, and not without good reason (In our adventure, "A New Twist in the Paradox", Fox and Cait joined the Institute, unable to leave their troubled pasts behind.--Reno).

The next morning, we had the "wanted posters" ready for distribution. "Look at them, share them with the others on your teams, commit them to memory, and then burn them," Buckaroo instructed. "We can't risk having them fall into the wrong hands. Now remember, people, we can't do any actual digging at these sites, but as students of anthropology, we can all make good use of our time there. Make sketches, take pictures, and ask very careful

NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY
07050
201-555-8888
TELEX: BANZAI88

Attention all Blue Blaze Irregulars and other Affiliates of the Banzai Institute:

A matter of utmost importance has arisen, and must be addressed. A man, a friend of the Institute, is in trouble. He is known to us, as is his mission, and all B.B.I.s are hereby instructed to render him all possible assistance. He is called Berru, and you will find his likeness below. Study it, memorize it, share it with others in your section, then destroy it. It is imperative that this picture does not fall into the wrong hands! If you have any information concerning Berru, or have had direct contact with him, report directly to the Institute. Do not, under any circumstances, give any information to a certain government agent, Justin Preminger, by name. Civil disobedience has its place, and in this case, humanity demands it.
Good luck.



questions. If Bennu has been and gone, inform Peggy here at home and move on to your next site. Okay, let's move 'em out. And folks, let's be careful out there."

Fortunately, Billy had predicted that Bennu would be exploring the northeast section of the country. We wouldn't be all that far from home, and would be able to get started almost immediately. But as we were able to ascertain almost immediately when Bennu had already put in an appearance, we found ourselves moving farther and farther apart from each other.

Fox and New Jersey were at their third site, feeling grubby and discouraged, when the break came.

"I was making a sketch of some cave wall drawings, though my heart really wasn't in it, when I felt like someone was staring at me. I turned around, and there was this incredibly gorgeous blond hunk who just couldn't take his eyes off me."

"He just couldn't take his eyes off her Team Banzai T-shirt," New Jersey set the record straight. Fox punched his arm, then continued her story.

"We stared at each other for what seemed a century, then the sun caught on the medallion around his neck, and that seemed to ring a bell. So I walked up to him and said 'Hello, Bennu.' Boy, you'd have thought a bee stung him or something, the way he jumped. 'Do I know you, Carly?' He seemed confused as he asked, though he called me by name. 'I can't seem to remember--have we met?' 'No,' I said, giving him my most reassuring smile. ('Sappy is more like it', was New Jersey's interpretation. Fox pointedly ignored him.) Then he shook his head as if to clear it. 'No, I can see now that we haven't.' He gave me this most wonderful smile. I was just speechless ('For once, if you can believe it,' New Jersey said, rolling his eyes.), so he kinda prodded me. 'I believe you have something important to tell me. A message from a friend? Ward Frazier?' I felt like I'd been shaken out of a sound sleep. I mean, I knew what Buckaroo, Pecos and Dr. Frazier had said he could do, but I can tell you, having your mind read is a weird trip.

"And to tell you the truth, it was Sidney who took control of the situation."

At this point, New Jersey reluctantly took over the narrative. "Well, all I did was introduce us, remind him that, though he didn't remember it, he had met Buckaroo a few years ago. Then I left to go call Peggy and have her send Casper to pick us up with the helicopter."

"Yeah, and if you hadn't, we'd have still been standing there, me grinning like a fool, when Preminger showed up. As it was, we barely had time to call back the two Blue Blazes who were working with us, and just managed to lift off before he sent someone over to stop us. Boy, did he look mad! I don't want to come face to face with him for a long time." Fox concluded.

"Well, Sidney, you did well," Buckaroo congratulated him, then looked over at Fox with a grin. "And Fox, well, we all screw up once in a while." She blushed furiously, fully aware that it would be a long time before we let her live this down. "The important thing is that our mission succeeded."

"Uh, wait a minute, Buckaroo," I couldn't believe that I was the only one aware that someone was missing. "Where're Pecos and her team?"

Peggy looked worried. "I haven't heard from her since yesterday. I tried to call her in after I sent Casper for Fox and New Jersey, but couldn't reach anyone on her team."

"I'm sure there's nothing to worry about," Buckaroo tried to be reassuring. "You know how easily the GO-PHONES get lost or broken. Give her a little more time, she'll get her people back here soon."

About that time, Bennu and Ward, who had had other matters to discuss, entered the room. Professor Hikita followed a short distance behind them.

"Hikita-san has tried to fill me in on what happened the last time I was

here," Bennu began, "and now Ward tells me you know who has Mira's sarcophagus. Who is this 'Xan' and how do we get her away from him?"

How to describe Hanoi Xan? Buckaroo's Moriarty? A role model for the Marquis de Sade? Atilla the Hun's Master Sergeant? The man who gave Hitler lessons? He is all of these and more. From our individual thoughts, Bennu was able to get a pretty good idea, and what he learned seemed to dismay him.

"We've gone up against Xan before," Buckaroo told him firmly. "In the long run, he rarely wins."

"We may not have time to win in the long run, Buckaroo," Bennu replied. "I think he's got your Pecos."

"What?" I jumped to my feet. "How can you know that?"

"I only said 'I think,' but did I meet Pecos before? Being here has brought back some vague memories, and her disappearance explains something that has been troubling me all day. I think she may be trying to reach someone here."

"Where is she?"

"I don't know. I don't think she knows, herself, and I'm not getting anything I could get a fix on."

"Take it easy, friend," Buckaroo laid what he no doubt considered a comforting hand on my shoulder. "If Xan plays it true to type, we should be hearing from him real soon. Then we can act."

"We can't wait for him to make the first move. It's Pecos we're talking about! She won't break and he'll kill her. Or worse!" I don't really remember what I said or did after that. I guess envisioning my Pecos in the clutches of Hanoi Xan must have driven me off the deep end. The next thing I knew, I was face down on the floor, with New Jersey sitting on top of me. "Hey, man, get off my back." I complained weakly.

"You okay now?" he asked cautiously.

"Yeah, Cowboy, really. I'm fine. Now let me up." I saw Fox, who was sitting on the floor near my head, look meaningfully at someone, Buckaroo I guessed, because then I heard everybody leave the room. When New Jersey got off me and I was able to roll over, I saw that Bennu had stayed.

"Reno." Fox took my hand, a surprise because she still rarely touches, or allows herself to be touched by anyone but Caity and Sidney Zweibel. "We're going to get her, and her team, back. You've got to believe that, or it's going to be harder on all of us."

I looked up at Bennu, who was standing on the other side of the room. "She's still alive," he told me. "And well. At least for now." He came over and knelt beside me. Though he didn't touch me, I could feel that we were in contact, like on another plane. And somehow, I knew that he had lost someone he loved very much, and that he knew my grief as his own. Then he did something that surprised me. He touched his medallion that was emblazoned with a phoenix rising from flames within the three points of a triangle. Behind this gold bas-relief design, a swirling pattern of light began to manifest itself. //Let me show you the Golden Light, // Bennu's words came to me though his lips had not spoken them aloud. As he read my acceptance of his offer, a clean, bright light seemed to flow through me, painlessly burning away my irrationality and allowing me to put my fears in their proper perspective. I looked at Fox and New Jersey and saw that they had also somehow shared in the experience. Bennu offered me a hand up and used an expression he must have gotten from Buckaroo. "Let's saddle up!"

We found the others in the living room, staring silently at none other than Lo Pep, Hanoi Xan's right hand man.

"Your Pecos is made of stronger stuff than she looks to be," the villain was saying. "She has managed to survive what has already killed the rest of her party, and to convince my Master that she is unable to open the golden

coffin without causing it irreparable damage. But my Master knows a similar coffin has been successfully opened by you in the past. You are to turn over all records concerning this procedure to me, or the young lady will suffer the painful consequences, which will most inevitably be fatal."

"You're not getting jack from us until we see that Pecos is alive and untampered with," Buckaroo's face was unreadable. But I knew that he was thinking back to a similar situation, and its nearly fatal ending.

"Very well, you will be contacted soon with further instructions. I recommend that you follow them to the letter." I longed to get my hands around that vulture's neck, but he had come in under a flag of truce, and under it still, had to be allowed to leave unhindered.

As soon as Xan's henchman was gone, Buckaroo sprang into action. "Call the Rug Suckers, call the Kolodny Brothers. Oh, Tommy, call a Strike Team. Mrs. Johnson, break out the ammo. Peggy, where're my guns?" He went up to the Bunk House.

"A Strike Team? Whew!" Tommy couldn't believe it.

Bennu had made himself as inconspicuous as possible by standing in a far corner and hiding his medallion under his shirt. I noticed that Fox had joined him, having a reason of her own for wanting to hide. The sight of Lo Pep had shaken her deeply, bringing back memories of her last encounter with him. It took both Bennu and New Jersey to get her to her chair.

"Could his mind have been tampered with? His thought patterns were too different, too well shielded, for me to read," Bennu told New Jersey as the latter rubbed Fox's hands. "But what I've just seen about him in Carly's mind..." he broke off, looking angrier than I imagined anyone capable of being.

"Who is that guy?" Tommy asked me, sizing up the newcomer as possible competition. Our resident "pretty boy" had gotten his first good look at our rather remarkable blond-haired, blue-eyed guest.

Feeling somewhat hostile eyes upon him, Bennu came over and smiled at Tommy. "I understand that it was you who figured out how to find me. Your plan was perfect."

"Well, of course!" When it comes to Tommy, flattery will get you everywhere. And Bennu, in usual form, had known exactly the right thing to say.

Unfortunately, Cait chose just that moment to come over and look up at Bennu adoringly, her puppy, Blue, right beside her, all wags and licks for the tall charismatic stranger. This was almost too much for poor Tommy--the child who worshipped him, and the puppy he had given her, defecting to the enemy camp!

Blue gave a short, sharp bark, and Bennu smiled. "Why Tommy, I didn't know you were an expert at dog training in addition to your other talents."

"Who told you that?"

"Blue."

"Blue told.... Is this guy for real?" He turned to me.

"Absolutely. Don't you think you'd better go call your Strike Team?"

"Huh? Oh, yeah. The Strike Team!" He hurried off, his mind finally back on business.

Fox was still looking a little pale, and clinging to New Jersey, so I offered to get her usual cure-all--a large Coke with lemon. On my way to the kitchen, I passed Bennu and Cait.

"You don't have to be afraid to talk to people, you know," he was telling her. "You really have a lovely voice. Would you like to hear how it sounds to me?"

The little girl nodded, then asked softly, "Is Pecos going to be all right?" She paused, eyes wide with wonder at what she had just heard for the

first time. "My voice really isn't ugly, is it?"

"No, it's not ugly at all. And if all of us here have our way, Pecos'll be just fine. Now, we all have a lot to do, and I know that you want to do your part." Again Cait smiled, then hurried off to find Tommy and see what she could do to help.

Next Bennu came over to where New Jersey and I still attended to Fox. "You're going to be able to handle what's ahead," he told her. She drew a deep breath and nodded, her confidence returned.

Fortunately for my state of mind, we did not have long to wait. Within an hour, a cassette arrived via special courier with our instructions.

"Greetings, Buckaroo Banzai. How pleased I am to find that you have finally come to your senses, and for once have not chosen to try to match wits with me." The hair at the nape of my neck stood on end as the voice of Hanoi Xan, Scourge of the World, came out of the speakers. Peggy, who had spent unknown years under the control of the unspeakable beast, paled visibly, and even Buckaroo had to fight to maintain his equilibrium. The sneering voice continued relentlessly. "If you wish to see this woman again, you will follow these instructions precisely: You and your 'Hong Kong Cavaliers' will play tonight at the bar whose location you will find in the envelope. Bring with you that one who is able to duplicate the efforts of the deceased Sluggo. You will receive further instructions after you arrive at the appointed place." The tape went blank and stopped.

"Tommy, have you been able to decipher Sluggo's notes?" Buckaroo spoke with chilling quietness.

"Why do you need Sluggo's notes?" Bennu asked. "I can open Mira's sarcophagus. And as dangerous as you say it will be, I should be the one to take the risk."

"No, we'll need you to help bring in the Strike Team at Xan's hideout," Buckaroo replied. "You can't pull this off by yourself, and we can't do it without you, Bennu--you're the only one who can lead us to Pecos and Mira. Anyway, the future of our world is at stake, and you're too important to it to risk having you fall into Xan's clutches should something go wrong."

Reluctantly, Bennu agreed.

"And you'll need the notes," Buckaroo now turned back to Tommy, "so that you can make a good show of trying to open the sarcophagus without doing any damage to it. Were you able to decipher them? Bennu can help brief you on things you should avoid, before we get to the gig."

"I could figure out some of them, but it wouldn't hurt to have Bennu's input. There were some technical things I didn't really understand, but Billy thinks he does."

"Then we'll have to send both of you. If you're willing."

"Of course!" they replied emphatically, in unison.

"Good. You two come with me. New Jersey, you too. Bennu, we'll meet you on the bus in thirty minutes. The rest of you, start loading up the gear."

We scattered to do as we were told. Fox and Ward hung back, unsure of what to do.

"Don't you have to get your instruments or something?" Ward asked her.

"I don't play with the band. I hope that Buckaroo will let us go along as spectators, though. Pecos is my friend, and even if we're really not needed, I want to be there."

"I think I know what you mean. I'm an old man, and there isn't much I can do to help Bennu. But if I ever think he needs me, I have to be there."

Whatever Buckaroo and New Jersey were up to, it was quickly accomplished. They rejoined us before we had even finished loading the bus. Billy and Tommy looked a little uncomfortable and scratched at the back of their heads.

"Subcutaneous transmitters, implanted just under the scalp," New Jersey whispered to Fox. "Just in case Bennu can't get a fix on where they're being taken."

A wise precaution, I had to admit. Though I knew that there are more things in heaven and on Earth than are dreamt of in even my philosophy, Bennu's mind-reading act was just too iffy a thing for me to feel comfortable with the idea of depending on it as Pecos' sole means of rescue.

Normally, we are all in high spirits when we are about to play a gig. But on this night, the mood was definitely subdued. And under the circumstances, especially after my loss of control earlier, the others, for the most part, seemed uncertain of how to act around me. Consequently, I was left to myself until Fox and New Jersey saw that I was alone and joined me.

"Where's Bennu?" I asked. Fox seemed to be attracted to him like iron filings to a magnet, and I was surprised that she had let him out of her sight.

"Upstairs with the Boss." The two of them sat down on either side of me, and with a great deal of insight, refrained from trying to reassure me.

Just before we arrived at our destination, Buckaroo, Bennu, and Ward came down and called a final meeting.

"Okay, this is the plan. Tommy's Strike Team will be scattered through out the house. In case of trouble, Tommy will signal them to go into action. Those of us on stage will be armed, except for Bennu, of course. Sorry, Sid, he'll be playing keyboard for us tonight, since he'll be able to see trouble coming before the rest of us do. You and Fox will ride shotgun, and protect Ward.

"I don't need to tell you what our success or failure means to Pecos. But there is a lot more hanging on this than the life of a friend, no matter how dear. Those of you who have had the chance to spend some time with Bennu should have an idea of the greater task before us--the recovery of the golden sarcophagus Xan has in his possession--and its importance. If we fail in this, we may well wish there were no tomorrow."

As we began unloading the instruments, I saw Bennu go over to Fox and New Jersey. "You both are so lucky, I'm glad you seem to know it."

"You're not as alone as you sometimes feel, Bennu. You have Dr. Frazier, of course, but now you have us, as well. We have people all over the country, all over the world, to help you. And Mira." Now it was Fox's turn to be encouraging. "After tonight, you will be with Mira."

The first set got off to a slow start, as the circumstances had made us somewhat apprehensive. But Bennu proved to be a superb musician, capable of following even B. Banzai's improvisations, and wowing us with some terrific licks of his own.

Fox and New Jersey sat by the side of the stage, dealing with the many requests that immediately started coming to us, written on napkins, matchbooks and scraps of paper.

Though he did not miss a note, I saw Bennu tense and narrow his eyes as he scrutinized a couple that entered the small club near the end of the set. There was something odd about the woman. She walked stiffly, unnaturally, as if she were under the influence of a controlled substance. This impression was substantiated by the fact that she was wearing dark glasses. The man was unremarkable except for the fact that he did not remove the stocking cap he wore pulled down over the lobes of both ears, even though it was quite warm in the club.

Almost immediately, he scrawled something on a piece of paper and had it passed up to Fox. Upon reading it, she put it aside, turned and looked at Bennu. He nodded once. That was the signal--contact had been made.

We made that the last song of the set and hastily retired back stage, waiting anxiously as Buckaroo quickly read the note for himself.

"I've been invited to join our 'friend' for a drink now, alone except for Tommy and Billy. Jersey, where are they seated?"

"In a corner, backs to the walls," New Jersey was able to inform him.

"Bennu, were you able to get inside this character's head? Good. Now, I want you and Reno to stand off to one side where I can see you, but this Bravo won't notice you. Anything that you can pick up that might be of help, tell

Reno. He'll sign it to me. The rest of you, stay cool. Let's save our energy for the fun part later--meeting Xan, and getting Tommy, Billy, --and Mira-- back safely."

"Battle stations," Fox said under her breath, then gave me a thumbs-up.

From our position across the room, Bennu and I could see Buckaroo getting a short argument about the extra person. But B. Banzai's powers of persuasion are masterful, even against one of Xan's minions, and the matter was settled to our satisfaction. I noticed that Bennu was intently studying the woman at the table.

"It's she, Reno. It's Pecos."

"You sure, man?" I wanted to believe him, but..."I saw them come in. That woman doesn't walk like Pecos, or sit like her, or anything like that." Knowing how effective disguise can be, I was careful to study clues that were less easily camouflaged.

"I'm sure of it. Your thoughts of her are strong enough that I can recognize her without any doubt. She is acting strangely because she has been drugged. Don't worry, the drug is powerful, but it will wear off in time, and she won't suffer any lasting after-effects."

Gratefully, I passed the information along to the Boss. Bennu then kept me informed of all that happened next.

The Bravo stood, dragged Pecos to her feet, pushed her over to Buckaroo, and motioned to Billy and Tommy to come with him.

"Where are you taking my people?" Buckaroo did not expect an answer other than the one he got.

"As if I'd tell you!" The Bravo was most insolent, but Bennu smiled triumphantly, and gave Buckaroo an 'okay' sign.

After the Bravo left, I could barely restrain myself from rushing to Pecos's side.

"Take it easy, Reno," the Boss whispered. "Just act casual, we don't want to alert these nice people that something is going on."

Of course, I had to agree with that, so I took Pecos' other arm and helped him walk her back to the dressing room. There, Peggy and Fox immediately began ministering to her: loosening her collar, rubbing her wrists, patting her face with a cool damp paper towel. Our two doctors also gave her the once-over and pronounced her physical condition stable. I could only hope that Bennu was correct about her mental state as well.

Somehow, we got through the last set. When we got backstage, Pecos was starting to look and act more her old self, and Peggy proudly displayed the area map she had slipped out to an all-night convenience store to procure. Bennu went to it at once, closed his eyes, and after a moment's meditation, put his finger on a spot.

"Here is where we go," he opened his eyes and spoke.

"How do you know?" Pinky asked, mystified.

"As is the way with all but the most accomplished liars, the Bravo was unable to keep the true answer from coming to mind when Buckaroo asked him where the others were to be taken. And lacking the mental discipline of that other--Lo Pep?--he could not shield his thoughts from me."

During this time, Fox, who had assumed the role of road manager, began directing the members of the Strike Team in the loading of our instruments. Seeing that this was proceeding smoothly, Buckaroo scrutinized the map.

"Okay, they must have had a plane or a chopper near by--if Bennu is right, they're heading to Boston."

"A place called Salem," Bennu elaborated.

"Oh, wow," Fox said, sounding amusingly like Mrs. Johnson. "Bad vibes!"

"Yes, very," Buckaroo agreed. "And it's a long way away. We'd better get started."

"Are we going to call Casper and have him take us in his chopper?" I felt it was a reasonable suggestion. Buckaroo considered it.

"Nope, not with this many. We'll drive all night, take some short cuts I

know. Give Xan a surprise with his breakfast. Tommy and Billy have instructions to stall as much as possible, so we should arrive well before they get the sarcophagus open."

After driving all night, we reached Salem in the eerie predawn hours. Heretofore, I had only known the town by reputation, but it had, as Fox had said, "bad vibes". While Buckaroo and I consulted the receiver picking up the signals from Tommy and Billy's implants, Bennu stood in the middle of the town and turned in a slow circle. Having gotten a fix on our comrades, our leader went to confer with him. They agreed on the direction we were now to take, and we set off on foot, weapons drawn and ready.

"Bennu?" New Jersey suddenly noticed that that unreadable young man (and I use the word 'young' fully aware that he was at least one thousand years old!) had stayed behind. The sun had just begun to come up, and Bennu unbuttoned his shirt and bared his chest, catching the early rays with his medallion. I shook my head in disbelief as his body began to glow, faintly at first, then more intensely. The whole procedure took no more than a few seconds, and then he was ready to join us.

Pecos, claiming that her head was clear and she was feeling quite fit after the sleep she had on the bus, also insisted on coming with us. Fox gave her the UZI she had brought along for herself, and took one of New Jersey's pistols. Bennu, to my continuing irritation, still refused to carry a weapon.

"Gallows Hill," Fox pointed out to me as we approached, silently as Indians. "Where they hanged or burned all the witches in 1612." It seemed an appropriate area for Xan's dastardly deeds.

Bennu led us to the rusty iron gates of an abandoned estate. The grounds were overgrown with weeds, and the house itself was ancient and fallen into decrepitude. Scrawled on a faded hand-painted sign nailed to the building's exterior were what I immediately recognized as Vietnamese characters that identified the structure as once having served as a Buddhist temple, perhaps in a post-Vietnamese War refugee relocation project. Through the structure's haphazardly boarded-up windows, I could see faint light shining.

We silently spilled through a gap in the fence and approached the house. Several yards away from the structure, Buckaroo motioned for us all to stop and listen.

Inside the building, I heard a shout of rage and the sound of a blow.

"You will do this thing, NOW! I have lost patience with your wasting of time." It seemed that Xan knew exactly how important the thing he had in his possession was, if he had left his fortress in Sabah to be present at its opening. But then, Hanoi Xan knows better than to trust his hirelings.

"Just be cool," Tommy's voice came across as just a little warmer than usual. "These things take time. Of course, if you want to risk the whole thing going up in a puff of smoke, that's your business." He got a growl and a stream of Vietnamese profanities in reply.

Buckaroo chose not to wait any longer. We split up, half of us--led by Bennu--circled around to the back, the other half staying with Buckaroo. The Kolodny Brothers spread themselves out at intervals, stationed to apprehend anyone who might escape our initial assault. At a pre-arranged signal, both men kicked in the doors simultaneously and we swarmed in to surround the group. Fox and Peggy immediately located and trained their weapons on Lo Pep, both women looking fully capable of cold-blooded murder. 'Wouldn't take much to make their day,' I had time for the brief thought.

At our entrance, Billy and Tommy joined Buckaroo's group, gratefully accepting the weapons the Rug Suckers passed along to them. Meanwhile, Buckaroo did not shirk from this face-to-face confrontation with his mortal enemy. With cold deliberateness, he trained both of his Navy Colts, the guns he had kept all these years for just this purpose, on the creature (when referring to Hanoi Xan, I can never bring myself to use the word 'man') responsible for his parents' deaths.

"Xan, I can only kill you once," our leader was saying, "but in even your case, I will be merciful and quick."

But before he could pull the triggers, we were suddenly and unexpectedly plunged into darkness as the room was swept by a powerful force, the likes of which I had never before encountered. It was as if huge, icy fingers grabbed us and shook us. We were helplessly tossed around like rag dolls, and I was knocked off my feet by it, as were the others. As I hit the ground, I simultaneously rolled into a prone position and, as the lights flickered on again, fired off several rounds in quick succession, neatly eliminating several Bravos who had seemingly come from nowhere and entered the melees to attack us. The gun fight lasted several minutes, during which time I was unable to observe the activities of any of the others. Then things got too close and heavy for gunfire and I couldn't shoot without risking hitting some of our own people. I holstered my gun and started swinging.

I must have been struck during a hand-to-hand engagement with a particularly determined Bravo, for I seemed to have lost the upper hand in that contest. I heard a shot, the Bravo fell away from me, and my lovely, bird-like Pecos was there cradling my head in her arms.

Finally, my head cleared and I was able to see that the battle was over. It cheered me to see that none of our own seemed to be numbered among the dead, although Buckaroo and New Jersey, and Benu, too, for that matter, were kept busy seeing to the wounded.

"Xan? Lo Pep?" I was barely able to get the questions out.

Pecos shrugged and shook her head angrily. "Gone. Don't ask me how, but when that blast--whatever it was--struck, they got the hell out. They must have had some kind of secret escape route, because the Kolodny Brothers didn't see anyone outside, other than the three Bravos they caught trying to flee."

"Leaving their underlings, as usual, to cover their escape." Buckaroo spoke with distaste for such cowardice. "But what about you, Reno? You okay?"

"Yeah, sure " I struggled to sit upright. "Just give me a second. What's Benu up to?"

The man in question was carefully inspecting a golden sarcophagus, familiar to me from the sketch that had started us on this adventure.

"How far did you get in opening it?" he asked Billy.

"Not even to step one. We managed to stall Xan better than he knew."

"Do you want us to take it back to the Institute to open it?" Buckaroo asked.

"No, I can do it here, without any of your equipment. And there's too great a risk that we may be ambushed along the way."

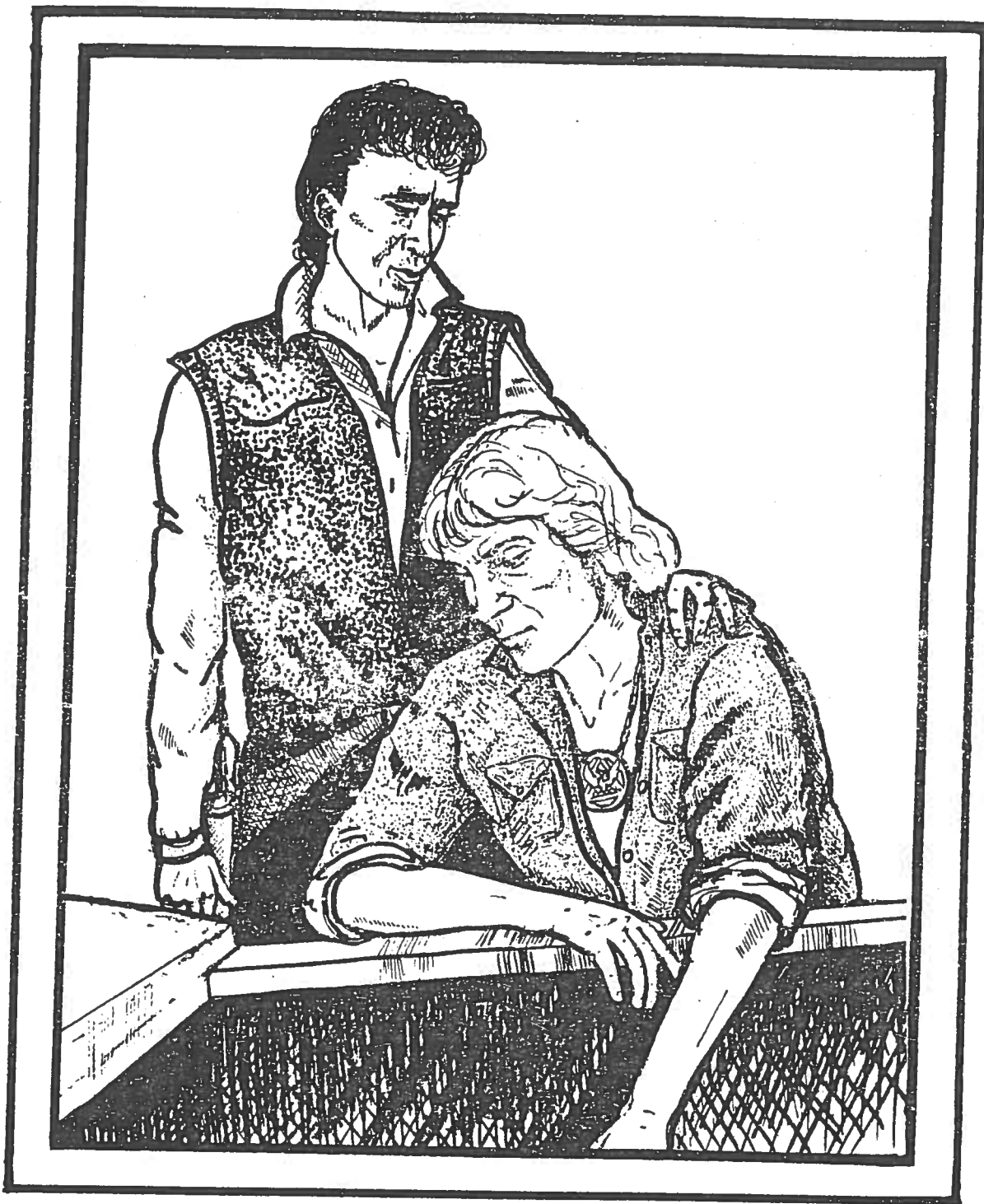
So we all stood at a safe distance and in respectful silence as Benu felt along the edge of the rim, pressing here and there as if to manipulate unseen levers and switches. At times, he would call on Billy or Tommy for assistance, but otherwise worked alone, swiftly but without undue haste. At last, it seemed that he was finished, for he straightened, drew a deep breath, then took his amulet in one hand and held it forward. His eyes closed in concentration, and for a moment, nothing happened. Then we heard a high-pitched whine that seemed to be coming from the medallion-- he was using sonics to command the sarcophagus to open! Anxiously, we held our collective breath as with a rumble, the lid slid open to reveal... nothing.

The coffin was empty.

"Noooo!" The anguish in that one spoken word made Benu's great disappointment clear to all of us. He leaned against the sarcophagus in despair.

Buckaroo went to him and laid a comforting hand on his shoulder as both men stared into the sarcophagus vacant interior. We all knew that, perhaps, better than anyone else, our leader could understand what Benu was feeling at that moment.

Suddenly, the room grew dark, and a wind carrying a foul stench with it swept over us. The only light seemed to be coming from Benu himself.



"Get away from here, all of you," he said to us. He was braced as if expecting an attack. To Buckaroo he said, "You can't help me, and there's no point in endangering yourselves." We stayed where we were.

It started softly at first, then rose in a deafening crescendo--the most diabolical laughter I had ever heard. It came from nowhere, and yet was all around us. I would wager that the rest of us cowered at the sound. Only the stalwart Buckaroo Banzai, and that stranger, Bennu, who was so much like him, were able to face the unseen demon with courage.

"You lose, Bennu," the laughter became the most evil voice imaginable. "I have her now. Your search has been in vain, and now your mission is doomed."

"Who the hell was that?" Pecos asked. We were back at the Institute, having brought the sarcophagus back with us. "Or should I say 'what'?"

"That was Yago, my ancient enemy," Bennu replied, looking at Buckaroo. "One who's even more evil and hungry for power than Hanoi Xan. He has powers, I fear, your world is defenseless against. We only survived their deadly alliance because Yago desired it, so that he could gloat over my failure."

Buckaroo nodded seriously. "We have to find some way of keeping them from teaming up again." He threw an arm around Peggy's shoulders and drew her closer to him, remembering a day just a few years ago, when he stood beside an open grave and an empty coffin. "Where do you go from here?"

"I don't know. Now it is more important than ever to find Mira. If Yago has her, I fear for her. His hatred of me is great and he would like nothing better than to see my mission fail utterly. I can only continue to look for her, to find where he has taken her. If only I can accomplish this before it is too late! She still provides my best and perhaps final chance to know what my mission is--and for me to remember what it is that I am supposed to do." Bennu sighed: the magnitude of the task was as apparent as ever to him. "At least I know her sarcophagus is in good hands. I wish I knew what damage Yago has done to it, but I don't dare take the time to find out. I must caution you not to tinker with it. Yago may have laid traps that you would be unable to detect. I'll return when I can, but until then, you must keep it safe."

Buckaroo assured him that we would all be responsible for its safety until he returned.

"Remember, anything we can do to help..." Fox reminded him. He smiled at her. "And this place is Sanctuary, any time you need it."

"I'll remember. But this is something I'd better do alone. It is good knowing that I have friends like you and Ward, that you are more typical of the people of this planet than Preminger and his kind." He looked up at Mrs. Johnson and Pecos. "There were three here before, that I have missed. I didn't remember them at first, but so pure and noble were they, that I can feel their presence here even now. Rawhide, Flyboy, and Sluggo will live on in your hearts forever."

He rose to go, and Cait and Tommy brought him his bag and jacket. "Maybe someday you'll get to meet my friend Tim." he told them, taking his things and thanking them.

"And maybe you'll get to meet our friend Jake," Fox spoke hopefully, thinking about the multihandicapped boy that she was teaching.

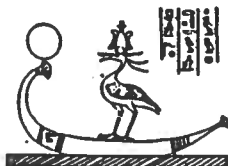
"Carly, you have done as much for Jake as anyone could. Better, for you know him better than anyone else. I might be able to see into his mind, but only you could understand what I saw there. You have opened the door for him, and given him a glimpse of the Golden Light. Where he goes from here is now up to him.

"Good bye, friends, and thank you. I may take you up on your offers of help someday." Bennu shouldered his small pack and waved goodbye to us. Ward Frazier walked him to the Institute's front gate.

The older scientist stayed a few more days, eagerly accepting Buckaroo's invitation to inspect our facilities further. I believe that arrangements were made, such as we have with Jacques Cousteau, to accommodate any of our people wishing to participate in a work-study program at the National Center for Astro-Archeology.

"I suppose you'll be the first to sign up," I remarked to Fox as I passed her a glass of Karakoumiss. Now that things had quieted down, we were able to relax with drinks and good conversation.

"Could be," she replied enigmatically, taking a sip of the bitter fermented mare's milk and winking at New Jersey.



The Scenes of the Crime

by

Leni R. Sommer

I knew that if I came whistling down to breakfast that morning, I'd be letting myself in for a great deal of good-natured ribbing. But I was unable to help myself. Fortunately, the kitchen was empty except for Fox and a couple of new Interns.

"We're all glad that Pecos is coming home today," Fox told me with a smile as she poured me a cup of coffee. "What time is she docking?"

"About 3:30, I think. You and New Jersey coming with me to pick her up?"

"Yeah. Peggy and I have some errands in NYC, so we're going in a little early and will meet you there. Buckaroo and Sid will fly in with you later."

"Well, I can't sit around here all day. Maybe I can talk them into us all going together."

"Great, if you boys can be ready to leave pretty soon."

The revised plan was agreeable to the two doctors, and soon the five of us, and Cait, were on our way in the bus. We parked near the dock, then split up, the women heading up-town.

Fox's errands brought their little group to Columbia University, where they paid lengthy visits to the library and bookstore. As they were leaving the latter, Peggy seemed suddenly to become aware that the whole area was dominated by the massive, looming structure of the Cathedral Church of Saint John the Divine. Mrs. Buckaroo Banzai stood on the pavement, staring at it in fascination.

"C'mon, Peggy," Fox attempted to urge her. "We gotta go meet the guys."

"We have time," Peggy's voice was trance-like, a bad sign, Fox knew. "You haven't seen it, yet, have you? Well, you should, and Cait, too. It won't take long. I need to go there." Then she headed towards it as if drawn against her will. Her companions had no choice but to follow her.

"Saint John's is the largest gothic cathedral in the world," Fox figured that she might as well take advantage of the situation to instruct her daughter. "And it is actually still under construction, with local people being trained in such crafts as stone carving and wood working, and being employed in its construction." She was even beginning to be glad they had come, for the peace of the great, empty Cathedral was a welcome relief after the commotion of the city. Someone was playing Bach on the superb organ, and they were content to wander about inspecting the seven chapels until Fox noticed that someone was missing.

"Where's Peggy?" she asked Cait, getting a shrug in reply. She then looked up and saw a teenaged boy polishing some wood in the sanctuary. "Where's the bride's changing room?" At her desperate question, the boy indicated a direction, and Fox took off, followed closely by Cait.

They found Peggy, as they had hoped and feared, in that location. She was holding a vase of yellow roses, staring at it in horrified fascination.

"Peggy," Fox called softly. Getting no response she tried again, more loudly. Peggy reacted by throwing the vase, and though Fox quickly put an arm up to protect herself, she was struck on the cheek by the missile.

Fox was somewhat surprised to find herself sitting on the floor, her daughter bent anxiously over her. "Go get help," she told Cait. Peggy, now past the verge of hysteria, was pelting them with roses, screaming and crying all the while. The child hastened to obey.



Fortunately, Cait didn't have far to go. Just a few yards from that turbulent room, she literally ran into the teenager from the sanctuary, as well as two older men who had been drawn by the commotion. Cait led the way back to the changing room.

Fox was trying to physically subdue Peggy and the two women were wrestling in earnest on the floor. Fox seemed about to get Peggy pinned when the latter suddenly shoved her and started to run out of the room. She was stopped, briefly, by the smaller of the two men.

He seemed to be rather elderly and frail at first glance, but his size and age belied his strength. He held the distraught woman's arm until he saw her face. "Peggy?" he whispered in disbelief, then let her go.

"Theo, over here," the other man, a priest, called from where he was helping Fox to her feet.

"Poor thing," she told me later, "he looked like he'd seen a ghost! And as I found out later, in a sense, he had!"

"I'm all right," Fox told them both. "Go find Peggy."

Cait stayed with her mother while the priest took Fox's suggestion. The smaller man, the one called Theo, stayed where he was.

"Did I hear you right?" he asked incredulously. "Did you call her 'Peggy'?"

Not feeling up to any involved explanations, Fox merely nodded. She then followed the trail left by Peggy and the other man. She found Peggy kneeling at the altar beneath the Octagon, staring at the candle flames before her.

"She doesn't seem to be aware of anything going on around her," the priest said, passing his hand quickly before her face in demonstration. Peggy didn't blink.

"It's all right. She gets like this sometimes. She'll be okay in a little bit." Fox didn't care to go into details with strangers, but the last time Peggy developed this condition was after attempting to blow my head off nearly two years earlier. It had taken her several weeks to come out of it. Now Fox took her friend's hand and tugged gently. "Come on, Peggy. Let's go home."

Peggy attempted to rise in answer to Fox's gentle urging, but wobbled uncertainly on her feet. The man supported her. "I think perhaps a cup of tea might be in order," he suggested.

Fox hesitated, but seeing how pale Cait looked, and feeling a little shaky as well, gratefully accepted. They were taken to an apartment in another building on the Cathedral grounds, and shown a bedroom where Peggy could lie down.

Fox stayed with her, talking soothingly until she closed her eyes. When she came out, Fox found their host waiting with a cup of tea for her.

"How's your friend?" the priest asked solicitously.

"Asleep. It's probably the best thing for her."

"I'm sure you're right. Now, what about you? That's a nasty bruise on your cheek. You should have it looked at."

"Don't worry. My daddy's the second best doctor in the whole world.

He'll take care of her." Fox could only look at her daughter in amazement, not only at the child's reference to Dr. Sidney Zweibel, but at the fact she had spoken at all in front of a stranger.

"I think he'd probably recommend that we put some ice on it." He soon had Fox, who was completely charmed by his soft English accent, settled in a comfortable chair, with her tea nearby and an ice pack on her rapidly blackening eye. She had even dozed off, when the mantel clock struck the half hour. Glancing at her watch, she was alarmed to see that it was 4:30.

She turned to Cait. "Weren't we supposed to be at the dock at 3:00?" The little girl nodded. "We're in deep sewage, kiddo. Do we have a Go-Phone? Yoi. Can I use the phone, Father--?"

"Tom. Just call me Father Tom. And, of course. The phone's right over here."

Fox placed her collect call, holding the receiver away from her ear when Mrs. Johnson answered.

"Yes, Mrs. Johnson, I know they're worried. That's why I'm calling. Could you please just get a hold of him and ask him to come get us? Excuse me--where are we, exactly?"

"The Dean's residence in Cathedral House."

"Thanks. The Dean's residence. At St. John's. Please, Mrs. Johnson, you just gave me a ten decibel hearing loss! Yes, I can imagine what he'll say, but you'll still have to tell him where we are! Thank you! Yeah, I hope we'll be home soon, too. Bueno bye."

As she returned to her seat, the old man called Theo and the young altar boy entered the apartment and helped themselves to tea. Father Tom did the honors, introducing the boy as Dave.

"I think I met Theo briefly. Were you the one playing the organ? It was wonderful. I'm Carly and this is Caitlin. Listen, I'm sorry to put you out like this. Buckaroo should be here to get us real soon, and then you can go back to what you were doing."

"Buckaroo?" Theo recovered from his amazement finally. "Buckaroo Banzai? Then that is Peggy! But...."

"But," Fox understood his confusion, but her head was throbbing, she was finding breathing difficult, and she, more than before, didn't feel like explaining. "I'm afraid it's a long story."

"Buckaroo Banzai? Have I heard that name somewhere?" Cait, whose life revolves around this very man, could not believe that her hero was not better known to Dave, especially since he seemed to spend a lot of time at St John's. I think we all assumed that the wedding had become a local legend. She was just about to enlighten him when we arrived.

Buckaroo and New Jersey went straight to Fox, who took the latter's hand and leaned up against him. Our leader gave them a second or two of silent communion, but then could contain himself no longer.

"Carly, what the hell were you thinking of?"

"It wasn't my idea, Boss. It was Peggy's."

"Well, why didn't you stop her?"

"Think what you're saying, Buckaroo. Who am I to force anyone to do anything against her will? Besides, she thought it might help her remember the wedding. Maybe it was time she confronted this."

B. Banzai flushed as deep a red as I have seen him do only rarely, then nodded. "Where is she?" Fox indicated the way to the bedroom, and he hurried off.

When Pecos and I approached, filled with questions of our own, I could see that the bruise on Fox's face was beginning to look really very nasty.

"Rough time, huh?" I commented.

"Not so rough as some I've known," but she smiled weakly, and did not remove her head from Jersey's shoulder.

"Why are you holding your side like that?" Sidney Zweibel was suddenly not only concerned fiance, but dedicated physician, as well.

"It hurts a little to breathe. I think maybe I cracked a rib."

"She's still asleep," Buckaroo came back out, his rationality returned. "What exactly happened?"

"She seemed fine at first--quiet and a little thoughtful, but that was understandable, under the circumstances, I thought. But when she went into the changing room and saw the yellow roses, she just freaked."

"Yellow roses! I'd better go check this out. Reno, come with me, please. That's okay, Sid, you just stay here." The two of us went off to investigate, while Pecos elected to stay behind.

"What was that about remembering the wedding?" I'm told New Jersey asked as soon as we were gone.

Pecos answered him, since Peggy had confided more in her than in Fox. "Peggy doesn't. Remember the wedding, that is. At least not all of it. She says she remembers all of us going to St. John's, and getting ready, but it's hazy. And she doesn't remember the ceremony at all, and certainly nothing that happened afterward."

"With the drugs Xan must have had her on, the surgery he did, and the surgery I did, that's really not surprising. The amnesia could have, at least in part, an organic cause." Dr. Sidney Zweibel quickly dropped his clinical detachment and showed a normal human desire to know the sordid details. "But if she doesn't remember getting married, does that mean...?"

"Sidney!" Fox was genuinely shocked at the question. "What goes on in their room is none of our business!"

"Look at them, Cowboy," Pecos added. "Their commitment to each other is as strong as it ever was, maybe stronger. I never did understand why they wanted a big church show like that."

"Look, I know it's a little unpleasant not being able to remember something," New Jersey mused. "Especially such an important event, but if the roses set her off, she must remember more than she realizes. With a little help, she can probably get most of it back. So maybe she'll stop being so hyper."

"I don't think it's so much the fact that she can't remember as why she can't remember," Fox offered. "She's been through a lot in the past few years, but the worst of it has to be finding out that all her life, Xan has been manipulating her, using her as a tool to trap Buckaroo Banzai. How can she be sure which feelings are her own, and which were engineered by Xan? And how can she be sure that her life is her own, even now? Nobody doubts your surgical skills, Sid, but there's no way on Earth to know if you got everything, or if she's still a walking time bomb. Remember how she was after almost blowing Reno away. I think she's still haunted by the fear she may try something like that again."

It wasn't long before Buckaroo and I returned from sifting through the shards of broken glass and crushed roses.

"We didn't find anything," Buckaroo announced.

"Was there a card with the flowers?" Pecos wanted to know.

"No," I told her.

"There never is," Dave informed us.

"What do you mean?" Buckaroo practically demanded.

"Well, they've been coming every couple of days for over a year now,

with just instructions that they're to be placed in the bride's changing room."

"Well, that makes it a little easier. All we need to do is hang around a few days and see if we can catch the delivery truck."

By asking him to refill her plate, Fox was able draw Buckaroo's attention to the food. Not staying to converse, however, he took a handful of the small sandwiches and went back to check on Peggy. Fox struggled to her feet and started after him, but Pecos stopped her. "Don't be a Jewish mother, Fox. Buckaroo knows what he's doing where she's concerned."

"I am a Jewish mother," Fox muttered, but then acquiesced.

"Well, that's good. Some of my crew mates are interested in becoming Blue Blaze Irregulars, so I invited them to dinner Sunday, knowing that it's usually your night to cook. You should love having five extra people to feed."

"What are Blue Blaze Irregulars?" I could imagine Perfect Tommy's indignant reaction to this innocent query posed by Dave.

"Why don't you, Theo and Father Tom join us on Sunday and find out," Fox quickly extended the invitation. At that moment, the Banzais rejoined us, Peggy looking a little dazed, but better than I had expected her to.

"Buckaroo, we invited them to come for a visit this Sunday," Fox broke the awkward silence that accompanied them.

"Fine. Do they have directions and transportation, or do we need to send the bus for them?"

"We have access to a car, thank you, Dr. Banzai," Theo assured him.

Peggy studiously avoided looking at Fox and Cait. Suddenly her gaze fell on Theo, at whom she stared with great fascination. "You were at the wedding, weren't you?" she asked softly.

"Yes, my dear. I played the organ. Don't you remember?"

"Yes! 'The Prince of Denmark'." She smiled, pleased with this new-found memory. Buckaroo squeezed her arm encouragingly, then noticed that Fox was looking very shaky. We made our farewells and set off for the bus.

"When did Cait start calling you 'Daddy'?" I heard Fox ask Jersey as we left the building.

"When you were in Newfoundland with GreenPeace. Does it make you uncomfortable?"

"No, but it does make for some awkward questions."

"Well, any time you're ready for me to make an honest woman of you, just let me know."

"Soon, Sidney. I promise."

It was fortunate that we hadn't parked too far away, for, true to form, Fox had waited until all the excitement was over to go into shock. Buckaroo insisted that New Jersey get her settled in his own private cubicle, and leaving them alone, came down to ride with the rest of us.

"I didn't mean to hurt her," Peggy said yet one more time. Buckaroo nodded his understanding, but I positively bristled.

"You never do, do you? Well this time, lady, you came too damn close!"

"That's enough, Reno. I've known you to go a little crazy on at least one occasion."

Grudgingly, I had to admit the truth of this. But my doubts concerning Peggy, those I had had since the day we got her out of the New Brunswick jail, resurfaced. I quickly separated myself from the the others and went to the back of the bus.

"Sulking? That isn't like you, Reno." I didn't know how to answer

Pecos. In the months since the operation, Pecos had managed to dissolve the hostility she had felt towards Penny Priddy, and resurrect her friendship with Peggy. I didn't know why I couldn't do the same.

Peggy, although stunned and confused initially, did not go into the catatonic stupor we all feared. She did tread lightly, though, until she was sure what kind of reception she would receive from the rest of us. The others needed no admonitions from B. Banzai to offer support and understanding, and I kept my distance until I could do the same.

In the meantime, Billy and I were dispatched to New York City to see if we could confirm our suspicions concerning the origin of the yellow roses that had sent us all into such turmoil. Father Tom had offered to get the name of the florist from the truck, and even talk to the delivery boy, but Buckaroo declined, reluctant to endanger outsiders by involving them with Hanoi Xan.

Fox did indeed have a cracked rib, but the injury couldn't keep her down for long. On Sunday, she declared herself fit to handle the preparations for the company we had coming. When I saw the Interns preparing the outdoors barbeque pit, I began to experience more than a little anticipation for the evening repast.

"I hope you all like lamb," Fox greeted the new arrivals. "Besides, being an easy way to feed a crowd, Mongolian Lamb is a favorite around here. And as a special treat, Tong has offered to make sticky rice. But we have lots of time before dinner, if you'd like to take a look around. I know Perfect Tommy is dying to give you his spiel on the Blue Blaze Irregulars." She had added the hot rocks to the body cavity of the lamb earlier, and by the time we all met back at the house an hour later, the air was filled with the mouth-watering smell of roasting meat and singed wool.

We were seated on cushions around a low table, passing platters and baskets of food around, when Peggy noticed our guests trying to use their forks to serve themselves rice. "Watch how Cait eats the sticky rice," she suggested as the child grabbed a larged handful of the hot grain, dropped it on her plate, then broke off a smaller piece and squeezed it in her fist before commencing to eat it. The others followed suit gingerly.

During the course of the meal, as we spoke of inconsequentialities, I noticed that one of the girls, who had already demonstrated a facility with languages, had been watching the members of Team Banzai interestedly. "You're using American Sign Language, even when you switch languages," she concluded, pleased with her discovery.

We were all a little embarrassed at realizing that we had slipped into our patois, that unique mixture of languages spoken at the Institute that we often use when talking amongst ourselves. And the simultaneous use of sign language had become second nature after Fox and Cait had joined us.

"Actually, we use Signed English," Fox replied. "The difference is in syntax. It gets really fun when someone's speaking German!"

"But why do you?" the girl wanted to know.

"For me," Cait volunteered. "I don't hear very well, and the grown ups don't want me to feel left out. We even have a TDD so I can use the phone."

"I thought you talk kind of funny!" Seeing the disapproving looks that the rest of us gave him, the young man making the comment had the good grace to look as if he wished the earth would open up and swallow him.

I felt some concern about Cait, who had only recently been persuaded to use her voice more often. While she had courageously spoken a few words to visitors before, she had never before been as conversable as she was that night. Thoughtless remarks such as this one had kept her from talking in front of all but the people she was closest to until just a few months ago.

"I thought the same thing about you," Cait told the the boy, referring to his New England accent. "I can hardly understand you."

"Guess those Powdermilk Biscuits are doing the trick," New Jersey remarked drily.

"Huh?" Tommy, like the rest of us, could not recall such a food ever having been served at the Institute.

"You've never needed them, Tommy," Fox informed him. "They give shy persons the courage to get up and do what needs to be done!"

"And actually, the TOD wasn't installed just for Cait, though we did get it on her birthday. And the first in-coming call was to her from Tommy, since he couldn't make it home for her party."

"What's a TOD?" another guest enquired.

"A telecommunications device for the deaf," Buckaroo answered her. "Fox and Cait have made us more aware of our less able-bodied members, and in the past year or so, we've done a lot of work to make the Institute fully accessible to our physically handicapped and visually impaired Blue Blaze Irregulars."

The meal ended, and Perfect Tommy and New Jersey, who were on k.p. that week, started to clear the table and serve the cake.

"What were you able to find out about the roses?" Father Tom asked me. As I said, he had assisted us during part of the operation, but not all.

"The flowers came from a certain florist shop in Brooklyn that we are all too familiar with," I explained, more for the benefit of of Pecos and the others who had not yet heard our results. "We questioned the delivery boy extensively, he claimed he didn't know anything."

"I think he was on the level, Buckaroo," Billy added. "He had both ears, and there were no suspicious scars behind either one. Anyway, since he wasn't able to tell us anything, Reno and I went to Brooklyn to do a little snooping after business hours."

"Billy--breaking and entering?" Mrs. Johnson's shock came from the knowlege that Billy usually did his best work in the comfort and privacy of the computer room.

"The shop is very primitive--not computerized at all," I interjected. "We had to get a look at the actual books. There's been a standing order for the roses since the day after Peggy's surgery. The bill is sent to a Post Office box. We got our hands on the paper work on it, but the address of the renter is a vacant lot. The box was paid for in advance, for a full year, and any mail has been collected after the Post Office is closed, so the Postmistress has never seen anyone connected to the box."

"I've been trying to trace the ownership of the flower shop," Perfect Tommy broke in, anxious to demonstrate the role he had played. "The trail led down a lot of blind alleys, but I was finally able to find a connection between it and the Buell Tool Company, and we all know who's behind that corporation."

No, we did not need to be told that Hanoi Xan was orchestrating this situation. We had suspected it all along. But it was more than a little disconcerting to realize that the villain still had a line on Peggy--that he knew precisely the day his control over her began to weaken, and that he anticipated her compulsion to return to St. John's.

"What have you been doing with the flowers?!" that tortured young woman asked softly.

"The Dean takes them to the hospitals when he makes his visits," the boy, Dave, replied.

"You've been letting sick people have those flowers?" Peggy was horrified.

"Well, yes. The Dean says that often they're the only flowers on the wards, and they really cheer the patients up." Dave obviously didn't know what to make of her agitation.

"It's all right, Peggy," Buckaroo hastened to reassure her. "These flowers are perfectly harmless. They were the day you were at the Cathedral, and there's no reason to believe that Xan has sabotaged the others. This is just his way of sending us a message, letting us know that he's still around. As if we needed any reminders."

"It is ironic, is it not, Buckaroo," Professor Hikita commented, "that such good has come from such evil intent."

We then launched into a lively discussion on the nature of good and evil, and whether or not such inadvertent good deeds should be judged by their end result or their evil intent.

At last the visit came to an end. Pecos's new recruits had proven themselves acceptable, especially the young man who had commented on Cait's speech, and plans were made for them to return to the Institute for orientation. Also, it seemed highly likely that we would be seeing Dave, Theo and Father Tom again, as well.

I cannot say that any of us were sleeping soundly that night, for the implications of yellow roses weighed heavily on all our minds. As has been revealed in the adventure, Across the Eighth Dimension, after Peggy's presumed death, Buckaroo acquired the habit of not sleeping more than an hour or two a night. Not a man to waste time, he continued this practice even after Peggy recovered from her surgery and moved into his room as his wife. On this occasion, He was in the projection room, reviewing the video tape of an operation he had recently performed. The patient was on the road to recovery, but had suffered several unforeseen complications in the process, so Buckaroo Banzai was watching the tape, at super slo-mo, one more time in an attempt to find an occasion when his performance had been less than perfection. The rest of us were tossing in uneasy slumber when we were startled into action by Peggy's terrified and terrifying screams.

"Daddy! Where's Penny? Daddy? No, no, no!" Peggy was then convulsed by sobs as she thrashed wildly about on the futon. Buckaroo pushed his way through the crowd that had gathered in and outside of his room, and took his wife into his arms, calming her with soft, reassuring words. At a sign from Big Norse, we began to file out. Pecos was reluctant to leave her friend, and hung back. As I pulled her gently from the room, I was touched by the pain and concern that filled our leader's face.

"Sidney, would you stay?"

Sidney Zweibel had, in the past year, begun to study psychiatry at his Alma Mater, Columbia University. "We have known for a long time," he explained to me when he announced his decision, "that the mind cannot be ignored during the treatment of the body. I think that, digging around in a patient's brain as we do in neurosurgery, it's all the more important to take into account his or her emotional state." While agreeing with the

logic of this reasoning, I still could not help but feel that the quiet New Jersey also sought to fill the void left by Rawhide's death. We continued to miss our late friend, but even more, there were times when we missed his psychological expertise even more. Now, with Peggy's obvious nightmare, B. Benzai had occasion to consult with his medical colleague.

"You know, Buckaroo, it's not that unusual to relive a traumatic experience through dreams." They spoke softly as they awaited my return.

"I know, Sid. In fact, I expected her to dream about the wedding. I don't know what triggered the dream about the fire."

"I was told that she doesn't remember the wedding."

"She doesn't remember the fire, either, at least not clearly. She was very young at the time, and I don't need to tell you that selective amnesia following such a trauma is not unusual. She accepts the fact that there was a fire, and that her parents and sister died in that fire, because this is what she has been told all her life. Just as she accepts that she and I are married--because she has been told that the wedding took place, by people she trusts."

"That's a hell of a lot to accept on faith."

"Yes, it is." Buckaroo pondered briefly. "There are a lot of unanswered questions about that fire, and about everything that's happened to Peggy since. I need your help to get those answers."

"If you think I can help...." New Jersey knew his friend would not have broached the subject without having something in mind.

"You've been doing extremely well in your studies. Do you feel competent to try a little analysis?"

"On Peggy?"

"She is your patient, Sidney. And after the job you did during the operation, she trusts you implicitly. And of course, you know all about the situation, more so than even any of the experts we have in the Blue Blazes. We've talked about it, and Peggy wants you to work with her."

"Well, yes, um, I suppose I could question her under hypnosis. When do want me to start?"

"There's no time like the present--she's on the brink of remembering something now.

"Well, yes, Buckaroo. You have a point. I guess I can try asking a few questions."

Buckaroo cradled his sobbing wife in his arms as New Jersey began talking in a soothing, semi-monotonous voice, urging her to relax. At last, his patient complied. As her sobbing ceased and her body grew limp, he began his questioning. "Where are you, Peggy?"

"Outside. With my mommy and daddy."

"What's happening?"

"Our house is burning. It's pretty. Where's Penny? Daddy, where's Penny?"

The two men exchanged a startled look. I think we had all reached the conclusion that 'Penny Priddy' was a fabrication of Hanoi Xan. It never occurred to us that the girl might actually exist. New Jersey drew a deep breath, then continued. "Where is Penny?"

"Still in the house. It's okay, Daddy is going to get her. Oh! There's a big boom! All the windows are breaking up. Mommy tells me to stay there, and she goes to help Daddy." Horror invades Peggy's voice at this point. "The roof is falling in, the fire is flying everywhere. My mommy and daddy don't come out! I wait and wait, and they don't come out, and the fire keeps burning and burning. They're dead, and it's all my

fault!" The woman started sobbing like the small child whose experiences she was reliving.

"It's all right, Peggy," Sidney Zweibel struggled to maintain his cool, professional demeanor. "You can leave that place now, and go to sleep. When you wake up, you will remember everything that we've talked about tonight. But this is something you've always known about, and while the memory will always sadden you, you have come through the pain. You know that your parents' deaths were not your fault. Just sleep now, Peggy." He left Buckaroo to comfort his wife, and left the room. He was not surprised to find the rest of us still congregated in the corridor. True to his hypocratic oath, the good doctor refused divulge any information concerning what had just transpired.

It was Buckaroo himself who filled us in the next morning at breakfast. Even the bare details that he furnished us evoked dismay as we realized the validity of the theory formulated by Fox and myself, with some paranormal assistance from Rawhide, all those months ago.

"What do we do now, Boss?" As usual, Perfect Tommy was ready for action.

"Tommy, I want you to go to Wyoming and talk to people in Cody about that fire. And check out the Department of Records. Get copies of birth certificates, death certificates and adoption records. There's something fishy going on, and we all know who's behind it. Find out what you can."

"Uh, what name do I look under?"

"Simpson. Peggy said her name was Simpson even before the adoption."

"You're not sending him alone, are you, Buckaroo?" Sometimes, Fox's lack of confidence in the youngest member of our group surprised me.

"You can go with him, if you want, Fox."

"That's okay, Boss. I'd just as soon stay home. I was just asking, is all."

"How about sending Mrs. Johnson?" Pecos suggested. "She hasn't had a vacation from this place since the trip to Texas to find Mac."

"If she wants to go, and if Tommy doesn't mind."

Mrs. Johnson, when she awoke several hours later, was delighted with the prospect of the trip, even though it would disrupt her normal (for her) sleeping patterns. They left the next day.

While they were gone, Buckaroo and New Jersey would continue to work with Peggy to help her fill in the gaps in her memory. I had my doubts about the whole enterprise, for, as Peggy herself had said, how could one be sure when she was remembering her actual experiences and when she was remembering what Xan wanted her to remember. "Well, we'll see how much of what she remembers matches what Tommy and Mrs. Johnson find out," was Buckaroo's attempt to set my mind at ease. However, knowing that Hanoi Xan is not above bribing government officials, altering public records and otherwise changing past history to suit his purposes, I was not fully convinced.

Although New Jersey had been studying the mysteries of the mind almost full time for the past year, and, needless to say, was at the top of his class, he was reluctant to work solo on this project. He consulted heavily with his professors, and even with Father Tom, who, as a priest, had counselled his parishoners and helped them deal with emotional problems. It was decided that a combination of hypnosis and judicious use of the so-called 'truth drugs', administered when Peggy was drifting into sleep and her mental defenses would be at their lowest, would be the most effective course of action.

That night, New Jersey was summoned to the Banzais' room, and the great adventure began. "Peggy, do you remember the fire? We talked about it last time. Good. Now, don't be afraid. You can remember without feeling the pain you felt then. I want you to tell me what happened right after the house blew up."

"I'm all alone. I'm so scared! People are coming now. They saw the fire and they're coming, but they can't help. A lady says I'm going to stay with her for a little while."

"Do you know who she is?"

"Uh huh. She's a friend of my mommy's. She's nice, I want to stay with her. I don't like the man. He's funny looking, and he scares me, and he wants to take me away. The lady and her husband are real mad and they yell at the man. They tell him that blood is thicker than water. I don't understand that, but I don't want to go with the man."

"The man says something about the law, but finally he says I can stay with them if they do everything he tells them to. He says that I have very special needs, and he will give them the money to meet these needs. But if they didn't do as they were told, he'd come back for me."

For the next few sessions, Peggy was able to calmly talk about her life after the fire. The Simpsons, her new parents, spent much time telling her how much they'd always wanted a little girl, and how happy they were that she had come to live with them. Peggy missed her real parents, and her sister, intensely at first, and couldn't really understand what had happened to them and where they were. But her adoptive parents were supportive and understanding, and she grew to be a happy, well-adjusted little girl.

Not the type to complain, it never occurred to Peggy to resent the fact that she had very little time to herself to indulge in that past time so necessary to all young children--day dreaming. Instead, her days were filled with classes at the private school she attended, dance classes, music lessons and private tutoring. Even at so young an age, her educational program heavily emphasized maths and sciences, and oddly enough, Oriental history and culture. In fact, she was kept so busy that she almost never was allowed to attend a classmate's birthday party or have her little friends come over to play. And as she grew older, she was forbidden to associate with boys of her own age. At the age of seventeen, Peggy Simpson, though beautiful and well-liked by her peers, had never had a date, had never been to a party, and had never even had a best friend. The few times that she objected to the constraints placed on her life caused her parents such pain that Peggy learned to sublimate her resentment and concentrate on excelling in all of her endeavors.

Peggy never saw the strange, 'funny looking' man again, though her parents were obviously in communication with him. Sometimes yellow roses would arrive, and instead of being pleased with the gift, her mother would become alarmed, almost fearful. Then Peggy would realize that the flowers always seemed to arrive when she had almost succeeded in cajoling her parents into allowing her a special treat--permission to attend a prom or a party.

"What did the man look like, Peggy. Do you remember?" New Jersey had his suspicions, which Peggy quickly confirmed.

"He was small, and his skin was a funny color, sort of yellowish. And he had mean, slanty eyes. His voice was funny, too. And he sneered."

"Okay, Peggy, you did just fine tonight. You will fall into a deep and restful sleep now, and in the morning, you will feel wonderful." When Peggy

was sleeping peacefully, Buckaroo and New Jersey quietly left the room.

"How about a beer, Sid?"

"Sounds good. Say, Buckaroo, did that nasty little man, the one that was calling all the shots in Peggy's life, sound like some one we know?"

"Like Lo Pep, maybe? Actually, all we can say for certain is that he was an Oriental. But I do have this feeling, that if it wasn't Lo Pep, it was one of Xan's operatives. I don't have to tell you, I don't like where this is heading."

The next morning, we got a report from Perfect Tommy. "We didn't have a whole lot to go on, Buckaroo, but we finally managed to find the house. At the time of the fire, it was outside the city limits, really isolated. The nearest neighbor was over a mile away."

"Well, that could explain why no help arrived until it was too late. Was there an investigation?"

"Yeah. The police suspected arson, but they weren't able to find anything. Their methods were pretty primitive back then, Boss. I'll bet we could do a better job."

"The trail's pretty cold after all these years, Tommy. And besides, we have a lot of work to do. Were you able to find anyone that knew Peggy?"

"Of course. Most of the people who knew her adoptive parents are still living in the same neighborhood. I found one old lady who just about talked my ear off. It seems that the Simpsons had been trying for years to adopt a child, but had been turned down by different agencies because of age or health or something. So she was very happy for them when they announced that they were keeping the little girl who was orphaned in the fire. She just didn't like the 'sleazy little chink', as she called him, that seemed to be hanging around all the time. Once, over coffee, Mrs. Simpson confided to her that there were a lot of conditions that had to be met, or they'd lose custody of the little girl."

"Well, Tommy, I hate to tell you this, but you haven't told us anything we already didn't know. Now I want you to go to Laramie. See if you can find out anything from the Priddys." I could imagine how Tommy's eyebrows shot up at that.

It seemed that, with each session, New Jersey had an easier time leading Peggy through the maze of dead ends and false leads that cluttered her memory. Finally, they completed the narrative of Peggy's childhood, and reached the day of her high school graduation. We had gotten to the part of the history that was known to us, but Buckaroo felt it was important to see things from her point of view.

"I wanted to go away for college, but I didn't think they'd send me so far away. They've never left me alone in my life, and now they're sending me all the way to England alone."

"Does this upset you?"

"At first. I never even thought about going to Oxford, but now I'm starting to get excited. I've just found out that Buckaroo Banzai is at Oxford."

"You've heard of Buckaroo Banzai?"

"Yes, of course. It seems I've heard about him all my life. Especially in all my science classes. My physics teacher was very excited when he founded his Institute. I think she's going to apply for membership. I don't think I'll get to meet him, though. I mean, there's probably a hundred girls trying to get to him all the time, and he always has friends around him. They're like bodyguards or something."

Many a woman has harbored a secret passion for B. Banzai, and I was not

totally surprised to learn that Peggy had been one of their number. But still, some of the implications were ominous.

"But you do get to meet him, don't you?"

"Yes. We have a class together, but it's big one. I didn't think he'd even notice me, but one afternoon after class he and his friends come into the cafe where I'm having tea. They stand by the door for awhile, looking around. Then one of the friends, a kind of stocky guy in a cowboy hat, points in my direction. I can't believe it! They're coming over to me! The others take seats at another table, but Buckaroo sits right down next to me, we exchange names, and he starts talking about the lecture we just heard. He questions some of the conclusions the don had come to, and wants to know what I think. We have a good talk. There aren't many women in that class, and the don doesn't seem to give us credit for having much intelligence, but Buckaroo Banzai really listens to what I say. I think I even change his mind about a couple of theories that we've been discussing in class. It doesn't seem like we've been talking very long at all, but suddenly, the other two come over to us.

"Getting late, Boss," the man says. 'Time we were heading on home.' The other one, a woman, just stares at me suspiciously, and I can almost feel her hostility. Looking past her, I see, with surprise, that it has grown dark outside. I pick up my purse and get ready to leave.

"Buckaroo thanks him, then introduces me to his friends. What funny names, Rawhide and Pecos. They both seem to have some doubts about me. At least, they're reserving judgement until they get to know me better, I guess.

"We spend a lot of time together, the four of us. I like Buckaroo's friends. Behind their stand-offishness, I can see that they're good people. They really care about Buckaroo, and I think they're beginning to like me. At least, Pecos is. Rawhide looks at me real strangely, when he thinks I don't notice. He almost scares me. Sometimes, Pecos and I would even get together without the guys. I don't think she's ever had a friend before, either. And she tells me why she and Rawhide are so protective of Buckaroo--about his parents dying and all that. So much like the way my parents died, it makes me feel all the closer to him." Suddenly, Peggy started to cry. Not hysterically, as she had on other occasions, but with great tears silently streaming down her face.

"What's the matter, Peggy?" New Jersey asked with utmost gentleness.

"He's leaving. They're all leaving. Going back to the States for the summer. I think about going with them, but Buckaroo says maybe we need to spend some time apart, to test the strength of our feelings for each other. I guess I agree, but it's hard. I'm afraid they won't come back."

"Aren't you going home for the summer?"

"No one to go home to, since Mama died last summer. And I have no friends, except the three of them.

"But it's okay. They do, and Buckaroo and I find that our feelings haven't changed, except perhaps to grow stronger. By spring, we know that we love each other." Peggy laughed. "Near the end of the spring term, he finally proposes. We're on a picnic, just the two of us, and I get him to sing 'The Jolly Tinker' for me. Some young men I don't know come along, and without thinking, Buckaroo introduces me as his fiancée. I've had my hopes, of course, but I have to give him a hard time for just assuming what my answer will be without even asking. But when he does ask, I can't bear to tease him any more. Of course, I say yes. He'll be graduating and he can't stay in England any longer--his work at the Institute is waiting for him. I

have two more years, and he says, 'Do we wait?' But I say, no, we have to be together. That's all that matters. There are a lot of good universities on the East Coast, I can finish my degree at any of them. So, we go home, and start making plans for the wedding.

"Buckaroo is so famous, we can't have just a small wedding, so there's a lot to do. Oh, I wish my mother were still alive, just to see how happy I am. She wouldn't know how to put together such a big party, though. Thank G-d I have Pecos and Mrs. Johnson to help me. We never had a wedding like this in Cody! And I'm still not used to all the publicity. When we go to Washington to recruit a new man, even he seems to know all about me. Poor Reno. Pecos gave him such a hard time, and the karakoumis didn't help the situation. I'm glad he's joining us anyway."

"Okay, Peggy, let's talk about the wedding."

"No!" While New Jersey was prepared for Peggy to become resistant at this point, her degree of agitation surprised us all. Glancing at his watch, Buckaroo decreed that the session had gone on long enough.

The next morning brought us another phone call from Tommy and Mrs. Johnson, who were, by this time, in Laramie.

"This is really weird, Buckaroo," Tommy immediately went to the crux of the matter. "I mean, we weren't even sure there were such people as the Priddys, and there was the old man, big as life, sitting there in his tee shirt with this huge beer gut hanging out."

"There's nothing particularly weird about that, Tommy," our leader was quick to point out.

"No, but the story he told was," Mrs. Johnson announced. "It seems that the Priddys were unable to have children of their own, and had tried for years to adopt a child."

"And they kept getting turned down by every agency they talked to." Buckaroo may have found the story 'weird', but it was also utterly predictable.

"You got it," Tommy continued. "Then, one day they were approached by this sleazy little Oriental type lawyer who knew of their desire for a child and had one to offer them.

"They were suspicious, having just seen a television program about black market babies, but the guy didn't seem to want a lot of money from them. In fact, he offered to pay all the child's expenses, as long as they agreed to do as they were told. One act of disobedience, and they'd lose the kid.

"Well, they were told plenty. The kid had to go to a private school, take music and dance lessons, have special tutoring, and not be allowed to spend time with other children. And they had to keep detailed records of every aspect of the girl's life. They accepted the conditions willingly enough, but the kid, Penny, turned out to have a mind of her own from the beginning. She didn't like piano lessons, she hated horses, she wanted to be a Brownie and go to birthday parties like the other kids. You get the idea. Every time they got a new order from the lawyer, Penny would fight whatever she was told to do. They could see how unhappy she was, but they felt there was nothing they could do. As she reached her teens, Penny turned into a run-away. At first, they were able to find her and bring her home in a matter of hours, but as she got older, that became harder and harder to do. The last time, she didn't leave a trace, and they haven't

heard from her in years." There was dead silence as those of us who were party to this conversation assimilated its implications. "Uh, Boss? What do you want us to do now?"

"Come on home, Tommy. You two did a great job, but the real work is going to be here, I think. Get back as soon as you can."

"Right."

New Jersey had continued to meet with resistance--"A brick wall," he described it to me--when trying to get Peggy to talk about her wedding day.

"What are you going to do now?" I asked.

"I don't know. We've tried all the drugs in all the combinations that Buckaroo is willing to risk. I think we may have to give it up. I hate to think of it, because I think Peggy needs to remember it if she's to stop having these nightmares and attacks of catatonia. Not to mention Buckaroo's need to know how far Xan's plan went. Or goes. I mean, we can't be safe until we know the whole plan and find means of counter-acting it."

"Have you thought about trying the Tank?" Pecos suggested. At her instigation, we had installed a Samahdi Tank in the psych lab some months ago. This sound-proof, light-tight piece of apparatus was filled with salt water whose temperature and buoyancy factor were such as to give the occupant the sensation of weightlessness, while the sensory deprivation caused by the lack of light and sound would, supposedly [so I say, having never felt the urge to try the thing], open the inner recesses of the mind. Several of the Interns who had spent time in it reported later that they remembered to precise detail incidents that they hadn't thought about for years. Peggy, herself, had spent some time in the tank, and seemed to enjoy it, but had done certain meditation exercises and so did not report the recall of any childhood memories. It was a promising idea, though, and New Jersey went to the library to review the literature and see what drugs, if any had been used by other researchers.

"Most of them used psychedelics, if they used anything at all," he later told Buckaroo. "I think we'd be perfectly safe using one of the thiopental sodium derivatives that worked for us before. And of course I will be in constant verbal contact with her through the intercom *, so we can get her out immediately, if there are any problems."

"Is Peggy willing? Then go ahead and give it a try. She's worrying so much about this last gap in her memory that it's effecting everything she does. Next time she becomes catatonic, we may not get her back."

As expected, Peggy was more than willing. That very night, she was given a light sedative and went into the tank. Fox and Pecos waited nervously in the kitchen while I was permitted to sit in on the proceedings.

"Peggy," New Jersey spoke in that reassuring, hypnotic voice he had developed, that belied the tension I knew he was experiencing. "You're in a safe place. Nothing and no one can reach you here or hurt you. You are free to talk about the most important day in your life--your wedding day. How do you feel?"

* An intercom had been installed in the tank to provide reassurance to nervous first-timers, and for use as a gentle way of bringing its occupants back from their 'trips' when they stayed longer than the recommended time.

---Reno

"Nervous. Happy. I'm marrying the most wonderful man in the world, and even Pecos says I deserve him. And as soon as I put on my wedding gown, I know she's right. Oh!" A note of panic had crept into her voice.

"What is it? What's the matter?" New Jersey leaned forward intently, speaking to the microphone as if it were Peggy herself. Buckaroo waited for her reply, his jaws clenched, a vein throbbing in his forehead.

"I'm not sure. There's something I'm supposed to do, something I don't want to do. I can't remember, but I'm afraid. It's like something that's been bothering me since that day in the cafe, back in England. Pecos is here, and Mrs. Johnson. They say it's just nerves, and it's time to go to the sanctuary.

"They were right. The ceremony was beautiful, and went off without a hitch. I feel strangely relieved. With everyone wanting to offer congratulations, I can hardly make it back to the changing room, but someone has left flowers for me there--yellow roses!"

"What do you think when you see them?"

"Texas--the yellow rose of Texas. They must be from Buckaroo! Or maybe Rawhide, his way of saying that he approves of me after all. But why am I afraid to read the card? I'm afraid of yellow roses, just like my mother's. They got yellow roses, and they died--I never really realized that before. Yellow roses come, and someone always dies! I want to call for Buckaroo, but I can't cry out."

"What happens when you smell the flowers?"

"I don't, do I? I don't remember smelling them. I just remember being in a room, dark like this one. But not so nice. I don't feel so safe. There's a voice, a nasty, snake-like voice, telling me things I know aren't so. I loved my parents. We never fought. I never ran away from home. And I never, never spent the night with a pick-up full of cowboys! But the voice keeps telling me I did all these things, so they must be true. I don't want them to be, but if the voice says they are, they must be.

"The voice never stops. There's no day, no night, just the voice, on and on. But one day, it does stop, just for a little while. Something's going on, something wrong. And it makes me feel--hopeful--for some reason. But then, the voice comes back, and it starts all over again."

At this point of Peggy's narrative, I saw Buckaroo sit up with a start, no doubt recalling the only occasion on which, in an attempt to find Peggy, he dared assault Hanoi Xan's fortress, the cave city of Sabah. Evidently, he had come closer to succeeding than any of us knew at the time.

"Oh, thank G-d!"

"What, Peggy? What's happened?" New Jersey immediately seized upon the change in Peggy's voice.

"Penny. The name's Penny, buddy. [Oh, no, I thought. Here we go again.] Anyway, it doesn't matter, I'm just so glad to be out of that stinking hell-hole. Even if things aren't going too good. I'm almost out of money, can't get a job, got thrown outta my room, don't have anyone to turn to. I don't even know how I got here. New York sure ain't what it's cracked up to be.

"Boy, people sure are making a fuss over this Buckaroo Banzai character."

"Doesn't the name mean anything to you?"

"No, should it? But when I see him on television, I feel--drawn to him, for some reason. I overhear someone say that he'll be singing at some club in New Brunswick, and I know I have to be there. Today is a good day

to die, and this place, Artie's, is as good a place as any to do it in. I pass a pawn shop on my way to the train station. I had always thought about pills, but in the window is just the right little gun for me. After I buy it, I have just enough money for the train fare and a bottle of VAT 69."

"You planned to kill yourself?"

"No, him! When he talks to me, and starts to sing to me, I know that he has to die. But I can't do it. I can't! I don't know what he'll do to me for failing him again. But if I die now, there will be an end to it."

As the events of that night are as familiar to the Reader as they are to those of us who were in attendance that night, I will not report in detail the rest of the session, and how Sidney Zweibel led Peggy back to the realization of who she is. Further probing on his part then reassured him and Buckaroo that whatever control Xan had had over her, by chemical and surgical means, was indeed dissolved.

It was a full twenty-four hours before Peggy was recovered from her ordeal, but then we were pleased to see that she was very much her old self, and that her love of life was all the greater for having recalled her turbulent past. But she was touched with a sadness apparent to all of us.

"I really did have a sister. I thought that she was just an invention of Xan's."

"No, she did exist. But she didn't die in the fire that killed your parents," Buckaroo said. "He must of taken her from the house before it started, and substituted the body of another child, the devil only knows who. I don't know why he chose you two, but I'm not surprised he used twins. That way he would have a back up if something went wrong with one."

"Penny. She is dead, though, isn't she, Buckaroo?"

"It sure looks likely, Peggy. It sounds like she was a problem, and Xan doesn't keep problems around."

"She did come in handy for a little while," Fox commented with more than just a little bitterness. We had all liked 'Penny', but Fox had been closer to her than the rest of us. After the surgery, she had not been as close to Peggy. I could see that losing such a friend would be as hard on her as losing a sister was on Peggy. "After all, she provided him with a convenient set of memories for Peggy, facts that could be checked up on and verified."

We were sobered by all the implications of what we had learned. I don't think there was a one of who did not believe that, through Peggy, Hanoi Xan had attempted to murder Buckaroo Banzai on two separate occasions.

The first occasion was the Banzais' wedding day.

"The warning bell, the uneasiness I felt, was all because I knew what I was expected to do, and I knew I couldn't," Peggy spoke softly, as if working things out for herself.

"The conflict was so great you collapsed," New Jersey was still playing psychiatrist, helping her to untangle the threads. "To cover up the plot, Xan must have then given you something to suppress vital signs, then spiked the roses to provide a cause of death."

"But the autopsy!" This detail had thrown Fox, and all of us for that matter, off the scent from the beginning.

"It would have been easy enough to bribe the coroner," I reminded her. "Remember, none of us were there."

"The same thing happened that night at Artie's," Tommy deduced.

"And the day you tried to shoot me," I was unable to resist adding. Buckaroo raised an eyebrow at me, and I knew it was past time I put my resentment of that incident to rest.

We talked long into the night, taking apart all of Peggy's memories, analysing them, reassuring ourselves that she was truly free of Xan's tentacles.



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A week later, we were all once again in the sanctuary of the Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine. Peggy was dressed in a simple, flowing white gown, and Buckaroo in a tuxedo, and we, their friends, gathered lovingly around them. Theo was once again playing Bach on the organ as Father Tom blessed them as they renewed their promise to love each other until the day they died and beyond. **80**

BUCKAROO WHO?

or

The Three Doctors

by Leni R. Sommer and Peggy Spalding

We were sitting in a pub somewhere in the Salisbury plains--Fox, Cait, Pecos, and I--having draughts and sandwiches after spending the day "looking for Robin Hood," as Fox called it. We had explored rings of standing stones and the pitiful remains of Sherwood Forest, and were planning to go next to Hathersage to see Little John's Grave, all the while receiving instruction on the history of the Norman Conquest and the legend of Herne the Hunter, a local forest god.

Fox can get very carried away on these subjects, so I was glad that when we stopped at the pub, she brought in her portable computer and started entering in some measurements she had taken at the Rings.

"What are you working on?" I queried as she stopped to take a bite of her egg and tomato sandwich.

"Dimensional transcendentalism. It just won't leave me alone."

"On that thing? You practically fry the UNIVAC whenever you work on it at home."*

"Billy made some modifications. He thinks it can handle polydimensional physics, now."

"It is an interesting concept," Pecos conceded. "With the east coast metroplex becoming even more over-populated, it might be the only way we'll ever be able to expand our facilities at the Institute."

Lately, we had been approached--hounded, actually--by land developers anxious to buy off the land on which our sanctuary rests. While we knew that Buckaroo would never willingly sell any of the property, I for one, feared that these ruthless businessmen might get zoning laws changed and otherwise make it impossible for us to retain the 132 acres that act as a buffer between us and the rest of the world. My musings on this problem were interrupted by my sudden awareness of the couple at the next table, a handsome man in a uniform of the Royal Navy and a perky young woman with dark hair and eyes. They seemed to be listening to our conversation very intently.

"Just think, Pecos," Fox was now saying, "if I could get this working right, we wouldn't even need a house as big as the one we have now. We could fit everything into a structure as small as a...a..." she fumbled for an example.

"Police Call Box," the woman was now standing by our table, looking quizzically at Fox.

"Exactly!" Fox couldn't keep a trace of amazement from her voice, and

* In our adventure 'A New Twist in the Paradox', Fox not only gave every computer at the Institute a nervous break-down, but attracted the attention of the nefarious Hanoi Xan, as well. --Reno]

the two women looked as if they had more they wished to say to each other.

"Sarah Jane," the man tapped his foot impatiently. "Come on, Old Girl!"

"Harry, please. I wish you wouldn't call me that!" 'Sarah Jane' smiled apologetically at us, and the two of them left, bickering familiarly.

"We're not going to have time to go to Hathersage today," Cait reminded us. "We're supposed to meet Buckaroo and Daddy in London in about an hour.

As the drive back to London was uneventful, I will take this opportunity to explain what TEAM BANZAI was doing in England in the first place.



Less than a week ago, we were spending a quiet evening at home (the first in a long while, I might add), enjoying a heated but friendly debate between Perfect Tommy and Billy over the solution to some engineering problem, when the Intern on duty in the communications room dashed in breathlessly.

"Buckaroo--it's the President on the phone! He wants to talk to you." While it is a well-known fact that B. Banzai has been advisor to three presidents and countless princes and heads-of-state, it never fails to rattle a new Intern the first time he or she answers the phone to find, not the White House switchboard operator, or even the President's personal secretary, but the President himself on the other end of the line. Buckaroo accompanied the Intern to the communications room, and the rest of us returned to what we were doing.

"Buckaroo, my good friend, what do you know about U.N.I.T.?" The President got right to the point.

"The United Nations Intelligence Taskforce? Not much, really. Isn't it headquartered in Geneva? Anyway, it seems to be most active in Great Britain. Its primary purpose is to track down alien intelligence, and last I heard, it was headed by Brigadier Alistair Gordon Lethbridge-Stewart."

"Who retired last year. The new C.O., Brigadier General Hugh Smythe, is having some problems with his command. It seems that his predecessor had some sort of scientific advisor who helped him out in situations like this."

"Situations like what, Mr. President?"

"They're not being completely open with me, but it seems that London citizens are being murdered in a most bizarre manner. Smythe's aide, a Sargeant Benton, seems to know something, but basically, all anyone can get out of him is 'call the Doctor'."

"Doctor ----?"

"Who knows? In any case, those people need help. I've been approached by the Secretary General of the U.N. to ask if you'd be willing to go to England and do what you can."

"Of course, Mr. President. We're on our way."

Buckaroo strode into the living room, surveyed the scene for a moment, then announced, "Who wants to go to England? Sidney, the President said something about them needing a doctor, so I'd like you to come. Yes, Carly, you and Cait can come, too, then."

"You're not leaving me behind this time, Buckaroo," Peggy proclaimed. "You did that time we were looking for Bennu, and look what happened. We nearly lost Pecos."

Pecos and I exchanged looks. "We're coming, too."

Tommy said something about wanting to visit his Bond Street tailor, but everyone else in the room decided to pass. Billy and Mrs. Johnson both claimed to have too much work to do, and Professor Hikita and Big Norse had other trips planned. Both were going home for the summer--Big Norse to Denmark, and the Professor to visit his honorable ancestors in Japan.

While the rest of us were sight-seeing (Peggy had gone to Harrods with Perfect Tommy), Buckaroo and New Jersey went alone, as requested, to U.N.I.T. HQ. Brigadier General Hugh Smythe turned out to be a fussy little man with both an inflated sense of self-importance and a martyr's complex.

"I fail to understand why it has been so difficult to get anyone to help me around here. Now that the story has gotten out, all I get is flak from the press. They've been hounding me night and day since the whole incident began--the telephone has been ringing off the wall. And now the Prime Minister wants to know what I intend to do. All I know is that if I don't get some help around here, Benton assures me that the results will be disastrous!"

"That's what we're here for," Buckaroo said in his most reassuring manner. "But you need to be completely honest with us if we're to be able to help."

"I suppose you've seen this." Smythe plopped the newspaper he had been waving under Buckaroo's nose on the desk, and pointed to the banner headline. "MINIATURE CORPSES FOUND IN LONDON'S WEST END."

"Is this some of Rupert Murdock's sensationalism?" New Jersey enquired.

"I wish it were so. But as bizarre as it sounds, I'm afraid it's quite true. The medical examiner's report indicates that these objects are, indeed, composed of human tissue. Our top scientists examined one victim under an electron microscope and found that all space between atoms had been removed from the body."

New Jersey asked incredulously, "Is that possible, Buckaroo?"

"It's just a step beyond what we did with the Oscillation Overthruster, and if Hanoi Xan is involved, anything is possible," the Boss answered. "It's almost as if the perpetrator of these crimes is trying to attract attention and lure someone to London. Look at the pattern of where the bodies were found."

They were busy exploring this possibility when the door opened and a past-middle-aged man wearing a public school blazer burst into the room and exclaimed, "When I saw the headlines, I knew I had to come and help."

"Thank you, Lethbridge-Stewart," Smythe said rather stiffly, "but that's why these gentlemen are here. And I think we can handle the situation quite competently without you."

At that, Lethbridge-Stewart noticed New Jersey in full regalia--red cavalry shirt and white high-crowned Stetson--seized his hand and began to shake it warmly and energetically. "Well, Doctor, another regeneration, I see. A Yank cowboy...? Anyway, I knew that when you found out the Master was around, you'd soon be on the scene."

New Jersey gave the other man a puzzled glance, then asked, "Have we met before? I don't seem to recall..."

Lethbridge-Stewart dropped New Jersey's hand as if it burned him. "Then you're not The Doctor? I thought surely..."

"I'm Dr. Sidney Zweibel, and this," he said indicating Buckaroo, "is Dr. Buckaroo Banzai."

"Oh my! I seem to have made quite a faux pas. Please forgive me, Dr. Zweibel, but when I read that a doctor had been called in as scientific advisor to the new head of U.N.I.T., I thought for certain that he would be

here, and so I naturally presumed that you were he."

New Jersey was really confused now. "But I am! Er--I mean, we are. Buckaroo was called in to help, and he asked that I come, too."

Buckaroo came to New Jersey's rescue. "Brigadier, you seem to have some idea of what's going on. Who is this 'Master' you mentioned?"

"He's a Time Lord, so you can imagine the powers he has, and he uses these powers only for evil purposes."

"Excuse me, Lethbridge-Stewart, but I hardly think we need assistance from an A Level Maths teacher." For a man who was complaining about a lack of help, Smythe was curiously unwilling to accept it from his predecessor. His refusal bordered on rudeness.

"As former commander of this organization, I am considerably more than an A Level Maths teacher."

"Ah, but the key word is 'former' commander. Details of this situation are top secret, and now that you've retired, you no longer have the clearance, my dear chap."

Before Lethbridge-Stewart could reply, Smythe was called away to the phone.

"This is our hotel," Buckaroo said to the nearly apoplectic older gent as he handed him a matchbook. "Meet us in the bar as soon as you can." The Brig looked at Buckaroo as if seeing him in a new light, then nodded, and left without bothering to say goodbye to his replacement.

Upon Smythe's return, Buckaroo made appropriate noises about getting right on the problem, and checking in from time to time as developments occurred, then he and New Jersey also beat a hasty retreat.

When we arrived at the hotel, we found them already deep in conversation with the man we would all come to refer to as 'the Brig'. We pulled extra chairs up to the table, and were soon able to ascertain what was happening from things said, and the few questions we were able to get the Boss to answer.

"I used to have a signalling device to call the Doctor with when I needed him. I wish the devil I knew what happened to the bloody thing."

"It may not be needed, Sir," New Jersey volunteered. "Before you arrived, Buckaroo had suggested the possibility that the person behind these murders may be trying to attract someone's attention. If the Doctor knows the Master as well as you say, he should recognize his M.O. and show up soon."

"Yes, if he's on Earth. But there's no telling where, or even when, he is."

"He'll show up. I know his type." Buckaroo was fully confident. "But in the meantime, we'll have to get started without him. Our first priority is to stop this lunatic from killing any more innocent people."

"So, what's the scenario?" I wanted to know.

"New Jersey will go to the morgue and get a better look at the autopsy reports. The rest of us will check out the crime scenes and see if we can come up with any clues. Alistair, can you give us a description of the Master? If Reno can get a sketch to the papers, we may be able to warn the citizens of this city to stay away from him."

"I can tell you how he looked the last time I saw him, but I don't know how much good it'll do. Like the Doctor, he has the ability to regenerate. He may be entirely different now."

"Still, it's worth a try."

"Where do you want Cait and me?" Fox had listened quietly all this time, but I could sense her excitement.

"You'll stay here at the hotel and handle any calls we get from Smythe.

I get the feeling that he's got mixed feelings about accepting our help, and he certainly won't be happy to learn that the Brig is working with us. If you can keep him out of our hair, we'll be able to get a hell of a lot more done." I could tell that Fox was disappointed, but she had made a great deal of progress in learning to control herself since the business with Rawhide's journals, and she took the news like a trooper. Buckaroo took advantage of the darkness of the room to add, making sure Cait couldn't read his lips, "This situation is more dangerous than I had realized when I gave permission for Cait to come along. I want to keep her as far away from the hornets' nest as I can, and the only way I can do that is by keeping someone with her. You're the least experienced of any of us in this sort of thing, and that makes you the logical choice. And I do need someone to run interference with U.N.I.T. So, as much as possible, I will have Peggy and Tommy take turns relieving you, and I'll even try to give Sidney some time off so the three of you can spend some time together." Fox had no recourse but to acquiesce gracefully.

"We're going to need Benton," the Brig said. "He's the only one left at U.N.I.T. who has any experience with this sort of thing."

So urgent did Buckaroo feel the state of affairs to be, that he would not even wait until morning to get started. Benton was summoned immediately, and his initial reaction upon seeing Jersey was almost identical to that of the Brig.

"Doctor? I knew you'd come. I must say, you've really out-done yourself with this regeneration." Once again, introductions were made and explanations given as to New Jersey's true identity.

"I can't wait to meet this Doctor character," New Jersey asided to Fox as they parted to begin their assigned tasks.

As the rest of us went about our business around London, Fox made use of her time at the hotel by reading back issues of the daily papers to see what she could learn of the crimes from the popular press. In addition to the sensational accounts of the shrunken corpses, she found, hidden in the back pages, small items that caused her to sit up and take notice. It seemed that there was a marked increase in fights amongst the residents of Soho, several of the articles reported. The perpetrators arrested all had strange hickey-like markings on their necks and exhibited sleep disturbances. Physicians had been called in, but even the strongest sleeping potions had proven ineffective. In the most recent edition of the London Times was a small report of the arrest of a woman caught assaulting a man with a strange instrument. The victim had no injuries other than a strange mark on the side of his neck, and seemed unable to sleep. The woman was undergoing psychiatric evaluation. Without really knowing why, Fox clipped all of these news items and set them aside to show Jersey and the Boss.

Meanwhile, on a small island in the Mediteranean...

A young woman and an oddly dressed man were sharing a picnic lunch on the beach, reclining in the shade of a large many-colored umbrella.

"Ah, now Peri! This is the life! Fresh air, sunshine, the sound of the waves as they crash against the shore--could you ask for a more perfect holiday spot?"

"But Doctor, I don't understand! Why are we here? I want to stay with you in the TARDIS."

"Now, Peri, we both know you promised your stepfather that you'd be back in time for school in the fall. That time is now here."

Peri, a pretty, buxom young woman clad in leotard and shorts, opened her mouth to deliver a retort, but the argument was interrupted by the blare of music coming from the portable radio of a near-by sun-bather. The Doctor was about to request that the volume be turned down, when BBC Radio Newsreel began with a startling announcement.

"More on the story which broke yesterday concerning the miniature corpses found in the industrial areas of London. Brigadier General Hugh Smythe, commander in chief of U.N.I.T. forces in Great Britain, has confirmed that that agency is indeed investigating the murders and that Buckaroo Banzai, reknown American psycist, has been called in to assist. Dr. Banzai, who, accompanied by several members of his staff from the famed Banzai Institute, arrived earlier today, was unavailable for comment."

The Doctor did not wait to hear any more. "Come on, Peri. We must get to London immediately."

"Is it the Master, do you think?" the girl asked as they entered the TARDIS and he set the coordinates at the console.

"Who else could be behind this? I don't know who this Hugh Smythe is, or 'Buckaroo Banzai'," the Doctor expressed his amusement at the strange name, "but I fear that they may not be up to this challenge."

Miraculously, the TARDIS's guidance system worked perfectly, and they arrived in London at the right time, materializing on the lawn outside U.N.I.T. headquarters. A quick check via the monitor screen showed that the coast was clear, and the two disembarked from their vehicle. They entered the building unchallenged, and the Doctor, annoyed with himself that he couldn't remember where the Brigadier's office was, stopped to get his bearings.

Peri spotted a directory posted near the lifts and studied it briefly. "Room 3001, Doctor. This way."

Ignoring the protestations of the secretary posted outside, the Doctor strode purposefully into the office, his companion close on his heels. "Smythe, my dear chap, has there been any sign of the Master? If I am correct, and I invariably am, then he is no doubt attempting to acquire materials to repair his TARDIS. Ordinary computer shops won't have equipment sufficiently advanced to suit his purpose, so I suggest that you double the guard on all military and government installations."

"Now see here. I don't know who you are, or how you got in here, but you are trespassing on the premises of a top-secret multi-national security organization. Now I must ask you to leave. Do so quietly, and no harm will come to you. I do suggest, however, that you seek counseling. Obviously, you are in great need of help."

"Help? Me...in need of help?! Oh no, my good sir, if what the radio reports is true, it is you and the good people of London who are in danger."

The argument continued for some time, the Doctor so involved in pressing his case that he failed to notice Smythe pressing a button that summoned two guards. Peri added her objections to his as they were hauled off to detention.

"This thing has kooks and weirdos crawling out of the woodwork," the beleaguered commander muttered to himself when he was once again alone in his office.

For some reason, however, the odd couple stayed in his mind. He had just sent for the girl, who struck him as being the saner of the two, when we arrived with word of more victims--two high-level computer technicians at a NATO installation.

Not knowing what had transpired earlier in this very office, I thought Smythe to be oddly silent when we arrived there a short time later. If he took notice that Lethbridge-Stewart was with us, he gave no indication of it. As Buckaroo described the scene of the most recent crime, the new Brigadier, in a state of nervous distraction, tapped his pencil on the desk and stared out his window.

"I don't suppose there's been any word of the Doctor, has there?" the Brig asked hopefully in the protracted silence that followed the Boss' concise run-down of the facts. Before Smythe could rouse himself from his stupor to reply, Sergeant Benton entered with the young woman I have described earlier.

"The Doctor?!" she exclaimed, breaking free and turning to Buckaroo, clutching at his coatsleeve with one hand and pointing accusingly at Smythe with the other. "That man has him locked up downstairs. We kept trying to tell him that we came to help, but he wouldn't listen. Now one would

listen!" Perpigliam Brown, or Peri, as we all soon came to know her, was clearly on the verge of hysteria, and shaking violently. Solicitously, Buckaroo attempted to calm and reassure her, motioning for Jersey to assist him. I could see a trace of concern on Buckaroo's face as he felt her pulse and pressed his lips to her forehead.

"Fever," he pronounced. "A cold, possibly flu."

NEW JERSEY gently pined the skin on the back of her hand. "She's a little dehydrated, too, Buckaroo."

"It's bedrest for you, young lady--" the Boss prescribed.

"But the Doctor--" she protested weakly.

"Hey, now... don't worry about your companion. We've been expecting him. And Carly, here, will make sure you rest up and drink plenty of fluids," he reassured her.

Fox, who had successfully argued that since we were going to U.N.I.T., she didn't need to wait by the phone, sucked air through her teeth in the manner of Buckaroo and Hikita-san when displeased, then smiled sweetly. "You can count on me, Boss."

"But..." Peri moaned.

"Don't worry, my dear," the Brig said soothingly. "We'll have Benton fetch the Doctor here straight away."

The sergeant hesitated and looked questioningly at Smythe, who nodded wearily. "It all rather seems to be out of my hands, doesn't it, Benton?" He shrugged. "Just do as they say."

A few moments later, Benton returned with the most bizarrely dressed man I have ever seen. Even Perfect Tommy could only stare at him silently, mouth agape.

"I think I prefer the Yank Cowboy," Benton said with a grin. I could see why. The Doctor was plumpish with curly blond hair, but what Benton was no doubt referring to was the newcomer's coat. It must have been pieced from the spare parts of half a dozen jackets, all of which would have been in bad taste individually. Together, they made the most glaringly, blindingly, atrociously heinous garment imaginable--a veritable kaleidoscope of clashing colors, fabrics and patterns. The outfit was completed with a blue and white gingham floppy bow tie, a mismatched flame-stitch waistcoat, gold and white striped trousers, green shoes and orange spats. And the man was as flamboyant and eccentric as his garb.

"Brigadier!" the Doctor greeted his old friend warmly. "Good to see you. You're looking well--time seems to have treated you kindly since last we met. I don't need to tell you, do I how relieved I was when Benton told me you were here. So this is Buckaroo Banzai. They tell me you're a doctor. Of medicine?"

"Of many things," B. Banzai replied evenly, then introduced the rest of us before adding, "And I am equally glad to see you here, Doctor. From what Alistair has told me, you may be our only hope in defeating the Master."

"Well," the Doctor beamed with false modesty. "I do have more knowledge of him than anyone else on his planet."

"You mean he's your former scientific advisor?" Smythe whispered weakly to the Brig, who nodded smugly.

Then our oddly dressed Doctor noticed his companion. "But what about you, Peri? How are you feeling?" he asked, clearly concerned.

"Not too good, I'm afraid, Doctor."

"Don't worry. A few days in bed, and lots of tea and fruit juice, and she'll be good as new," Fox assured him. "and the sooner she's back on her feet, the sooner she can mind the phone, and I can be out working with the rest of you," she added in an undertone to Peggy.

"Don't worry, we'll spring you as often as we can," Peggy whispered back.

"You seem to be in good hands, Peri. Let's be off, then. We've no time to waste! Tell me Brigadier," the Doctor was saying, "I don't suppose Bessie's still around somewhere, is she?"

"Bessie?" Smythe asked, assuming that the Time Lord was requesting additional personnel.

"The Doctor's automobile," Lethbridge-Stewart informed him. "Benton, check in the Garage, will you?"

The car, a yellow classic open roadster, was found, and, with the Doctor at the wheel, we dropped Fox, Cait and Peri at the hotel and continued on to NATO to continue our investigation of the latest murders.

We worked through the night, but even though the base personnel did their best to be helpful, we came to a dead end. The situation was much the same as we had found at the rest of the murder sites: miniature corpses were found, key electronic and computer components were missing, and no one who still lived had seen the perpetrator.

"This is pointless," the Doctor proclaimed. "It's no good looking for him here. He's far too clever to leave any clues behind that we could use to track him. If we're going to find the Master, we're going to have to figure out where he's going to strike next. He's cunning, but he'll have to come out in the open sooner or later. Brigadier, perhaps you can persuade Smythe to mobilize U.N.I.T. troops, now. I'd give a regeneration, though, to find out how he got back to Earth. I thought I'd fixed his wagon for good. He should still be hurtling through space out beyond the Milky Way, not murdering innocent people in London. And where's the Rani, I wonder?"

"Who?" I inquired.

"She was traveling with him, last time I saw them."

"You mean, like you and Peri?"

"No, not at all like Peri and me." He didn't seem inclined to elaborate, so I let the subject drop.

"I'm going back to spell Fox for awhile," Peggy said to NEW JERSEY. "Any message you want me to give her?"

"Besides the obvious, tell her I'll meet her and Cait for lunch."

As per Buckaroo's instructions, Fox had literally forced fluids on the patient, and had given her acetaminophen at four-hour intervals. Peggy found Peri asleep, and her nurse very grateful for the chance to go out for awhile. Fox took her computer and her daughter, and went to Hyde Park. With Cait intermittently reading off more measurements from our sight-seeing trip and watching the equestrians on Rotten Row, she continued working on her moonbeam.

"That's a most interesting problem you're working on." Fox looked up to see a strange, bearded man peering over her shoulder at the small computer screen. He was dressed rather elegantly all in black, and had a manner that Fox could only describe as 'Shakespearean'. "May I? I think that if you try this," he punched in some figures, "you'll find that that equation will work now."

Fox changed some of the variables, and when the computer continued to perform appropriately, looked up appreciatively. "Thank you! Have you done much work in pandimensional physics?"

"You might say I have my Master's in the field. Where else are you having problems? Perhaps I can help."

"That would be wonderful." Fox glanced at her watch. "Oh, but I have to be getting back. Guess I'll have to work it out myself."

"Well, maybe we could meet here again. Say, tomorrow?"

"I'll try. About this same time?"

"Excellent."

"Mommy, I don't like that man," Cait almost whined as they headed back to the hotel. "He scares me."

"Don't be silly, Pet. He was perfectly nice. Anyway, I can protect us in a public place in broad daylight. So don't worry."

As it turned out, none of us made it back to the hotel until tea time, and Fox was so eager to hear the details of our search that she neglected to tell us of her encounter in the park. Otherwise, I'm sure, B. Banzai's intuitive early warning system would have been alerted, and much anxiety would have been averted. But then, we would have missed out on quite an interesting trip. In any case, I'm getting ahead of myself. At the time, we were all too pre-occupied with the problem at hand that it didn't register with any of us that Fox was accepting her continued role as nurse with better grace than any of us who know her would expect.

Another murder occurred over night. This time the night watchman at a plant that manufactured hightech computer chips was the only victim. Buckaroo and the Doctor were more anxious than ever to find and stop the culprit. But the Doctor seemed to have formed a hypothesis of sorts.

"Of course!" he exclaimed as we discovered what had been taken in the break-in. "Somehow his TARDIS must have been damaged, and he is using his same old gristly methods of acquiring the parts necessary for repairing it. That must be the answer! If we could only find it, I'm certain we could find him."

"That doesn't sound too hard," Pecos interjected, brightening. "How many of those old Police Call Boxes can there be in London? That is what you said a TARDIS looks like, isn't it?"

"You mean, that's really what they look like?" I exclaimed, realizing that my mind had wandered, and I had missed something. I recounted the odd conversation we'd had with the young woman in the pub, that day in Salisbury.

"Ah, Sarah Jane Smith, mixing memory with desire," the Doctor said nostalgically. "What times we had together. And Harry was with her, you say? Fine man. Bit of an imbecile at times, you know, but a splendid chap, otherwise."

"But to answer your question, my dear Pecos, a Police Box is what my TARDIS looks like. Unfortunately, the Master's chameleon circuit was still operative, at least, I believe it was, the last time I saw it, and his TARDIS could virtually look like anything--a tree, a clock, a statue--anything!"

Still, it was a starting place, and we quickly decided to split up and begin combing London, asking its citizens if they had seen something, anything, that had inexplicably appeared in their midst about two weeks ago. So intense were our efforts, no one thought to go back to relieve Fox. So, no one knew that Peri was feeling better.

"Listen, I'm fine," she told Fox. "I'm quite capable of answering the phone, if they should call, and taking a message."

"And I'll stay to get her stuff to drink, and make sure she stays in bed," Cait volunteered. "She can tell me more stories about her travels with the Doctor in the TARDIS."

"Go on," Peri continued to urge. "You know you're dying to get out."

"Well, okay, but just for a little while. I'll be back in about an hour. Cait, you come get me if there's any trouble." Fox dashed out before her conscience could get the better of her, and when she got to Hyde Park, found the dark man already waiting for her.

"Sorry I'm late," she panted.

"Never mind that," he snarled. "Where's the computer?"

"Oh, I forgot it! But I have my notes in my purse. We can work from those."

"Your notes are useless to me! I must have that computer. Now, you will tell me where it is."

Fox told me later, "I got the impression that he was trying to hypnotize me or something, and that made me suspicious. It's a good thing that Sidney gave that seminar on resisting brain-washing last month. But when the Master [for that's who the stranger was--Reno] saw that I wasn't going under, he became furious. He must have been at least partially successful, because, even though I refused him, he caught me off guard. The next thing I knew, he had my arm twisted behind my back and was forcing me to take him back to the room. He managed to stay clear of my heel and free elbow as he warned me of the consequences, should I attempt to call out to any passers-by."

When they got to the hotel, Peri and the Master stared at each other for several seconds. "So he did come. I knew he couldn't resist the opportunity to meddle in my affairs," the renegade Time Lord sneered. "Oh, what sweet revenge! Not only have I found the means to escape this backwater planet, but I'll have the Doctor's companion as my hostage to insure that he, with his foolish sentimentality towards humans, will be unable to stop me. Get dressed at once. You're coming with me. Where's the little girl?"

"She--she went to get some Jelly Babies," Peri said fearfully as she shrugged into and pullover and slacks that Peggy had thoughtfully loaned her.

"Jelly Babies!" the Master roared, enraged at the very mention of the sweets Cait had become fond of. "We'll have to leave without her--the others may be back at any moment. Get the computer."

"I'm not going anywhere, and neither is Peri," Fox informed him stoutly. "She's been ill."

"We'd better do what he says, Fox," Peri said, pulling on her shoes. "You don't know what he's like and what he can do. The Doctor will get us out of this, somehow."

"Not this time!" the Master hissed, wrenching Fox's arm tighter and pulling her with him toward the door.

Discretion being the better part of valor, Fox acquiesced. Perhaps the Master suspected that she was alert for any possibility of escape, for he kept the tight hold on her and prominently displayed an odd-looking device that terrorized Peri.

"It's the Tissue Compressor and Eliminator," the girl told Fox. "That's how he's been shrinking all those people."

Knowing the true nature of the danger calmed Fox down considerably. She concentrated all her energy on keeping her wits about her, and so did not notice that Cait was returning to the hotel, and thus witnessed the abduction.

I have to give Perfect Tommy credit for what happened next. Some weeks earlier, he had thoughtfully been teaching Caity to use the Go-Phone, and give a special emergency code that would let the rest of us know there was trouble. But because of our youngest member's impaired hearing, there had been no way for her to know if her call had been received, so Tommy had installed a light that would come on when the connection was made.

"Something's wrong," Tommy was saying as the Doctor, the Boss, NEW JERSEY, and the rest of us encountered him on the way up to the room where we had left Fox and Cait watching Peri. "Like I told you on the Go-Phone, Cait wouldn't be calling otherwise."

Poor NEW JERSEY couldn't help but look worried, and I know we all shared his consternation. "Carly wouldn't just leave without letting us know."

"I'm afraid Peri can be very headstrong at times, and occasionally more than a little foolish. Perhaps she left and your friend went to look after her," the Doctor suggested as the lift's doors finally opened, and we rushed down the hall toward the room.

"No, Jersey's right," I ventured. "Fox would never have left Cait alone unless there was some sort of trouble. She'd have called us herself if she were able to."

"She might not have had time to," Buckaroo deduced. "Hopefully, Cait is all right and can tell us what's wrong."

Jersey was anxiously fumbling with the key when Cait threw open the door and hurled herself at her daddy. We all gathered around them as the child told him the little she knew.

"Good girl!" Tommy signed to her. "You did exactly the right thing."

"Take us there, quickly!" the Doctor demanded. "If we hurry, we may have a chance of catching them."

The rest of our group were waiting for us in the hotel lobby, and joined us as, with Cait in the lead, we ran the three blocks to the alley. There was the very ordinary looking dumpster that the child had told us about, but to our dismay, it began to wheeze and groan in a most frightful manner.

"Peri!" shouted the Doctor.

"Mommy!" Cait moaned as she signed. As we all witnessed the dumpster disappear before our every eyes, New Jersey scooped the distressed youngster into his arms, and held her tightly to him.

"What now?" Peggy asked hopelessly, giving voice to the question we all wanted to ask.

Pecos turned on the Doctor. "You're the Time Lord, you're the one who knows about TARDISES, time travel and about the Master blaggart. So you tell us where he's gone and where he's taken this little girl's mother!"

"Take it easy, Pecos," I tried to calm her down. "I'm sure the Doctor will help us find Fox."

"Yes, of course I will," the Doctor replied. "But the problem is tht it isn't just where he's taking your Fox and Peri--it's also when he's taking them. They could literally be anywhere, anywhen, and I have no way of tracking them."

"Let's go back to the hotel," Buckaroo insisted. "Maybe Fox was able to leave us some kind of message." He then added to Cait, "Try not to worry. We'll get her back."

While Cait was running for help, Fox was having quite a curious experience. Although her face registered no surprise, she felt a certain amount of satisfaction as she entered the dumpster.

"Even under the circumstances," she told me later, "I couldn't help but feel, well, triumphant, that my theories were correct. I knew that the Master wanted me to show surprise at the fact that the thing was bigger on the inside than on the out. But I just stood there and waited to see what happened next."

What happened next was that the Master snatched the computer from Peri's hands and began attempting to attach various wires and cables to the interface ports. "This is going to take some work," he muttered as he did so. "But you have saved me days of toil with this little toy of yours. It won't take me far, but it should take me where I need to go and give me the breathing space I need. Then I'll have my own TARDIS and can abandon this wreck."

"TARDIS?" Fox asked innocently, having missed both the Doctor's and the Brig's explanation of the Time Lords' vehicles, and Peri's stories to Cait.

"It's his time and space machine," Peri told her. "The Doctor has one, too. Only I don't understand. I thought this was...oh, no!" She paused and looked around, remembering. "This isn't his TARDIS. It's the Rani's. The Masters must still be back at the beginning of the Industrial Age. That's where he's taking us!"

The Master overheard their conversation. "That's correct, Miss Brown," he sneered. "And when I get it back, I'll have all I need at my disposal to get rid of the Doctor once and for all!" He brandished the Tissue Compressor and Eliminator at them again, and ordered them to go stand across the room from him and be silent, then continued his frantic workings. Finally, he finished his task, which took some time, considering the state of the control room. Then he punched some buttons on the center console, and Fox and Peri were knocked off their feet as the 'borrowed' TARDIS dematerialized.

It is here, I feel, I must offer something more in the way of an explanation concerning the mode of travel of that mysterious race called Time Lords, and of the Time Lords, themselves. A TARDIS, as Peri said, is a time/space vehicle, one that is a practical application of dimensional transcendentalism, that illusive concept that Fox had been seeking for almost as long as we had known her. In other words, it is bigger on the inside than on the outside. Not only that, but a properly working TARDIS (unlike the Doctor's, I must add) has a device called a chameleon circuit, which changes the external configuration of the vehicle so that it blends in with its surroundings. And Time Lords, we learned, are as curious as their vehicles. While cats may have nine lives, the denizens of Gallifrey (the Doctor's home planet) have thirteen. When a Time Lord is seriously injured, or the body is simply worn out from old age, he or she is able to 'regenerate' [There has even been at least one documented case of a Time Lord regenerating for the hell of it! --Reno] up to twelve times. After a

regeneration, he has not only a new body, but often a new personality as well, although memories and knowledge gained previously are usually retained. In light of this information, we could understand the confusion exhibited by both the Brig and Benton.

We returned to the hotel and started going over the room with a fine-tooth comb, opening drawers and closets, looking under the bed, even checking behind the mirror, looking for some sort of clue, but to no avail. Thirty minutes later, we were sprawled dejectedly around the room, wondering what to do next. Even the Doctor seemed to have no suggestion to offer, and was beginning to annoy us with his constant pacing back and forth. NEW JERSEY and Cait sat glumly on the bed, the former absently leafing through the stack of newspaper clippings on the night stand.

"These are really strange," he said to no one in particular. "Where did they come from?"

"Mommy was saving them for you. She thought you and Buckaroo would be interested."

We all gathered around them to read the articles Fox had clipped, once again hoping that they would give us a clue as to her and Peri's whereabouts.

"So that's where she is!" the Doctor exclaimed. "I wondered if the Master had shaken free of her."

"Who?" Peggy asked.

"The Rani, another renegade Time Lord. She's as evil as the Master, and the last time I saw either of them, they had joined forces of a sort. I should have known better than to think I'd taken care of them for good. In some ways the Rani is even more evil than the Master. There is no room for a soul in her scheme of things. All that matters to her is her unorthodox chemistry, and she doesn't care what or whom she practices it on."

"Can she tell us where the Master may have taken the girls?" Pecos asked.

"Very possibly," the Doctor assured us. "She trusted the Master even less than I do. It's quite likely she may have some sort of way to find him. And since he's gone off and left her, it should be easy enough to persuade her into helping us."

"Then what are we waiting for?" Tommy said. "Let's go."

The gaolers at the facility where the Rani was being held were not nearly as impressed with our Banzai Institute credentials as they were with the Brig and Benton's U.N.I.T. i.d.'s. At last we were ushered into a cell block, deserted except for its lone occupant.

"Well, well, well, Rani," the Doctor said jovially. "The last time we met, and the Master were heading out beyond the galaxy. Tell me, however did you get out of that little fix?"

"As you recall, Doctor, I had several Tyrannosaurus Rex embryos in my TARDIS at the time." The woman in the cell was cool, very cool. "One of the little darlings started hatching after you had tampered with my controls. It nearly destroyed the console room, but fortunately something it did caused us to decelerate before we travelled too far. We were able to limp back to this primitive planet, and managed to materialize here in London. My wrecked controls fused when the reptile broke out, leaving us stranded. The Master and I have merely been trying to rebuild the TARDIS ever since."

"You mean that there's a growing dinosaur running around town?" Buckaroo asked in alarm.

"The Master tried to get it with his Tissue Compressor and Eliminator. Perhaps he succeeded."

"Just to be on the safe side," B. Banzai asided to Tommy, "it might be a good idea to put a call out to any Blue Blaze Irregulars we have in the area to be on the look out." Tommy nodded and left to take care of it.

"Now," he said forcefully to the prisoner, "where has the Master taken our friends?"

"I don't know."

"Wrong answer," I told her, threateningly. I hitched aside my jacket to reveal the pistol I was wearing.

"This little girl," Buckaroo said, "wants her mommy back. We all do. If you don't help us, I just might turn Reno loose on you."

Somewhat cowed, the Rani reconsidered. She coldly raised one eyebrow and commented sarcastically. "Really, Doctor, resorting to violence these days? How refreshing! Perhaps I can help you, but there's a price." She was clearly amused at the Doctor's discomfiture, though I noticed she kept an eye on me. I did my best to look threatening.

"I suspected as much, Rani." The Doctor seemed to have expected this. "Name your terms--but I warn you, be reasonable about what you ask. The local authorities are convinced that you should remain here in this prison psychiatric ward, and I'm inclined to agree."

"Very well," she agreed. "I'm not sure exactly where he has taken them, but I have tracking devices planted on both him and the TARDIS. Well, surely you don't believe me so naive as to trust him, do you? With it, he can be followed. But you'll have to take me with you."

The Boss conferred briefly with the Doctor and the Brig. "It appears that we have no choice," he said. "Lethbridge-Stewart will make arrangements for your release."

"And one other thing," she added. "When we do find that arrogant fool, I get him first."

We needed to stop at the Rani's lodgings--a disreputable little flat in Soho--for her tracking device. It was then decided that Pecos, Peggy, the Brig would stay behind with Tommy in case the Master should return. I know that New Jersey would have liked to have left Cait behind as well, but she threatened to throw a tantrum worthy of her mother in her heyday, so he gave in. With that settled, we headed for the Doctor's TARDIS.

"Nice place you have here," Buckaroo commented.

"Thank you. Feel free to look around if you like, but do take care you don't get lost." I suspected that the Doctor was secretly disappointed that we so coolly took in the remarkable features of his machine. But then, he didn't know that those of us who are fortunate enough to associate with Buckaroo Banzai, like Alice, are accustomed to doing three impossible things before breakfast. After seeing the Lectroid troop ship, even this could not surprise me.

The trip was remarkably short. I was just about to accept the Doctor's invitation and venture out of the console room, when he announced that we had arrived.

Fox and Peri picked themselves up off the floor of the TARDIS, and shook their heads, trying to clear them. "Where are we?" Fox asked.

"Not where...when are we?" Peri corrected. "We should be somewhere near Wylam around 1812, if we're going to find the Master's TARDIS." They both looked expectantly at the Master.

But the renegade Time Lord didn't answer them for a few moments. He was scowling, and checking and rechecking the coordinates on the few remaining parts of the console that were still working. Fox's small computer was smoking, the keyboard melted and fused. A moment later, the Master opened the viewing port, and gaped at what he saw. "You fool!" he hurled at Fox. "What sort of data did you enter into your program? Just where did you get your calculations?"

"Stonehenge, Rhiannon's Wheel, the Nine Maidens," Fox replied. "Places like that. Why? What's wrong?"

"What's wrong?" he echoed. "I'll tell you what's wrong. Thanks to your pretentious attempt at understanding dandimensional teory and phenomena--time travel in particular--you have managed to maroon us in one of the most primitive eras of this barbarian planet of yours.! Not only did you neglect to incorporate the time dilation coefficient, but the insipid and inconsequential data in you program managed to override the commands I gave that sorry excuse you call a computer!"

"I don't understand," Peri whined. "What does that mean?"

The Master turned on her, glaring. "What it means is that we are not in your early nineteenth century, where my TARDIS is. We are here..." he gestured out the viewing port at the ancient ring of standing stones, "in the thirteenth century! Idiotic woman! Didn't you bother to take into consideration that time moves slowing in the future than in the past?"

"Look, Peri, it's the Nine Maidens!" Fox whispered, recognizing the familiar configuration of massive stones from her previous visit, only she could see subtle alterations in their weathered appearance and the landscape around them was different. "So we've over-shot our destination by centuries." She turned to the Master, rankling at his insults. "And of course I've heard of time dilation. But only with regards to space ships travelling at light speed. You Time Lords may have access to all sorts of information, but when and where I come from, we are only now beginning to take the first steps into understanding that branch of physical science. Besides," she added smugly, "you're the one who shanghaied my computer and hooked it up to your controls. Why didn't you take the time to check out the program yourself?"

"Bah!" the Master roared. "Watch your tongue, girl! With Banzai and the Doctor closing in, I had to leave sooner than I wanted. And now, thanks to you, I may not be able to find the materials I need to finish rebuilding the navigational system of this TARDIS."

"I thought you'd stolen everything you needed," Peri said.

"I had," he stated darkly, but the computer will never last through another jump. You can imagine my excitement when I chanced upon this 'Fox' and her project. A chance had finally presented itself for me to free myself from that wretched Rani and confound my old adversary, as well. Now it looks as if I'll have to be doing all that work I thought I'd saved myself. I will get it done, but it will take time, perhaps more time than I have. You, Fox, will have to recreate this program."

"Impossible. For one thing, I don't have the foggiest idea what was on that disk. And even if I did, and we had another disk to enter the data on, the computer is ruined." Fox's voice trembled. "Are we really stuck here forever?"

"The system can be rebuilt, but where or not I leave you two disgusting females here, or take you back where you belong, depends entirely on how useful you are to me."

A moment later, Fox and Peri found themselves herded out the door with instructions to scout the area and procure something to eat. It seemed that the Master found the unidentifiable things stocked in the Rani's larder to be completely unpalatable, and it looked as if the three time travelers were going to be there for quite a while. His threats of the consequences should they choose to betray him still rang in their ears.

"Which way do we go, now?" Peri asked as she and Fox paused to look around, taking note that instead of nine 'maidens', there were now ten.

"That way, I guess," Fox replied, pointing. "I've always wanted to see how Sherwood Forest looked when the legends say Robin Hood inhabited it."

The girls soon found themselves in an ancient, unkempt forest, without so much as a footpath in sight. "As we picked our way along," Fox told us later, "I couldn't help thinking it was like something out of Middle Earth. Even the Redwoods in California seemed like seedlings compared to some of the giant oaks we saw. I half-expected to find Elves and Hobbits behind every tree. But I really never expected what we did find."

They wandered for over an hour, Fox remembering to mark the path they traversed, so that, when needed, she could readily find her way back to the TARDIS. At last they came to a small but oft-used trail. After a short deliberation, they decided to follow the set of hoof-prints leading north that Fox had spotted. But Peri, who had only just begun to recover from her illness when the Master abducted her, had had it. She had been falling further and further behind since they found the road, and finally had to sit and rest. "Fox, wait!" she called out pleadingly.

"I'm sorry, Peri," she said when she hurried back to where the Doctor's companion had seated herself on a mossy rock. "I forgot that you still aren't fully recovered. But we need to be moving along. These aren't the times for two women to be travelling alone and unarmed. For all we know, these woods may be crawling with thieves and cut-throats."

Gamely, Peri rose and limped along after Fox. "He's never going to take us back, you know," she began to moan. "If we don't lose ourselves in this horrible forest and die of hunger or get pneumonia from the cold and damp, the Master's going to do something horrible to us. Probably shrink us, so he can be rid of us."

Fox had done her best to ignore this tirade, instead concentrating on her surrounding. Suddenly, she raised her hand in warning. "Some one's coming," she told the girl. "We'd better hide ourselves until we know if he's friendly or not."

Reluctantly, Peri joined Fox in the shrubbery by the side of the path. Presently the hoof beats Fox had heard grew louder, and a small group of foot soldiers, led by a rather handsome, though arrogant and angry-looking blond knight on horseback, came into view.

"Soldiers!" Peri whispered excitedly. "I'll bet their leader will help up." Before Fox could stop her, she was out on the road. "Sir, sir. Excuse me, but could you help us? We're lost, and cold and hungry, too."

"And I think I know just what it is you're hungry for." The knight dismounted from his horse and approached the girl, who was suddenly frightened. Stroking her face, he added, "You're very lovely, but whatever are you wearing? Certainly, no decent woman would go about dressed like that." He began to kiss her, as Peri struggled weakly against his advances.

"Now, knock it off!" Fox ordered, springing from the bushes. At orders from the knight, two of the soldiers immediately grabbed her.

"This one is full of spirit, Sir Guy," one of them leered. "Perhaps we should tame her for you. When you've finished with the other one, she'll be ready for you."

"No, I'll take her now," Sir Guy told the man angrily, then turned to Peri. "Don't worry, my dear, I'll have more than enough strength left for you." He pushed her into the arms of another soldier.

Remembering her lessons with Buckaroo, Fox did not let the anger she was experiencing get control of her. Instead, she let it build inside of her as she waited patiently for the knight to get within striking distance. The two soldiers still held her, as the blond man began to kiss and caress her. When the expected resistance did not come, she could feel them relax their grips slightly, letting down their guard. The time ripe, she drove her knee into her assailant where it would do the most good. As Sir Guy doubled over with pain, Fox took advantage of their surprise to deal with the man who were holding her. The third soldier threw Peri to the ground and came to help his comrades, sword drawn. Knowing herself to be out-numbered, Fox was forced to raise her arms in surrender.

"Hold there," a voice called out. "Or your next move will be your last."

All looked up to see that they were surrounded by group of people, all dressed in Lincoln green, all training the arrows of their longbows on the soldiers. The leader, who wore a hood of leather, went over to the knight, who was crouched on the ground in pain, grabbed a handful of blond hair, and pulled the man's head up.

"Really, Gisburne, don't you ever learn? The forest is ours. You cannot molest helpless women in Sherwood."

A stout man, tonsured and robed like a monk, came and helped Peri to her feet, while a huge, bearded man assisted Fox.

"Thieves and cut-throats, indeed," the fur-clad man said with good humor. "It's the sherrif's men you have to worry about around here."

"Who are you?" the lone woman in the group asked.

"Travelers," Peri replied.

"We were abducted by an evil sorcerer who forced us to serve him. Please, my friend has been ill. Will you help us?"

The leader recognized the desperation in Fox's voice and saw Peri swaying on her feet. He nodded, and another man, hardly more than a boy, joined him. "Much, take the ladies back to camp, while we decide what to do with Gisburne and his friends. Marion, go with him, will you?"

"Oh my goodness," breathed Fox. Something had seemed oddly familiar about these people, and it just sank in what. "You're Robin Hood!" There was one man, however, she couldn't place. They stared at each other curiously.

"Yes. Where have you come from?"

"A very far country. You wouldn't have heard of it." Fox looked again at the strange dark man. "I don't recall hearing that you had, I mean, have a Saracen with you."

"Nasir? He's been with us for quite a while."

"A-salaam aleikem," Fox greeted the Arab in his own language.

"Aleikem a-salaam," The one called Nasir bowed slightly.

"And I'm Much," the boy introduced himself eagerly.

"The Miller's Son!" Fox was delighted at being able to make the connection. "Then you're Little John and Will Scarlet. And Marion. I don't believe I'm actually meeting you. Where's Alan A Dale?"

"Who? Oh, the bard, or so he fancied himself," Little John laughed. "He's off barding somewhere, I suppose. Unless he found some place where bad singing is a hanging offence."

"You seem to know alot about us," Marion commented.

"Oh, I've loved all the stories about you' since..." Fox caught herself about to say 'since I was a litle girl'. "Since the people of Nottingham first started telling them."

"The tales about us have even reached your country?" Scarlet seemed immensely pleased. "Well, then, I'd say we're famous."



The girls were taken, as Robin ordered, to the outlaws' camp, where Peri was wrapped in a sheepskin and given hot spiced wine. Fox was helping Marion tend to a haunch of venison that was roasting over the fire, when Robin and the others returned, leading Guy of Gisburne and his soldiers.

"Guy says that he was off to escort an earl from Northumberland to Nottingham," Tuck announced gleefully. "Just rolling in money, I'll bet he is."

"Are we going after him?" Marion asked, interested.

"Yes, but not 'til morning," Robin told her.

As food was served, Peri began reciting some of the versions of the legend, eliciting much laughter from the robbers at some of the inaccuracies. Fox suddenly found herself unable to eat, and, setting aside the plate she'd just been handed, went to the edge of the clearing. Feeling a hand upon her shoulder, she realized that the others were now silent. She turned and met Peri's eyes.

"Don't worry," the younger girl said briskly. "The Doctor will find us, somehow."

"I hope so. This may be a fun place to visit, but I don't want to live here. Not without Sidney and Cait, anyway."

"The Doctor?" Robin furrowed his brow in thought, striving to recall something Herne had said to him:

*Time folds in upon itself. Its Lords
come in war. A token finds its way home,
completing the circle.*

"Does he travel in a great blue box?"

"Yes! Do you know the Doctor?" It seemed to Peri that lately they couldn't go anywhere without running into old friends (or their descendents) of the Time Lord.

"No, but I think King Richard may have mentioned meeting a person called Doctor in Palestine. A crotchity old meddler who still rendered him a great service." [See the adventure 'Doctor Who and the Crusaders'.

---Editor]

"Well, that's him, but I doubt he's the same man the King remembers," Peri said. "He's still an old meddler, and he's still just trying to help."

"And I'd say he's more overbearing than crotchity, these days," Fox added.

The two returned to the fire and accepted mugs of wine and more food. "May Herne protect us," Robin intoned solemnly. The others repeated the blessing.

"You worship Herne the Hunter?" Fox was surprised.

"Many of the people of Sherwood do," Robin told them.

"And Robin's his champion," Much added. "His son."

"Oh. I'd just never heard of a connection between Robin Hood and Herne before." More mead was served, and soon they were laughing uproariously as Little John offered to teach Peri how to use a quarterstaff. There was a rustling sound behind them, and Much shouted a warning. Gisburne and his men had contrived somehow to free themselves, and were running off into the woods.

"All I could think," Fox later reported, "was that the jerk who had tried to rape us was getting away. There was a bow and quiver at hand, so I grabbed them, not even taking the time to pray that the bow was Marion's and I'd be able to pull it."

The arrow that Fox let fly struck a tree just a hair's-breadth from the Gisburne's nose. Before she could nock another one, however, he was gone. "If it had been the Master," she muttered, "my arrow would have been in the black."

"Where did you learn to do that?" Peri asked.

"It's all in the reflexes," Fox replied. "Anyway, there's a German guy at the Institute applying for Internship. He's been giving me lessons."

"He taught you well," Little John said. "That was a good shot."

"But he got away!"

"I shouldn't worry about it, if I were you. One of those soldiers is bound to talk, sooner or later, and when word gets out that Gisburne was beaten in hand to hand fighting by a girl, he'll be the laughing stock of Nottingham!" Scarlet chortled gleefully.

"We have that little piece of business to do later," Robin said after some consideration. "We could use you, if you wish to join us."

"I'll think about it." Fox wondered if she would enjoy the life of a forest bandit, and decided it would be better than nothing if she were stuck in Sherwood Forest for the rest of her life.

"Perhaps you will tell us how you came to be here," Nasir suggested. Quickly, with help from Peri, Fox told their tale.

"And he's really our only hope of getting home to our families," she concluded glumly.

"We will help you capture this Master, and see to it that he returns you to where you belong," Robin announced.

The meal finished, Robin began outlining his plan for the capture of the Master. "We'll dress ourselves as Druids," he decided. "And go to the circle to celebrate the miracle of the tenth Maiden. We'll leave offerings of food. You said he was hungry."

"How about a human sacrifice?" Tuck suggested. "That sort of evil creature can't resist a maiden bound on the altar."

"Fox handles herself well," John added. "She'd draw him out for sure, and get him like she got Gisburne."

"Well, I don't exactly qualify on one count," Fox said, "but I do want to get my hands on that murdering ..."

"Then it's settled. The moon is full tonight. We'll get started as soon as it's risen."

All went as planned, and after Robin and Tuck made a great show of offering up their sacrifice, the Master came out to gloat over the return of his prisoner.

"Well, how clever of you to lose that tiresome Miss Brown," he laughed evilly. "And how thoughtful of you to bring so much food. A pity you won't live long enough to share it with me." He pulled out the Tissue Compressor and Eliminator.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you," Robin called out, having been briefed by Peri as to the nature of the Master's weapon. He and the others appeared, bows drawn and arrows trained on the black-clad villain.

Temporarily distracted, the Master was caught off-guard by Fox, whose bindings were only a sham. She neatly relieved him of the device, and grinned as Nasir and Scarlet came with leather thongs and bound the captive.

"What shall we do with him?" the Saracen asked.

"I say we kill him," Will Scarlet snarled. "Not let him get away, like Gisburne did."

"No!" Fox cried out in alarm. "I told you, we probably can't get home without him."

They went back to camp, and rather a lot of care was taken as the Master was tied to a tree, his back to the bole and his hands behind it."

They were making final preparations for the robbery planned for the morning, and getting ready for sleep, when they heard a bird whistle.

"It's Edward," Scarlet announced. A moment later, a blond bearded man entered the clearing.

"Blessed be." He seated himself by the fire and accepted a cup of ale. The others returned the greeting. "Odd goings-on in the forest tonight, Robin. Strange people."

"What people?"

"Several men and a woman, all arguing which way to go. One, a great longshanks of a man, had a little girl with him."

"Sidney! Quickly, where are they?" Edward indicated the direction of the Standing Stones, and Fox took off.

The Doctor's TARDIS had materialized next to that of the Master. We found the trail markings Fox had left and began following them, but eventually came to a place that was unmarked and there was no trace of anyone having been there. The Rani suddenly claimed that her homing device was malfunctioning, and that we were lost. For some of us, then, finding our friend became more important than finding and stopping the Master, and as the serf was reporting, an argument had broken out between Buckaroo and the Doctor, with all of us adding our two cents' worth at the top of our lungs. We were interrupted by what sounded like an elephant crashing through the trees, and then a small body that hurled itself at Dr. Sidney Zweibel. It, or as you've probably guessed, she knocked him to the ground and began covering his face with kisses. Cait was quickly drawn into the melee, and the reunion continued for several minutes before Buckaroo waded in and separated them.

"I take it you're glad to see us, Carly" he said equitably.

"Am I ever! Come on. We've got the Master hog-tied and waiting for you, and I want you to meet some people."

"I think they're all ready here," I reported nervously. My enjoyment of being reunited with our comrade had been interrupted by the silent appearance of, as I found out later, Little John and Robin Hood. but at the time, all I knew was that one man had an arrow aimed at my breast and that an angry giant looked ready to beat New Jersey to a pulp with a fence post.

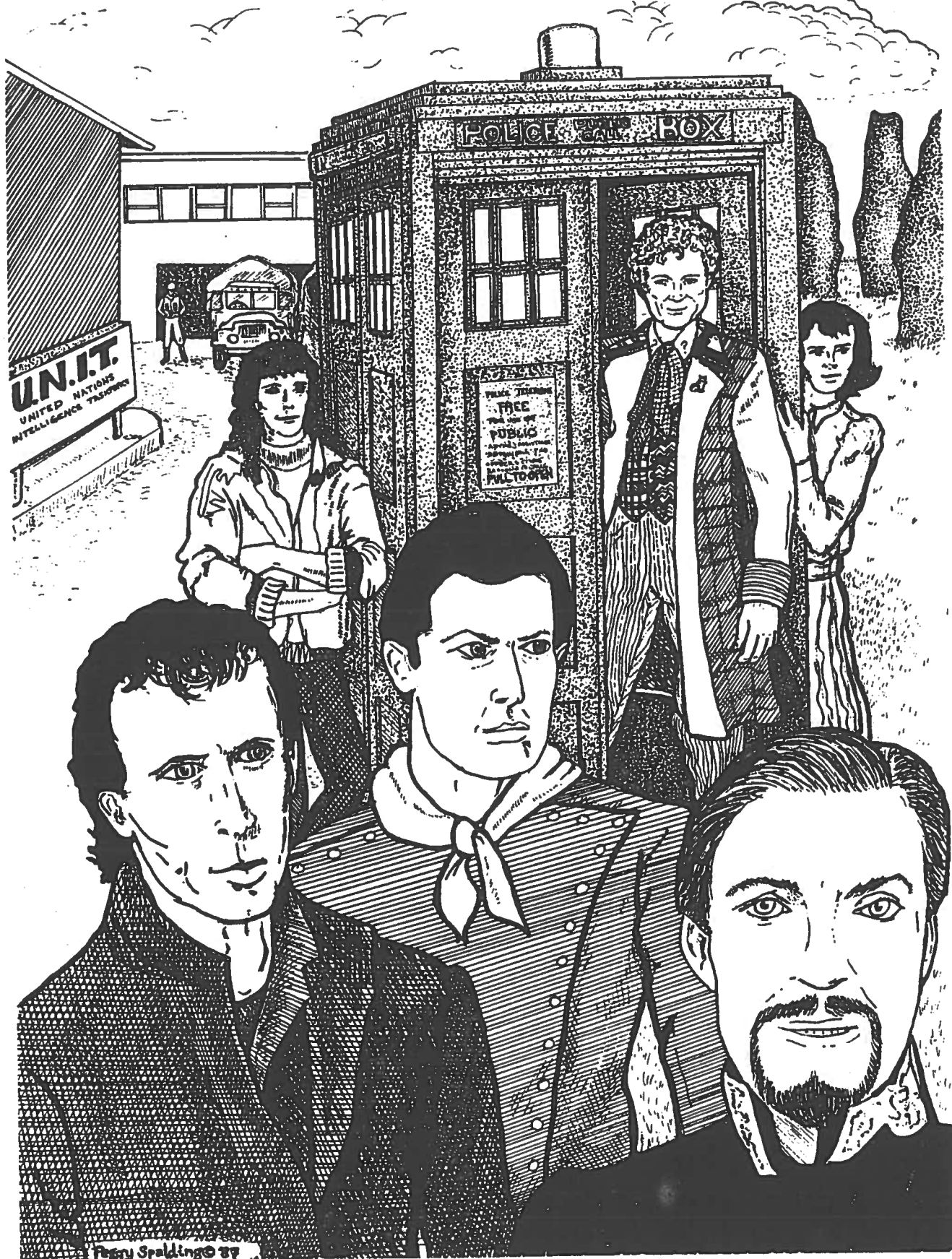
"Robin, no. They're friends." Fox hastily made introductions, at that time herself becoming acquainted with the Rani.

"Then these are the ones dear to you whom you have missed." Weapons were lowered and we were led back to the camp.

Seated around the fire, Fox and Peri proudly told us what had transpired, and presented the Boss with the Tissue Compressor and Eliminator. Buckaroo promptly turned it over to the Doctor.

"I think you know better what to do with this," he said.

"Indeed I do," the Time Lord replied, then got up to confront his nemesis. "I'd say you've met your match, this time, Master."



Peggy Spalding © 87

The renegade remained silent, but stared malevolently at the Rani, who smirked, and turned her back on him.

At Fox's insistence, we agreed to spend the night. As I was dozing off, I heard the boy, Much, call out a warning. I roused myself and saw that the Master had somehow managed to free himself and was running back towards his TARDIS. Of one accord, we all took off after him, and arrived back at the Nine Maidens just in time to hear the now-familiar wheeze-groan of a TARDIS dematerializing, and to see the tenth Maiden disappear.

"He won't get away from me!" the Rani muttered, and pressed a button on her recall device. The TARDIS reappeared, she forced the door open, shouting curses the entire time, and then the whole kit and kaboodle disappeared again.

"Shouldn't we go after them, Doctor?" New Jersey asked. "I don't like to think what havoc they could wreck on a society such as this."

"I shouldn't worry, if I were you," The Doctor replied. "The Master. He and the Rani seem to have gotten what they wanted, after all, and it doesn't seem likely that they'll stay in this century. But in the meantime, they can't get into too much mischief. Especially after I notify the High Council of Time Lords. I'm afraid, though, that I, at least, have not seen the last of them."

We returned to camp and passed what little was left of the night.

"Are you coming with us?" Robin asked Fox as we broke our fast. She nodded.

"Carly, armed robbery?" New Jersey was clearly wrestling with the moral issue.

"Well, I've always wanted to rob from the rich and give to the poor. And this way, I get to prove the truth of the legend, at least to myself." Fox picked up a bow and turned to Buckaroo. "Tuck is a man of G-d, and he's taking part in this. Trust me to not do anything that would conflict with our beliefs." B. Banzai, who himself has seemed a mass of moral contradictions to those who don't know him, probed her eyes with his own, then nodded.

The robbery went off without a hitch. At Robin's signal, Fox and Marion cut the ropes and dropped a large net on the unsuspecting baron and his entourage. With amused contempt on his face, Will Scarlet swaggered up and relieved the nobleman and the others of their purses and valuables. One of the soldiers took it upon himself to fight back, but Nasir drew both his swords and subdued the man. No one else seemed willing to take on the Saracen, so then the party was allowed to continue.

Fox was higher than a kite when they returned to the clearing. "Did you see that fat pig? In another incarnation, he's going to be a senator who votes to cut funding to programs for the elderly and poor. And I had him. I had my arrow on him the whole time. If it had been Lo Pep, or Xan----POW!"

She paced around the clearing, working off the adrenalin, while the outlaws went about their business. Money was counted, swords were cleaned and sharpened, and arrows were counted and inspected. Cait had attached herself to Much, and was following him around silently. Fox finally slowed down enough to notice, and tossed a pebble at the child to attract her attention. "Don't be a pest, kiddo."

"She's not bothering me," Much said.

"He reminds me of Tommy," Cait said, the first words she'd spoken since we got there. Fox nodded her agreement. "But I don't think he'd understand the comparison."

"I'm glad you're having such a good time, Fox," the long-forgotten Doctor broke in, "but now that we've found you and Peri, we really need to be getting back."

"Can't we stay a little while longer, please? Buckaroo, you could really learn something about handling swords from Nasir."

"You heard him. It is time to go." The Boss treated Fox the way she would treat Cait.

The Doctor's TARDIS, we discovered upon our return, showed signs that the Master had tried to force entry.

"Well, that just shows you," the Doctor said smugly, dangling an oddly-shaped key before our eyes, "that it pays to install a good lock, and to use it. Well, Fox say your good byes. Time to go. That new Brigadier has to be told about all this."

Fox did as she was told. "Thank you, Robin. All of you. I can't tell you what meeting you has meant to me. I'm just sorry I have no way of repaying your hospitality. Oh, wait. I do! Take this." She pulled off a small ring that she always wore.

"Fox!" I was surprised, knowing that the ring was an antique and had been in her family for centuries.

"I know what I'm doing, Reno." She turned back to the outlaw. "This is topaz from the Holy Land. Take it to Aaron of Lincoln. I think he'll give you a good price for it."

Robin nodded his thanks. "Herne protect you, my lady. And all of you."

"Herne protect you, Robin-in-the-Hood," suddenly Fox seemed close to tears. "If we're going, can we just go? Now?!"

"All right, everyone into the TARDIS," the Doctor ordered briskly, unlocking the door.

"What? All of you getting in that thing?" Will Scarlet was incredulous. "You're right around the Maypole, you people are."

We didn't bother to reply as we filed in and took off. Once again, the trip didn't last long, and soon we materialized in present-day London.

"You're lucky," Peri remarked as we egressed. "Half the time, we never end up where we expect to."

We not only landed in the right country in the right time zone, we were right in front of U.N.I.T. Headquarters. "I take it, we're going to make our report to Smythe now," I commented to Buckaroo.

"Postponing the inevitable, even when it is unpleasant, is counterproductive," he told me.

I was pleased to see that the Brig was with Smythe. He would be a support to us when we told Smythe about the Master's escape.

"The next time it happened, he was gone for about two weeks," Lethbridge-Stewart was saying. "And when that guru fellow dropped him out of the TARDIS, I knew he was more than half-dead. He croaked out some final words to Miss Smith, and then changed before my very eyes."

"I don't believe a word of it."

"It's the truth! Apparently, they all can do it. And he's done it two more times since. Oh, I see they're back."

"Where's the Master?" Smythe demanded. "Didn't you find him?"

"We found him. Of course, we found him," the Doctor retorted belligerently.

"We found him. He got away. And that's really all there is to say about that," Buckaroo said evenly. "But we did manage to defang him, at least for the time being."

Peri proudly displayed the Tissue Compressor and Eliminator, which the Doctor then demonstrated on wilting houseplant. Smythe was suitably impressed.

"I can see that I'm in need of a full-time scientific advisor around here," he told the Doctor. "I may even be able to arrange some sort of payment."

"Thank you, Brigadier Smythe, but, uh, I believe my services are needed elsewhere at the moment. Don't worry, I'm sure to pop in now and again. You humans do seem unable to get along without my help." He signalled us urgently, and we hastily departed.

"You look like a gargoyle hoping for raspberry teacakes," New Jersey said to Fox as we piled into Bessie for the drive back to the hotel.

"I am starving. After all, I haven't eaten for over six hundred years! But I can wait until we're with the others."

In our absence, Tommy, Pecos and Peggy had been joined by an attractive, athletic young woman.

"This is Kip," Peggy made the introduction.

"She found the dinosaur," Tommy added. "Hey, Fox, I'm glad you're back. That was one time I thought we'd never see you again."

"Thanks, mi hijo. Me, too." Fox laughed as Tommy blushed furiously.

Ever since Fox absent mindedly introduced him to someone as her 'youngest', Tommy has been sensitive to such terms of endearment.

It was decided to order room service for tea, so that we could recount our adventures away from prying ears. A lavish spread was soon brought up, and we dug in with enthusiasm. It was some minutes before we got around to travelers' tales.

"I can't believe your choice of friends this time, Fox," Pecos said. "I mean, outlaws?"

"They weren't outlaws, they were Maccabees. Freedom Fighters."

"What's bothering you about them, then?" the Doctor asked shrewdly.

"He was so young. Not like Errol Flynn, at all."

"Rebels usually are young men," Buckaroo told her.

"But I don't imagine rebels tend to live very long. Especially in those days."

"Well, whether he died an angry young man, or a contented old one," the Doctor said, "he died a very long time ago."

"Wakata," Fox sighed, smiled, and nodded her agreement.

"Well, I can't believe that you gave away your ring, Fox," I said. The incident continued to bother me, knowing, as I did, that it was the one possession her mother had managed to bring with her to the United States after the war.

"Did I ever tell you the history of it, Reno? Family legend says that

that ring was brought back from Palestine by a Crusader and sold to Aaron or Lincoln, the wealthiest Jew in England at the time. He gave it to his son, who gave it to his bride, and it was passed down through the generations until it came to my mother, and then me."

"You mean, that's how Aaron got it in the first place? From you?"

"It is now," the Doctor said.

"Well, maybe it's time we replaced it," New Jersey announced, bringing out the small box he'd been carrying with him since the day before the President's call. He had been waiting all this while for the right time to present it. "Someone suggested that this might be appropriate." Fox slipped on the ring it contained, which sported a one carat pear-shaped diamond, looking ridiculously happy. There were congratulations all around.

"Hey, Cowboy, 'bout time you got around to making it official," I couldn't help commenting.

"Whoa, now, look who's talking," Peggy said, looking meaningfully at Pecos and me.

"Gee, Fox, it's too bad about your computer," I hastened to say, trying to change the subject.

"And the program!" Pecos added, squeezing my hand to let me know that she didn't need any rings. "I don't suppose you'll ever be able to duplicate your efforts."

"Billy taught me better than that. I have a back-up disk, complete with the Master's corrections, in my suitcase. However," she looked hopefully at the Doctor, "there is that little problem with the time dilation coefficient."

"I don't know that I can allow humans to run around with the knowlege to build a working TARDIS," the Doctor said. "But with Peri, here, returning to school, I find myself companionless. Perhaps you'd care to join me for awhile, Fox."

"Thank you, Doctor, but I think not." She looked meaningfully at her new ring.

"Oh, well. How about the rest of you?"

We all demured, except for Kip. "I think I'd like to," she poked him playfully in the stomach. "You obviously need someone to teach you how to eat right."

"Doctor, are you sure I can't stay with you?"

"Yes, Peri. But I shall miss you, my dear. Come along, Kip. Time we were off." As the Doctor and his companion departed, I could hear Kip faintly, "Doctor, would you please call me by my given name, Melanie? I never did like 'Kip'."

We suddenly realized that we needed to be making our own travel plans as well.

"I suppose you'll all be leaving soon, too," Peri said forlornly.

"We do have work to do," Buckaroo replied.

"Maybe I can join your group. Do you have a botanist at your Institute?"

"Uh, write for an application," Tommy told her. "We'll get back to you--some day."

"Buckaroo," Fox suddenly seemed a little nervous. "Cait and I won't be going back to New Jersey with you."

"Is there any problem?"

"Oh, no, nothing like that. I called Stephan's parents while Peri was sick. They've invited us to visit them in Galway."

"How long will you be staying?"

"I don't know. I guess it depends on how it goes."

"Good luck, then. We'll be thinking of you."

"Thanks, Boss. Sidney?"

"It's okay, Carly. I'll be waiting for you." **EB**

ACROSS THE FINAL FRONTIER

by

Leni R. Sommer

It was a quiet, mid-August day and I was, more or less, alone at the Institute when they arrived home. Cait entered first, with her mother right behind her. Perfect Tommy came a short time later, lugging some rather large boxes.

"So, Fox," I queried casually, after I'd followed her into the kitchen, "how are things in Glocca Morra?"

She gave me a quizzical smile and headed for the fridge. "Just fine, Reno," she replied vaguely, helping herself to a beer and a dish of chili con queso.

"It's only ten a.m.," I reminded her. "A little early for all that, isn't it?"

"It's not ten a.m. in Ireland," came the testy reply. "Besides, while Irish food is better than its reputation, its still pretty bland. I want a cold beer and some hot food. And I want it now!"

"In that case, there's pollo mole in there, too, courtesy of Big Norse."

"Bless her!" Fox sipped at her beer while the food heated in the microwave, and moodily began to peel the label from the bottle.

"Not exactly the homecoming you expected, with just Tommy to meet you, is it?" I asked, divining the reason behind her ill humor.

"To say the least. Where is everyone?"

"Out and about. Buckaroo and New Jersey had to go to Prince Edward Island this morning to operate on a Samoan."

"Oh! How's the patient?"

"Not good, from what Pecos reported about an hour ago. They're still in surgery. They wanted me to tell you, though, that they hope to be home late tonight or early tomorrow.

"So what's in the boxes?"

"Presents, of course. From Gram Wilde." The microwave dinged, and while Fox got the queso out, I fetched the tortilla chips.

"Then you and Caity got on okay with Stephan's parents." After years of silence on their part, Cait's Irish grandparents finally responded to one of Fox's overtures--a phone call made while we were in England--and invited the two of them to visit. Fox had had her reservations, but figured no trip to the Old Sod could be a total loss. They had been gone over a month, and no one had heard much from them, except possibly New Jersey.

"Well, it was pretty hairy at first. The Wilde's knew exactly what kind of man their son was, and had their doubts about the sort of woman who would get involved with him. But they were... charmed... by Caity. She won them over completely."

"I'll bet they were 'charmed' by Cait's mom, too."

Fox blushed, as I knew she would. "Well, we got on all right. I only hope it goes as well when we meet the Zweibels. Say, did I get any mail?"

"Yeah, I'll get it for you." The stack of correspondence I placed before her was topped by a note from New Jersey, accompanied by a Godiva

chocolate sea shell and a yellow rose. Naturally, we who know and love Peggy Banzai have a great aversion to yellow roses, but the petals of this particular species--Fox's favorite--were rimmed in pink, making them inoffensive to us all. Now Fox sniffed at the rose as she read the note, her blush deepening. Finally, with a rather moon-struck sigh, she set the items aside and turned to the rest of her mail. One of the letters was from her friends the Bradleys, who had moved back to Texas.

"How's Jake getting along?" I asked.

"My ego wishes that he was spending his time at school crying and signing my name, but Joy says he's getting along okay. It'll take time for him to make the adjustment, of course, but it's going better than they thought it would."

"So, when do I get my present?" I asked a few moments later, breaking Fox out of some private reverie.

"When we're all together. I swear, Reno, you're worse than Tommy!" Having finished her snack, Fox gave me a good-natured slap on the back before going up to the Bunkhouse to unpack and get some rest after her trip.

Captain's Log, Stardate 4139.4

We have put in at Starbase 11 for a complete overhaul of the ship's computer system. Mr. Spock's estimate of a minimum of three weeks for the task is proving to be conservative, as the Federation computer experts are finding it almost impossible to exorcise the decidedly feminine personality that has possessed the computer since our stop-over at Cygnus IV. But I'm troubled. Something, and I can't put my finger on it, is wrong here.

Kirk looked up from his beer, surprised to see his First Officer standing before him. Spock rarely, if ever, consumed alcoholic beverages, and therefore did not frequent Officers' Clubs or any of the other haunts of service people on leave.

"What is it, Mr. Spock? Did the ship's computer commit suicide over its unrequited love?"

"No, Captain. I'm afraid we have a more pressing problem. I may have made a serious mistake in my calculations," the first officer replied.

"As Bones would say, this may be an historic occasion. What's the matter?"

"I am reconsidering the sagacity of our handling of Captain Christopher last month."

"You were the one who insisted that he be returned to his own time."

"I am aware of that, Captain. The action was necessary, so that John Christopher could father his only son, Sean Jeffery Christopher, who led the first manned expedition to Mars. However, the problem is that our method of returning him does not seem to have accomplished the desired result."

"You think that he may have remembered the 'look ahead', as he called it, that we gave him?" Kirk knew that Spock was concerned that an unscrupulous man with sure knowledge of the future would manipulate circumstances and change it, endangering not only the lives of crew of the Enterprise, but all of civilization as they knew it.

"Yes, Captain. But more importantly, the Base's computer banks show that the younger Christopher did not, in fact, lead that important manned space expedition. Instead, a similar mission was led by a citizen of what was called the Eastern Block, a Captain Esad Kolakovitch.

"As you recall, that incident last month was not the first time we fell into a time warp."

"You're talking about the time we had to use the matter/anti-matter implosion formula to restart the engines and warp away from planet Psi 2000." The memory was not a happy one for Jim Kirk. While in a critical orbit around a planet that was about to break up, the crew had become infected with a new form of space madness. Lieutenant Kevin Riley had barricaded himself in Engineering and turned off the engines, necessitating the use of the untried formula to restart them; Sulu had come on the bridge brandishing a fencing sword; Christine Chapel had declared her undying love for Spock, who had been overcome with remorse over his treatment of his mother; and he, Kirk, had come face to face with his true feelings concerning his ship and his command. All in all, it had not been a good day. "Yes, Spock. I remember."

"Then you also remember that, after employing the formula, we traveled back in time nearly three days."

"So what's your point?"

"The point is, Captain, that although we relived those three days differently--we did not re-experience the epidemic--we still remember the events that had taken place previously. Even though we beamed Christopher back aboard his aircraft before the events we wished him to forget occurred. . ."

"You're afraid that he may have remembered, anyway."

"There is cause for concern, Captain. I did not recall that this Starbase was staffed almost exclusively with Russian nationals. In fact, every Starbase in this part of the galaxy is so staffed. There are no Federation members from other planets at all."

"So that's it. I sensed something was wrong, but couldn't put my finger on it. It's not just the racial make-up of the staff--it's their whole attitude. They're almost antagonistic towards us."

"Indeed, Captain. Even Mr. Chekov has noticed. I have been using the Base's library to research Christopher's time period, which was an extremely turbulent one in Earth's history, and have discovered that the American space program suffered a severe crisis in the mid 1980's, approximately sixteen years after our encounter with the captain. The whole program was nearly eliminated."

"You think that Christopher might have had something to do with that? The man wanted to be part of the space program." Kirk found the idea incredible.

"He had applied, but didn't make it. A desire for revenge triggered by such a rejection could drive a man to sabotage the very thing he loved."

"Your logic can be annoying, at times, Mr. Spock. I assume you have a proposition to make."

"I believe that we need to return to the time in question and rectify any errors that we may have made. As soon as the ship is operational, of course."

"The Tennessee Stud was long and lean, the color of the sun, and his eyes were green. He had the nerve, and he had the blood. And there never was a horse like the Tennessee Stud."* It was the wee small hours before dawn when we were awakened by New Jersey's jubilant singing. By the time I got downstairs, he and Fox were in a serious clinch, and Buckaroo, Peggy and Pecos were fixing drinks.

"Knock it off, you two," I gave New Jersey a good-natured slap on the back and was totally ignored by both of them. I went over to Pecos. "I take it everything came out all right," I said, giving her a welcome home kiss.

"Yeah, the kid'll be fine," she replied, returning the kiss. The lovebirds joined us, and Drs. Banzai and Zweibel filled us in on the details of the surgery they had performed earlier. Once inside the patient's head, they had not only found the extensive nerve damage they had expected, but several aneurisms--balloonings in the blood vessels of the brain--ready to rupture, as well. One of these weakenings had in fact ruptured while they were attempting to repair it, lengthening the duration of the surgery by several more hours.

"We used the artificial nerve fiber to by-pass the damaged areas," Buckaroo was now saying. "There are vast areas of the brain that are unused. With the transplants to tap into the information stored in the undamaged brain cells, and therapy to train the new area, the boy should be able to lead a reasonably normal life." Mrs. Johnson, who had been about to go to bed when she heard the commotion and joined us, and I fixed some breakfast for everyone. We were all still talking when Tommy, Cait, Big Norse, Professor Hikita and Billy came downstairs. Tommy was toting one of the boxes he had carried in for Fox yesterday.

"Uh, Fox, now that everyone's home, can we have our presents now?"

"Well, we could wait until Scooter, Caspar and Pinky get here, Tommy, but sure, you can have your present now."

"Everybody's is the same, except for the sizes," Cait announced as her mother opened the box and distributed the parcels within. "My gram made them."

Our hasty tearing of wrapping paper revealed beautiful hand-knit Aran Isle sweaters. "The yarn still has the natural lanolin left in it, so they're pretty water-proof," Fox said as I held mine up for closer inspection. "Each cable pattern has to do with the life by the sea--lobster claws, fish nets, ropes, even the honey a fisherman uses to sweeten his tea."

"They're really neat," Tommy admitted, "but couldn't she have at least put the designs in a different order?" Sometimes Tommy has an almost pathological need to assert his differentness. All of us having identical jackets would seem too much like a uniform to him.

"The way the patterns are arranged on a man's sweater is very important in that part of Ireland, Tommy. Each family has its own design so that, after a ship-wreck, when the bodies have been in the water for days and are unrecognizable, they can be identified by their sweaters. Gram Wilde's people, the FitzHughes, have been fisherfolk for generations, and she's given us all the patterns she knits for the family, not the mishmash she knits up to sell to tourists. This makes us all honorary members of the family, so if any of you get washed over-board or drink yourselves senseless anywhere in Connemara, who ever finds you will know where to take you."

* "The Tennessee Stud", by Jimmy Driftwood

Captain's Log, Stardate 4215.1

Using the matter/anti-matter implosion formula, we have gone back in time to 1986, the year Spock has pin-pointed as the one critical to the continuation of the American manned space program.

Spock has also used the ship's now-repaired computers to access military records and locate Major Christopher, now retired and living near the Air Force base he was stationed at when we first met him. We beamed down to the coordinates provided and proved Mr. Spock's concerns valid.

"Captain Kirk, Mr. Spock, come in."

"You do remember us, then, Major Christopher?"

"Of course, Mr. Spock. I didn't, at first, but it started coming back to me after Sean was born. I never told anyone, though. I wanted to, but I remembered how important you thought it was that no one know."

"You haven't told anyone at all?" Kirk thought he caught something in the man's voice.

"Well, there was a terrible accident last year and seven astronauts died, one of them a civilian, a school teacher. Sean was just beginning to show more than an ordinary interest in astronomy and space before the tragedy, and afterwards, well, he didn't want to hear anything about it. I knew that if he didn't develop some interest in being an astronaut, then he wouldn't lead that mission to Mars, and your history would be changed."

"So you told him about us."

"Yes, and he didn't believe me. It just made matters worse. Now he's run away from home."

Spock responded with the closest he ever came to alarm. "Where is the boy now? Do you have any idea?"

"Yeah. I let him join some club a few years ago called the Blue Blaze Irregulars. Its headquarters is at a place called the Banzai Institute on the East Coast. I think he went there. Are we going to follow him?"

"I think we'd better. If he tells anyone what you've told him, we could have big trouble." Kirk pulled out his communicator and flipped it open. "Mr. Scott, three to beam up."

On board the Enterprise, Spock questioned Christopher closely about the organizations he'd mentioned then fed the information into the computer. He found the information he got back highly interesting. He had just given the command 'computer off' when he was called to the briefing room.

"What have you found out about that place, Mr. Spock?" Kirk found himself dissatisfied with the little that Christopher had been able to tell him.

"Captain, the Banzai Institute for Biomedical Engineering and Strategic

Information is a unique organization. Never before in the history of this planet has there been such a haven for people of intellect and science. By all accounts, the harmonious association of members of diverse races and national origins will not be duplicated until our own time. We should have quite an interesting visit."

"Let's hope that these people of 'intellect and science' are discrete and cooperative." The briefing completed, Spock then gave the coordinates to Mr. Scott, and they were beamed down to a place called Holland Township, New Jersey.

Mr. Scott had beamed them inside the Institute's grounds, practically at the door of the large house behind the main gate. John Christopher's knock was answered by a blond young man in a TEAM BANZAI T-shirt.

"We're here for my son," the major informed him, using his best military voice.

Fall comes early in New Jersey, and once the weather was cool enough that we all found occasion to wear our new sweaters, we found ourselves appreciating them for more than just their beautiful craftsmanship. The season was unusually quiet, regarding threats from Hanoi Xan or any of the other foes we've dealt with, and we planned to spend a fine, cool week-end seeing to the Institute's grounds.

Saturday evening, New Jersey had built a fire in the fireplace and we were enjoying hot toddies when the invasion started. I say 'invasion' now, having the benefit of hindsight at my disposal, but at the time it seemed to be nothing more than the arrival of a boy of sixteen.

"Nacho!" Big Norse exclaimed delightedly, instantly recognizing the Blue Blaze from Omaha with whom she had been corresponding for several months. Seeing the look on his face, however, she became suspicious. "What have you done, boy?"

"Left home." The reply was barely audible. Big Norse went over to him and lifted his chin, forcing him to look her in the eye. "I ran away. It's been getting worse and worse--I couldn't take it any more! He's crazy. I... I was afraid."

"Well, you're safe here," Buckaroo clearly suspected the boy was a victim of child abuse.

Big Norse, on the other hand, knew better. Sitting him on the sofa, she poured him a cup of the cocoa Cait had prepared for herself and Scooter. "What happened now?" she asked, seating herself next to him.

"He wants to send me to Space Camp for Christmas! He's got it all arranged."

"Wow, lucky dude!" Scooter was impressed, and obviously envious.

"But I don't want to go. I want to come here for the Seminar."

"There will be other Seminars," New Jersey told the boy. "At Easter, and several in the summer. You'll have many opportunities to attend one. But the way I understand it, it's much more difficult to be accepted to Space Camp. If you turn it down this time, the chance may never come again."

"I don't care. I don't ever want to go there, and I don't want to be in the Young Astronauts Club or anything like that. I hate the whole idea of outer space."

"It's my father who wants to go. He's obsessed by the subject, worse than the guy in 'Close Encounters', clipping articles from the ENQUIRER, reading all the books, going to all the movies. He's on a first-name basis with J. Allen Hynek, even."

"Did he build a model of the Devil's Tower in your living room?" Fox's question echoed the amusement we all felt.

"It's not a joke! He's crazy! They wouldn't let him be an astronaut, so he's making me be one. Says I have to--it's my destiny."

"Have you always felt this way?" Peggy asked quietly. "You know, the Challenger disaster hit us all pretty hard. With the racial and gender combination of the crew, there was someone on board that each of us could personally identify with."

The way the boy reacted to her statement led me to believe that this was indeed at least part of the problem. After examining the upholstery on the sofa for several minutes, Nacho looked straight at Buckaroo. "I am afraid, but I'm worried about my dad. He was okay until the accident. I mean, he still wanted me to be interested in the space program, but afterwards, he was different. Started telling me stories about being on a space ship with a crew of four hundred, and green men with pointed ears."

"Green men with pointed ears my ass," was Tommy's only comment. We were all chuckling when I heard someone clear his throat, and looked up to see Wilhelm Tell, a new Intern, at the doorway, accompanied by three men. I couldn't help but stare at one of them, who wore a ski cap pulled down over his ears. For this reason, I would have suspected him of being one of Xan's Bravos except that his skin did seem to have a definite greenish tinge, and his eyebrows slanted upwards in a most unusual manner.

"I fail to see what my skin tones have to do with the young man's posterior," this strange man began.

"Not now, Spock," one of his companions commanded. He turned to the other man, who started towards the boy, Nacho.

"Come on, Sean. It's time to go home."

"No, Dad. I'm staying here."

"Nacho, you're under-age," B. Banzai assumed his most patient and reasonable demeanor. "The Institute cannot harbor you here against your father's wishes. However, Mr...."

"Major. Major John Christopher."

"Major Christopher, I do think it would be a good idea if you were to spend some time talking with your son. He has some very real fears."

"I know that. That's why we're here."

"How did you get here so fast, Dad?" the lad in question wanted to know.

"How did you get past our security at the gate?" was Pecos's concern.

"In answer to both your questions, we popped in out of thin air." I noted that the two men with him were not exactly pleased with the father's reply.

"Well, Major Christopher, I'm Buckaroo Banzai," the Boss quickly introduced the rest of us, then waited expectantly for him to present his companions.

"Jim Kirk, Mr. Spock. We really need to talk to Sean, Dr. Banzai. Alone, if you don't mind."

"I want them here, Dad."

"Listen, son. The things we have to tell you are top secret. It's very important that we keep them just between us."

"For Pete's sake, Buckaroo Banzai is the President's advisor. You can tell him anything."

"That's okay, kid. We know when we're not wanted," I told him. We had all caught the Boss's signals that it would perhaps be best if we did leave. As a former teacher, however, Fox had been trained to detect signs of abuse and neglect, especially since her handicapped students were unable to speak for themselves. As she followed the rest of us out of the room, she had a few words for our leader, and she didn't especially care if our 'guests' heard them.

"Just remember, Buckaroo, there are forms of abuse that don't leave visible scars. And it's our duty to protect any child being victimized, and report those responsible."

"What you suspect is hard to prove, Carly, but I'll keep it in mind."

Before taking her leave, Fox couldn't resist scrutinizing the apparel of Major Christopher's companions. Both men wore black high water pants over boots, and shirts which were different colors, but made out of the same velour-like fabric, and sported gold braid on the sleeves. "That some kind of uniform?" She asked rather insolently.

"Maybe," the one called Jim Kirk answered her. "Is that?" He indicated her Irish fisherman's knit sweater, noting that it was identical to the ones the rest of us were wearing.

"These little things?" Tommy, who had hung back to wait for her, spoke up. "Naw, these are just so we can be identified if we ever get ship-wrecked off the coast of Connemara."

Fox flashed him a grin then turned to Buckaroo. "I assume they're spending the night, Boss?"

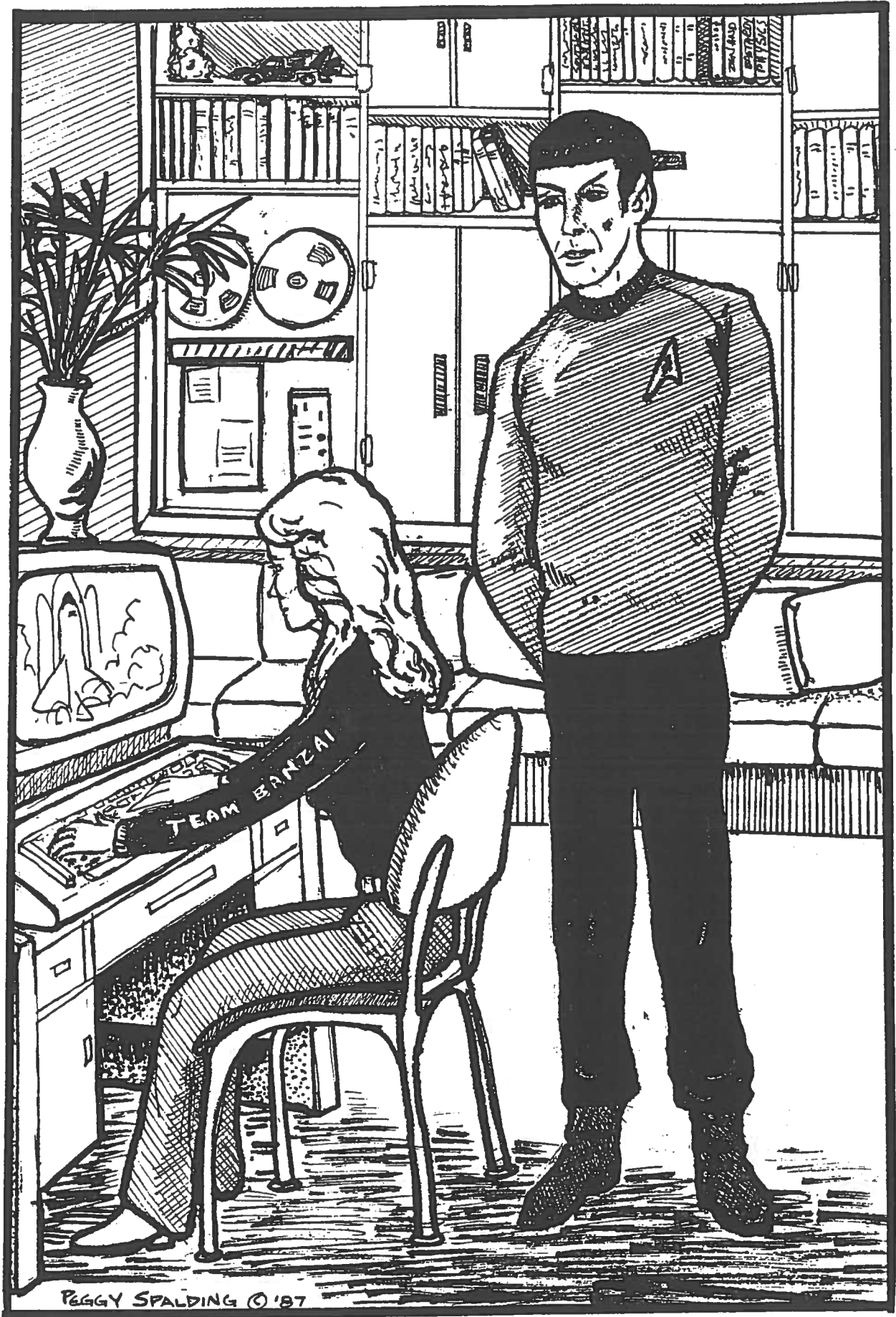
"Well, it's getting pretty late. We will extend the invitation."

"Then I'll get someone to get the guest rooms ready. We don't have room cats around here, but Blue likes to make his rounds and check on everyone during the night. So don't be startled by a cold wet nose in the middle of the night." She indicated the dog sitting at heel on Tommy's left side.

Events that I was not witness to have been reconstructed from reports of those who were. However, I have reason to believe that even B. Banzai did not tell me all he knows. But knowing the man as I do, I can't help but believe that any information he with-held was in the best interest of humanity.

Buckaroo Banzai would not find it necessary to defend his own honor, but he does have certain principles by which he stands. One is an oriental respect for parents, and by his expression, Buckaroo let Sean, or Nacho as we called him, know that he considered his behavior unacceptable. Another is loyalty to friends. He may not defend his own honor under circumstances such as these, but he would defend ours. "The integrity of my people is unimpeachable," he stated rather stiffly.

Major Christopher made apologetic noises, as if Buckaroo wasn't to take his comments personally. The tall greenish man, the one called Spock, broke in. "The boy is quite right, Captain," he said to the shorter, blond man with him. "I had an opportunity to check the computer banks regarding those associated with this organization. These people are utterly trustworthy and will make valuable contributions to society."



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"Just what is going on?" Buckaroo pressed the issue to the forefront. The three men then told an incredible story of Kirk and Spock being from the future and accidentally getting sent back in time seventeen years ago, and encountering Major Christopher when he was stationed at the Strategic Air Command, while Nacho sat by with an 'I don't believe a word of this' look on his face.

"We took the computer tapes from the base," Kirk concluded, "and then went into another time-warp to take us back in time so that we could then beam the Major back aboard his jet before anything happened. We thought he'd forget the whole incident because there would be nothing to remember."

"But nothing is ever forgotten," Buckaroo commented.

"We realize that, now," Spock replied dryly.

"Buckaroo, you don't actually believe them, do you?" Nacho was incredulous.

"'There are more things in Heaven...'," Nacho. We learned that after the Jet Car test, remember?

"However, the way I see it," he turned to Kirk, "the problem is not just whether or not you convince the boy to become an astronaut. Unless we get the space program out of the limbo it's currently in, it will be a moot point."

"Precisely. That is indeed one of the reasons for our return. However, our information from this time period is somewhat sketchy, and I have been unable to determine the exact nature of the problem. Logic dictates that there is more to it than fear of another such incident, since a similar accident in 1967, during what was called the Apollo program, did not cause such a disruption in space exploration. Therefore," Spock concluded, "we can assume that there are outside influences at work here."

"Well, if you're willing to trust my people, we just might be able to figure out what those influences are. With your help, of course."

Some agreement must have been reached, because when we came down to breakfast the next morning, our guests were already there.

"Big Norse, I want you to share all the data you brought back from Houston with Mr. Spock," was all Buckaroo would tell us. "The rest of you are on call, and are to render any assistance you can."

Since it was time to start planning the Christmas seminars, we hadn't intended on going anywhere, and frankly, we were curious to learn what was going on. The opportunity to kibbitz came several hours later when Billy was called up to the computer room. With feigned nonchalance, the rest of us, one by one, found excuses to join him.

When I entered, Billy seemed to be introducing Spock to the joys and challenges of computer hacking. "The info I had didn't seem to be of any use to them," Big Norse whispered to me. "So Spock wanted to see what's going on at NASA now. But I couldn't get past the security codes."

"Uh, Billy, you going to be using the UNIVAC?" When our whiz kid indicated the negative, Fox knelt in her back chair and began to work on her time and space problems. After her limited success in England, [see our adventure "Buckaroo Who?"] she was more determined than ever to build a workable time machine. From time to time, Spock would saunter over and scrutinize her work, raising an eyebrow without comment before returning to

his own task. I could tell he was getting on her nerves, and was amused that the alien seemed to have acute hearing--he was very aware of Fox's muttered string of yiddish expletives that followed his last visit.

"Paskudniak," I heard her say quite distinctly. That being one of the milder words in her vocabulary, I surmised that she was not as annoyed as she acted.

Some Interns had kept us supplied with food and drink, and as we all got drawn into the problems that Billy was uncovering, we worked straight through without stopping for dinner. So I hadn't realized how late it was until Caitlin came in, dressed in pajamas and robe, to see what was going on. It must have been late, because I could see her making a point of avoiding her mother. Instead, she made a bee-line for Perfect Tommy.

"Scooter go home already?" he asked in sign, well aware that it was long past her bedtime.

"Hours ago. What's going on?"

"Big Norse and Mr. Spock are going over the data from Houston again, and Billy is trying to access information on the tests and simulations NASA has been running at the Cape. Your mother's come dangerously close to frying the UNIVAC at least three times, and I am using the I Ching program we wrote to have the computer predict the stock market. Want to help?" He made room for her on his chair, she and settled down next to him.

Fox happened to look up from her monitor a few minutes later, and saw them deep in conversation. After glancing at her watch, she picked up a wad of discarded paper and, tossing it across the room, pelted the child with it. "Time for bed, Pet," she said when she had her attention.

When Cait began the normal 'oh, Mom, do I have to?' routine, Tommy offered to take her to her room. At that, she brightened, and a mischievous look invaded her face. "Sing!" she commanded. He hesitated a moment, nodded, then picked her up so that she could nestle her head against his chest and put a hand on his throat.

"I'll take you home again, Kathleen, Across the ocean wild and wide," he sang as they left the room. "To where your heart has ever been, Since first you were my bonny bride."

"Hey, Fox, don't do that on the UNIVAC!" At Billy's alarmed words, I looked over to see large tears rolling down Fox's face as she strove to keep from sobbing aloud.

"Come on," I tried to joke, not knowing the cause of her distress, "I know you don't consider 'Kathleen' real Irish music, but at least it isn't 'When Irish Eyes Are Smiling', and Tommy's singing isn't that bad."

"Indeed," added Spock. "I have, myself, heard a worse rendering of that particular melody."

"Much worse," Kirk added, looking as if an extremely painful memory had been called to mind.

While the rest of us laughed at the picture they both presented, New Jersey went over to Fox and took her in his arms. She smiled bravely and wiped her face with the back of her hand. "I can live with my daughter being hung up on a song with her name in it. Sometimes, I just wish she could hear Tommy singing it to her. Well, I'm done in. See you all in the morning."

The rest of us followed suit soon after. The rest of us, it would seem, except for Spock and Big Norse. They were still at work the next morning. When it appeared that they would skip lunch as well as breakfast, Peggy took a tray up to them. She was rolling her eyes in mock dismay when

she returned. "It doesn't seem to be going well," she announced.

And indeed it didn't, for the two of them came down an hour or so later. "Why don't you take the rest of the afternoon off," Pecos suggested. "You're too close to whatever it is you're looking for--you wouldn't see it if it jumped up and bit you on the nose."

"That is an excellent suggestion," Professor Hikita said. "Our guests have not yet had the opportunity to see and admire all of our facilities, and this evening you can approach the problem from a new perspective."

"Yeah, Big Norse, I'll bet Mr. Spock would really be interested in the results of the watermelon experiment." Fox smiled impishly, causing me to wonder if she had some ulterior motive for suggesting that they go to that little-used section of the physics lab.

The rest of us kept Kirk and the Christophers entertained with tours of the grounds and tales of our exploits.

"For the Mouse is a creature of great personal valor. For--this is a true case--Cat takes female mouse--male mouse will not depart, but stands threat'ning and daring."* Pecos was reading to us when Spock and Big Norse joined us in the living room.

*'Rejoice in the Lamb', by Christopher Smart, 18th century

"That is the product of an unbalanced mind," John Christopher declared at the end of the recitation.

"Very astute observation, Major," New Jersey informed him. "It was written by a man in an insane asylum."

"I do not fully understand the religious allusions made," Spock commented after quickly reading the entire text, "but the work contains flashes of vivid imagery that are occasionally both brilliant and beautiful." We engaged in a spirited discussion of the poem, while New Jersey played the musical accompaniment on the piano, until Fox and Peggy called us in to dinner.

The table was set with woks and charcoal braziers holding pots of boiling chicken broth, announcing that we were to be treated to Shabu Shabu, a special favorite of Hikita-san.

"Cait said that you're a vegetarian," Fox told the slender alien, "so I've fixed you a special meatless broth."

"I appreciate you taking the trouble to do so."

"Oh, that's S.O.P. around here. For example, the Haj is a Moslem and follows their dietary laws, so we always fix him something else when pork is on the menu."

"And," Wilhelm Tell broke in, "I never play Wagner when Fox is home, because it upsets her."

"That is quite an illogical reaction to some of the most magnificent music composed on this planet."

Fox blushed and stared at her plate. Seeing that she wouldn't say anything, Big Norse explained rather stiffly, "I think, Mr. Spock, that if a piece of music reminded you of the fact that six million of your people, including most of your family, had been systematically murdered, even you would tend to react illogically. Around here, we respect and enjoy each others' differences."

Spock raised his eyebrow, which, I was later to learn, is the closest he comes to an emotional reaction, to this last statement. "I believe I understand, now," he said by way of apology, then turned to Cait as she brought in the last plate of vegetables. "How did you know that I don't eat

meat?"

Fox repeated the question in sign, and the child giggled as she replied, "Because you're green."

After the laughter died down, Fox corrected her. "He's green because his blood has copper in it instead of iron, like ours does."

"How did you know that?" Kirk was clearly impressed by this statement.

"It was--logical."

"We don't ask how Fox and Cait know things," Tommy informed our guests. "It's too spooky sometimes. Say, Wilhelm, how come I haven't been able to find any German jokes?" In his quest for multilingual puns, this was the one roadblock he had run into.

"Because," our resident West Berliner replied with mock hauteur, "being German is no laughing matter."

The meal continued in silence for several minutes. "Say, Buckaroo," New Jersey said, finally, "are you ever going to tell us why these people are here?"

"We are here to save your space shuttle program," Kirk beat the Boss to the punch.

"Why?" I think perhaps we were all surprised by the vehemence and hostility in Nacho's voice.

"It is important," Professor Hikita explained patiently. "You are too young to remember a time when humans did not go into space, but together, Buckaroo and I have kept a scrapbook since the launching of Sputnik. Every flight of both the Soviet and U.S. space programs is documented in it. We are like little children, just gaining the courage to leave the safety of our own front yard. It is time."

"I agree, Hikita-san," Pecos said with unexpected warmth. "But I don't believe that the Shuttle is the way to go. If, as you say, we are children just leaving the safety of our homes, the shuttle is keeping us on our own block. We have not launched a single probe or craft that left our gravity, or gone farther than the moon, in years."

"With everything that's gone wrong this year, what do you expect? NASA hasn't even been able to launch a satellite without all kinds of trouble."

"Yes, uh, Nacho," Spock seemed to have difficulty with the nicknames we use here at the Institute. "And I find that most curious. Billy and Perfect Tommy are excellent 'hackers', as I understand the term, but we have been unable to get into the data banks that I suspect hold the key to what we are looking for. Captain, I feel that we need to use the ship's computer. As well as the two men, I will require the assistance of Big Norse aboard the Enterprise."

I think several of us sat up eagerly at the mention of our compadres going aboard this mysterious ship, which we had heard John Christopher describe to his son. Kirk noticed our interest. "Spock, our hosts have opened their home to us, allowed us full use of their facilities, and helped us every way they could. I think we should return the favor and offer them our hospitality."

"You mean, we all can come?" I don't believe I had ever seen New Jersey so excited. Fox's eyes were also alight.

"Well, if Dr. Banzai understands the situation and can explain the need for circumspection, and you also understand, I see no reason why not."

"Indeed, Captain," Spock said, "young Christopher would certainly feel more comfortable seeing the ship with friends that he trusts around him."

"Me? No way!"

"Come on, Sean. It's the most incredible experience you can imagine.

It'll change your mind about a lot of things." John Christopher's attempt to reassure his son was met with the now-familiar brick wall we saw in the lad whenever his father spoke to him.

"Well, Nacho," Buckaroo intervened. "You think about it awhile. But it looks like everyone else here is going."

With the promise of such an adventure before us, we quickly finished eating. The cleaning-up was left for the Interns who didn't have sufficient clearance to come along, and Mrs. Johnson and Professor Hikita, who elected to stay. I could see that the Haj and Wilhelm Tell were disappointed, but Perfect Tommy had trained them well as BBI's, and there was no grumbling from either of them.

"Okay," Pecos was ready to leave. "Where's your flying saucer?"

"We didn't come via saucer, this time." Kirk seemed amused. Spock didn't. "We'll beam you aboard right from here."

"A trans-mat beam?" Fox seemed to be somewhat familiar with the concept.

"If, by that you mean a matter transportation beam," Spock told her, "then you are essentially correct."

"Don't go! Please don't go!" As Fox signed Spock's words to Cait, the child became almost hysterical.

While Fox attempted to comfort the girl, Kirk came and knelt beside them. "Our ship's chief medical officer also has his doubts about the transporter, but I assure you, it's perfectly safe."

"But Daddy'll turn into a fly!" At that, Fox glared at Tommy, who blushed furiously.

"There was a Vincent Price film festival on one of the cable channels last week," he stammered. "I really didn't think you'd mind, since you like those old movies so much."

"Listen, Cub," now Tommy spoke directly to Cait. "I'm sure they've gotten all the bugs out of the system." At the atrocious pun, the little girl groaned and hit him good naturedly on the arm. Then she took his hand and indicated that she was coming, too.

"Nacho?" Big Norse looked over at her protege. The boy hesitated, then nodded.

"I guess if Cait can, I can."

"That's the spirit," Buckaroo congratulated the young man. "Well, Captain Kirk, maybe you'd better let them know that company's coming so they can throw another shrimp on the barbee."

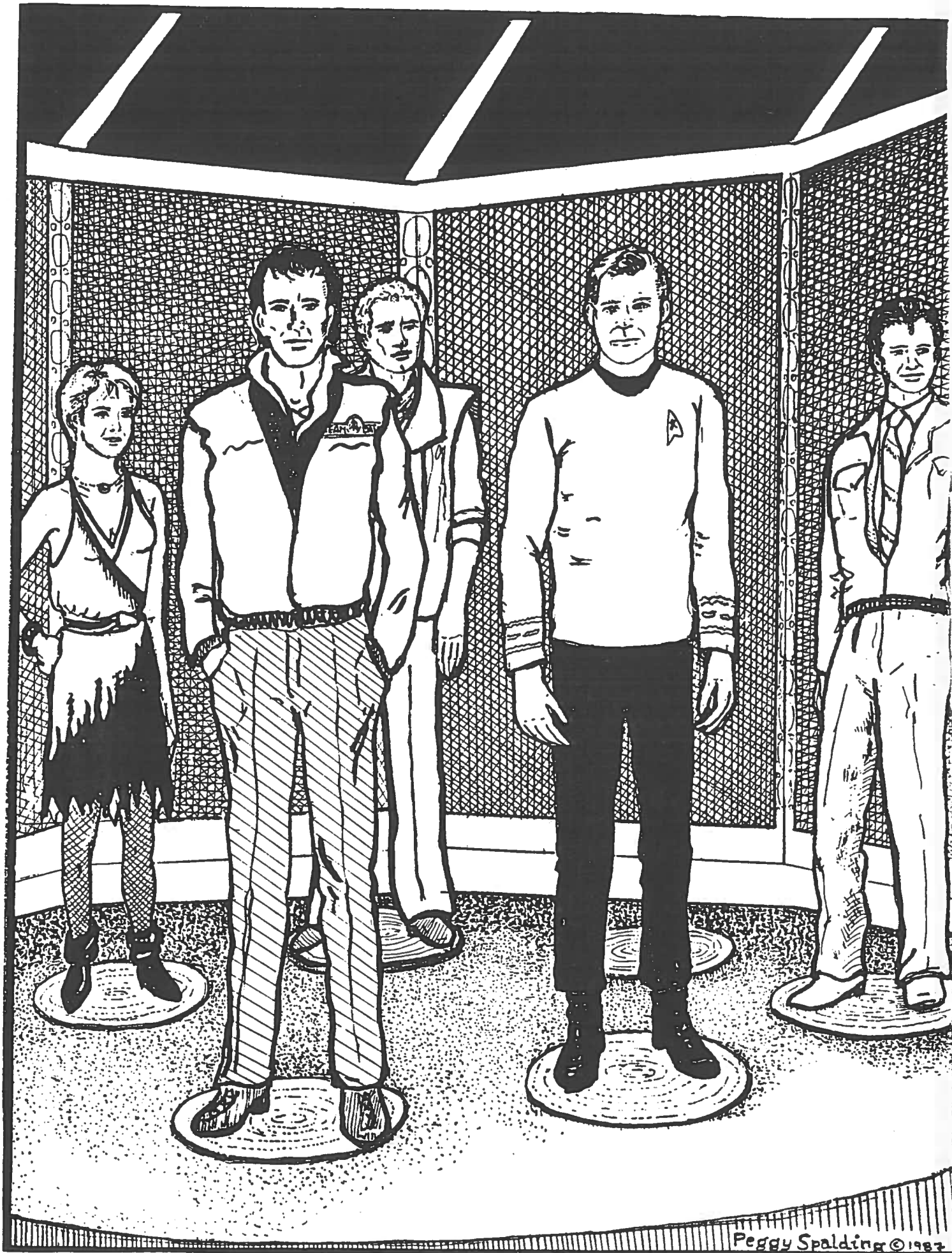
Kirk spoke into what I deduced to be some sort of communications device, I heard a faint humming sound, and saw the first group--Spock, Buckaroo, Peggy, Tommy, Billy, Big Norse and the Christophers--disappear before my very eyes. A few moments later, the humming returned, I felt a generalized tingling all over my body, and opened my eyes to find that I, Pecos, New Jersey, Fox, Cait and Jim Kirk were all standing on a platform in a strange stark room. We stepped down from the platform rather gingerly and looked around.

"This bunch looks okay to me, Jim." A tall, slim man with a gentle southern accent and pale blue eyes held what looked like a glass salt shaker in front of each of us, one by one.

"Good, Bones. I didn't want our guests' visit to get off to a bad start. May I present our ship's surgeon..."

"Dr. Leonard McCoy, at your service, ma'am." The doctor bowed slightly and took Fox's hand to kiss.

"Uh, Carly. Thank you, Doctor." Fox had a glint in her eye as she



Peggy Spalding © 1987

introduced herself and her daughter, then walked around the man, looking him up and down. "Tell me, do you ride?"

"Ride?"

"Horses. With those long legs and that tush, I bet you sit a horse real pretty."

"I'm afraid I don't."

"I could teach you."

Before the man could reply, New Jersey came to lead her gently away. "Forgive her, doctor. This really isn't like her. When she first joined us, she was really quite reserved."

"Now she's turned into a terrible flirt," I added.

"I resent that, Reno. I work very hard at everything I do. I happen to think I'm a very good flirt. Anyway, you know I have a thing for doctors."

"I thought you had a thing for Irishmen."

"I did. Now I have a thing for doctors. And technically, he's both. So, do we get the grand tour, or what?" With McCoy on one arm and Jersey on the other, Fox looked at the captain expectantly.

"You are here as our guests," Kirk told us. "But I must ask you not to go anywhere unescorted. This is a big ship and I don't want anyone getting lost."

"Also, there are areas that must remain off-limits for reasons of security," Spock added bluntly. "And I trust you know better than to touch anything. However, feel free to ask questions. I suggest that we start on the bridge. Billy, Tommy, Big Norse and I need to complete our task, and perhaps some off-duty personnel may be found to assist our guests."

We crammed ourselves into a lift and, following Kirk's example, held onto rods which projected themselves from the wall.

"Bridge," Kirk intoned.

Unexpectedly, I felt us begin to move sideways. When the lift came to a halt and the door opened, only B. Banzai, the one person among us (or so I thought, not knowing John Christopher's full story at the time) to ever have been aboard an alien space craft, stepped out with any confidence. The rest of us, myself included, followed, rather dazzled by the panels of flashing lights that greeted us. I did notice that the bridge crew seemed to have a racial and ethnic mixture similar to that of TEAM BANZAI: a beautiful black woman (who, need I say, attracted Perfect Tommy's attention instantly) was at a station directly to the right of the door as we came in; two men, one oriental and one hispanic, sat at a console in front of a large screen; and another man, with a decidedly Russian accent, approached Spock and began to make a detailed report.

Pecos, whose Russian is excellent, immediately engaged this young man--Chekov, he called himself--in conversation, while Spock showed Buckaroo and Peggy what he called the Science Station. New Jersey was on his way to Sickbay with Dr. McCoy, and Tommy, as I said, was likewise involved, so I made a circuit of the brige and ended up back with Pecos.

"Hey, Fox!" Tommy called out suddenly. "Fox?"

All flippancy forgotten, Fox stood at a railing, her eyes riveted to the screen at the front of the bridge. This afforded a spectacularly breath-taking view of a night sky. I could pick out a planet or two from our own solar system, but what really caught and held one's attention was the sagans of stars seen in the distance. A few seconds later, Fox realized that she was wanted, and turned around with a rather dazed expression.

"Huh?"

"Come over and talk to Uhura, here. She's the communications expert, so I'll bet you two have a lot in common. She's really studied inter-species communications." Tommy, along with Billy and Big Norse, was beckoned over to the Science Station while the two women talked.

"Captain," Buckaroo interjected, "I fear that we are keeping your people from their duties. Spock mentioned something about off-duty personel, I believe."

"I have a man on his way now. Lieutenant Riley will be assigned to you for the duration of your stay." Fox looked up, with interest, at the name. "Since you have 'a thing' for Irishmen," Kirk added with a grin.

Kevin Riley turned out to be a very personable young man who steered us away from certain sensitive areas with great diplomacy. Fox resisted his charm, however, and asked to be taken to SickBay to find Jersey.

Cait, who, under Tommy's tutelage, was becoming quite a proficient hacker herself, had elected to stay on the bridge and help him, but half way through our tour, a blond woman with a basket-weave coiffure brought her to us. Fox's 'Cub', as Tommy had begun to call her, was clearly upset.

"I can't use the dumb computer on this dumb ship!" she complained. "There's no keyboard."

"How do you access information, then?" I queried.

"It's voice activated and the out-put is aural." Riley replied.

"And no lips for you to read," Pecos sympathised. "Poor Caity."

"Maybe some ice cream would help," the crew woman suggested.

"Great idea, Janice," the lieutenant showed as much enthusiasm as Cait.

Fox and New Jersey were notified of our where-abouts, and they and Dr. McCoy joined us a short time later. As New Jersey commiserated with the child, the nature of the problem was explained to our hosts. McCoy looked thoughtful, as if he had something he needed to say, then reconsidered. In the meantime, there must have been a change of watch, for we were also joined by Chekov, Uhura, and Sulu, the Oriental helmsman we had seen on the bridge. They were also willing to play guide, and we split up into groups according to interest.

It being, by our chronometers, very late, Cait was put to bed in SickBay, and the rest of us were likewise given the opportunity to crash. Buckaroo Banzai, as is now well-known, sleeps only a few hours a night, and he, like the rest of us, would forego even that rather than waste a minute of our time on the Enterprise. Spock and his team also worked through what was for us night.

We all met several hours later over breakfast. The computer team was obviously exhausted, but triumph was evident on their faces.

"Several launches have been delayed or cancelled because of problems that have shown up on the computer," Billy explained. "We already knew that, so we were trying to find out why so much was going wrong with the equipment all of a sudden. Well, as we got deeper and deeper into the data banks, we found out that it wasn't the equipment at all--an outside source was feeding in false information to make it appear that there were malfunctions!"

"Were you able to trace this interference to its source?" Buckaroo asked.

"Yes, the Soviet Embassy," Tommy informed us.

"Sorry, Pavel Andreivitch," Pecos told her new friend. "But U.S./Soviet relations are not real good right now."

"You don't think they made the Challenger blow up, do you?" Cait asked.

"No, Honey," Big Norse assured her. "They've just been screwing up test results since then.

"But what would be gained by the Russians by sabotaging the United States Space program?" Chekov, it must be remembered, will come from a united Earth.

"The space race has been a competition, a matter of national pride for both countries, since the beginning. There have been some joint efforts, but I'm afraid we're not ready to trust each other enough to co-operate fully."

"Perhaps it is time you learned," Kirk said quietly.

"I have always been of the same opinion," said Buckaroo. "Do you have any suggestions as to how we may accomplish it?". B. Banzai, the world's primary advocate of peace, had spent uncounted hours addressing both the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council, assorted House and Senate committees, and the Cabinet, not to mention conferring in private with the President himself. The headlines of any city's daily newspaper and the reports of Tom Brokaw, Dan Rather and Peter Jennings offer sad testimony as to his lack of success.

"What's going on?" Fox stumbled in a little bleary-eyed, which didn't surprise me. Rumor was that she had spent the night trading drinking songs (and, I suspected, drinks) with Riley and the ship's chief engineer, Commander Scott. New Jersey, with help from a yeoman, got the food synthesizer to produce a reasonable facsimile of Coke with lemon, and then explained the situation.

"How about doing a 'Back to the Future'? You know, beam Spock into the Soviet ambassador's bedroom in the middle of the night, and scare the you know what out of him." The Christophers had been included in the brainstorming session, but Nacho's contribution surprised me. Until his friendship with some of the crewmen, he had continued to flaunt his indifference to the problem before us, and to the wonder of being on a spacecraft from three hundred years into our future. But apparently, the experience of being aboard the Enterprise was making more of an impression on him than he wanted to let on. In any case, he had hit upon the solution, and plans were quickly being made.

"Perhaps Mr. Chekov should accompany Spock," I volunteered. "It would certainly make a more convincing argument to show a landsman as an example of what we're talking about."

"Good idea," Buckaroo said approvingly. "I will also go along. The Ambassador and I are acquainted, and my presence should assure him that he's not dreaming."

"What about the rest of us?" Pecos, ready for action, as always, wanted to know.

"I'll let you know."

We had a few hours to kill before Buckaroo, Spock and Chekov were to enter the Soviet Embassy, and while we continued to make what good use we could of the facilities, and to learn what we could from the ship's crewmembers with whom we had become friendly. Nacho entered into a deep conversation with an off-duty crewman not much older than himself, and Big Norse spent the time monitoring world-wide communications on the bridge with Uhura. At the end of her shift, this beautiful lieutenant managed to talk Spock into getting his lyrette, an instrument native to his home planet, Vulcan. He was quite an accomplished musician, and Uhura had a lovely voice. We all enjoyed being entertained, instead of being the entertainment, for a change.

"I wish we'd been like the Dwarves in The Hobbit, and brought our instruments with us," Fox commented.

"Didn't you get enough last night? And how's the hang-over?" I couldn't resist the jibe, having never known her to over-indulge to this extent before.

"What hang-over? I learned a long time ago how to have a good time without letting anyone know I wasn't drinking nearly as much as everyone else. How do you think I lasted this long at the Institute, with all the Karakoumis parties the Boss tends to throw? The Cokes are just to keep me awake. Buckaroo may be able to get by on two hours sleep a night, but I sure can't."

After a few numbers, Spock put away the instrument and offered to teach Big Norse how to play three dimensional chess.

"The mathematical principles of the game are much more complex than the version you are accustomed to, but I believe you will have no trouble grasping them."

Cait had been learning the more mundane two dimensional version of the game from Billy, who had written a killer computer chess program, and as soon as she realized what was going on, went over to sit in on the lesson. Although Cait would address any questions she had directly to Spock, Big Norse still had to repeat or sign his replies.

"I fail to comprehend why the child cannot understand me," he said, after several minutes of this.

"Perhaps you have an accent the rest of us don't notice."

"My English is perfect," Spock replied rather stiffly. "Besides, you have an accent, and she understands you. She also understands Mr. Scott and Mr. Chekov, whom she doesn't know, and who have very pronounced accents."

"Why Spock, you sound positively petulant!" overhearing the conversation, Fox joined them to answer the riddle. "Anyway, the answer's very simple. There's more to communication than spoken language. Facial expressions, gestures, body attitude all combine to express what the speaker's trying to say. You use none of those things, so she has to rely on reading your lips, and you hardly move them."

"Does that have anything to do with the reason you dislike me, or do you perhaps fear alien life forms? That is a common emotion of this time period, I believe."

"I hate to disillusion you, but you're not the first extra-terrestrial I've met."

"Yeah, and she sure didn't react to Bennu the way she does to you!" New Jersey called over. ("Lord, will I never live that down?" Fox muttered. "Certainly not," Pecos assured her.) "And she even got along well with the Doctor. No, Spock, I'm afraid you have to take it personally. Your attitude does surprise me, Carly. What's your problem?"

She considered. "He puts up walls, hides behind them. I know, I've done the same thing, but I was protecting myself--at least, I thought I was--from being hurt. With Spock, it's like it's some sort of macho trip. It just brings out that reaction in me."

"It is the way of my people," the Vulcan informed her with great dignity. "Any show of emotion is considered a display of extremely bad taste."

"Oh! Then I must apologize. I would never presume to criticise cultural practices. I will make more of an effort to understand you." Spock nodded his acceptance of this very formal apology. Fox, who had been quite downcast at her social gaffe, brightened and turned to Tommy. "Have

you heard about German-Chinese food? Two hours after you eat it, you're hungry for power!"

We were all enjoying this jest, and Big Norse's attempts to explain it to Spock, when Yeoman Rand, she of the basket-weave hairdo, entered the rec room and announced, "Captain Kirk and Dr. Banzai would like to see you all in the briefing room." It was then that I realized that the two supreme commanders, as well as Billy, had left us some time ago.

On our way to the meeting, we recounted our adventures with Bennu, the Doctor, and, of course, our friends from the Nova Police to Spock, Uhura and Rand. To our amazement they had never heard of Eldobran, Gallifrey or Planet 10.

"Do you have the coordinates for these planets?" Spock inquired. "They would be invaluable as members of the Federation."

"Fraid not," Peggy told him. "I think Buckaroo did ask, but even though we don't have the capabilities for space travel of that magnitude, they didn't seem to think it was a good idea. Maybe when you get back to your own time, you can find them and convince them that humans are not so primitive as they thought."

We entered the briefing room in silence and waited expectantly until Buckaroo and the Captain were ready to begin.

"I know that most of you would like to go on this mission." We from the Institute had sat together on one side of the table, and Buckaroo spoke directly to us. "But as Fox would no doubt tell us, Embassy grounds are sovereign territory of the nations they represent. If any of us is caught, it will be the same as being found in the Soviet Union without the proper documentation, and the consequences will be just as severe. Messers Spock and Chekov, as futuristic representatives of both an alien race and the Ambassador's own nation, are essential to our success. And I continue to believe that my presence will lend credibility to what they have to say. Any more people will only put us all in greater jeopardy. You who remain behind will assist us from here."

"Billy was able to find plans to the Embassy grounds and buildings, so Scotty has the exact coordinates to beam them down directly into the Ambassador's private quarters," Kirk continued. "Buckaroo's Go-Phone doesn't have the proper range, so you, Mr. Spock, will keep your communicator open and on channel as much as possible. We will monitor your conversation, and at the first sign of trouble, will beam you back up. Mr. Chekov, you will be issued a phaser--on stun. Use it only if you have no other options to protect the integrity of the mission."

Dr. McCoy checked a chronometer. "It's time, Jim. I know you don't believe in it, Spock, but good luck to all of you."

At that the meeting broke up. Those who were going to the Embassy accompanied Mr. Scott to the transporter room while the rest of us went to the Bridge, where Uhura would be keeping tabs on them. What follows is a transcription of not only the notes I am wont to take at such a time, and the accounts of the participants, but the microcassette tape I made at the same time. (Finding that events had a tendency to move more quickly than even I could record by hand, I had recently begun to carry the small device--commercially purchased, but much improved-upon by Perfect Tommy--at all times. It certainly proved its usefulness on this occasion. ---Reno)

(the now-familiar hum of the transporter beam)

AMBASSADOR PETROVITCH: Who...? What are you doing here? (He reaches for a

small button on the side of his night stand.)

BUCKAROO: I wouldn't do that, if I were you, Mr. Ambassador. (Petrovitch presses the button. Two armed guards enter the room. We hear the sound of Chekov's phaser and two bodies hitting the floor.)

CHEKOV: They are not injured, Comrade Ambassador, and will awaken in an hour or so. I beg of you, please listen to what we have to say without further interruption. It is of utmost importance.

PETROVITCH: You are Russian? And is that Dr. Banzai with you? What is this about?

SPOCK: Very simply this, Ambassador Petrovitch. We know that this embassy has been used as a base from which false information has been deliberately fed into the NASA computer system. While the disruption of the U.S. Space Program may grant the Soviet Union supremacy in space during this century and the next, it would ultimately be to the detriment of Earth's welfare. For the planet would remain polarized, East versus West, and be unable to withstand attacks from more advanced, highly-aggressive planets. Earth's inhabitants must learn to put national chauvinism aside, and unite for the good of the entire planet.

BUCKAROO: (seeing the look of doubt on Petrovitch's face) He speaks the truth, Sir. These men come as representatives of the United Federation of Planets--Mr. Chekov, OF The United Earth we spoke of, and Mr. Spock, of Vulcan, a planet which will be a valuable ally to Earth. However, this can only happen if you and your staff cease and desist from making the exploration of space a contest between differing ideologies.

PETROVITCH: I don't know if that is possible. What can one man do by himself?

SPOCK: Alot, if he is committed to a cause. You, by discontinuing the interference, and by making the well-placed comment at the proper time to certain key members of your government, can insure that history runs its true course.

CHEKOV: The Russian people can and will retain their identity and national pride while living in peace with the other inhabitants of this planet. But only with your help. (Petrovitch considers, then nods his agreement.)

SPOCK: Mr. Scott, three to beam up. (I smile with amusement as I imagine the look on the Ambassador's face as his visitors dematerialize before his very eyes.)

We met them in the transporter room, knowing that our stay was over and it was time to go home.

"That was quite a show you put on," Peggy said fondly as she embraced her husband.

"Yeah, well, I can only hope it works," he replied.

"I think it will," Kirk assured us all. "Thank you for your help. It has been an interesting experience."

"Indeed." Spock raised his hand in what I assumed was some sort of

Vulcan salute. "Live long and prosper."

Fox and New Jersey looked momentarily surprised, exchanged smiles, then each raised both hands in the same sign as if pronouncing a benediction (Which, indeed, they were.) "May the Lord bless you and keep you," they intoned in unison.

We made our individual farewells, took our places on the transporter platform, heard Kirk give the command "Energize", and found ourselves back in our own livingroom.

Captain's Log, Stardate 4215.2

We have returned to our own time, and it seems that our mission has been successful. Starbase 11 is now staffed, as I remembered it to be, with a heterogeneous staff of Earth-born humans and other Federation members. In addition, a comparison of information from Enterprise's computer banks with those of the Base show that Sean Jeffery, Christopher, or 'Nacho' as his friends called him, did lead the first manned expedition to Mars, as he was meant to.

'It was good to be home,' Kirk mused as he sat in the Con chair. 'Good to be aboard the Enterprise, in our own time, with everything as it should be.' He was not surprised to see McCoy and Spock approaching him. "Well, Spock, as you said, it was an 'interesting' visit. What's the matter, Bones?"

"The little girl, Cait. I could have restored her hearing. I don't like having the knowledge to help someone like that, and having my hands tied, so that I can't."

"Your feelings are understandable, but quite unnecessary, Doctor," Spock told him. "Because of her deafness, Cait Zweibel and Perfect Tommy did research on alternate methods of communication, and developed certain augmentative devices that will lay the foundation for the invention of the Universal Translator."


"That was quite the Nordic beauty I saw you with," the doctor offered, after considering Spock's information.

"Oh, yes, Big Norse," again the Vulcan puzzled over his erstwhile assistant's odd moniker. "She, too, has more to contribute to the development of Earth's space program."

"Well, now that everything's back to normal, we have work to do," Kirk said jovially. "Mr. Sulu, ahead Warp Factor 3."

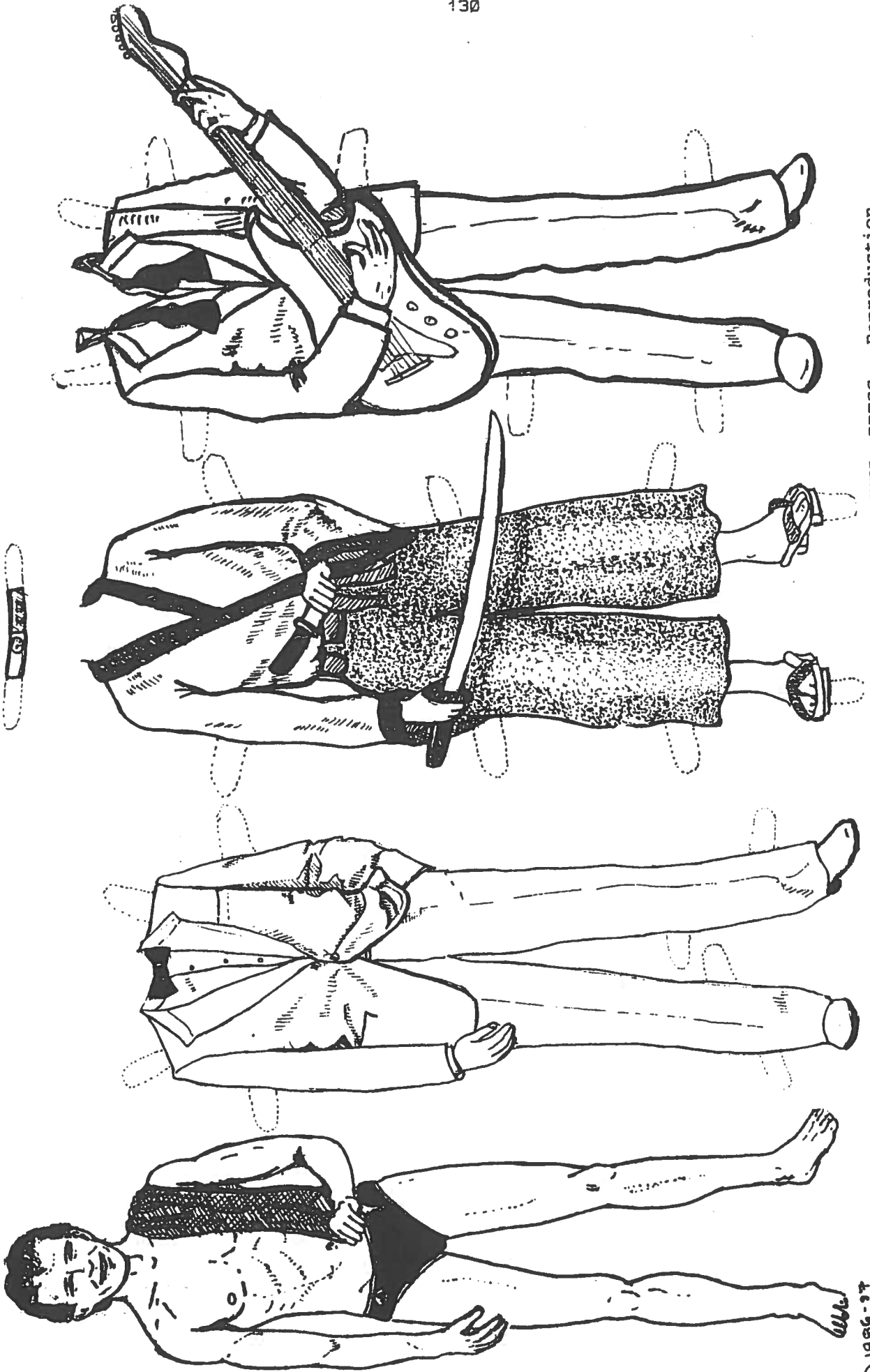
"What's the problem, kid," Big Norse asked Nacho as he and his father prepared to return to Nebraska the next day.

"Well, I can see why my father is so interested in space, why he always wanted me to get interested in it. Now that I've seen what I've seen, I can't wait to see more. But Dad and Mr. Spock kept talking about 'my destiny', but wouldn't tell me what it is."

Buckaroo came and placed a fatherly hand on the boy's shoulder. "I think you may have just found it, Son, and it's what we all must do--reach for the stars." 

BUCKAROO BANZAI, MD, PhD...neurosurgeon, physicist, jet car driver, adventurer, and rock and roller....a modern day renaissance man.

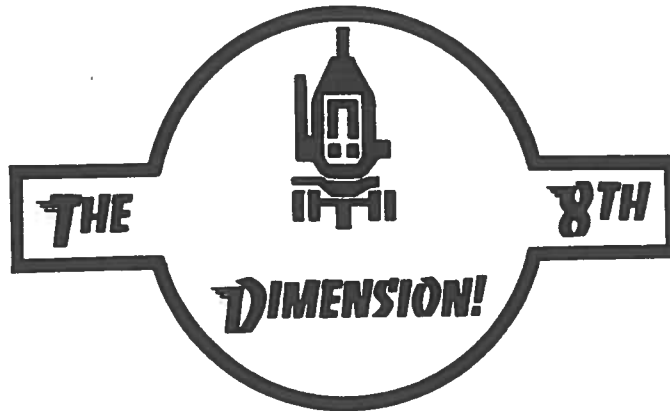
Color the pieces, cut them out, and have fun with your Buckaroo paper doll set.



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