

WORLD WATCH

AUGUST '87

WIRE

ISSUE TWO

The Fanzine for Friends of Buckaroo Banzai



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THE WORLD WATCH WIRE

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BLAZE AHEAD!

The Editor's Page

Here is issue #2...finally. The delays in getting this issue out are due to a great many things. But, rather than get into all the details, I'd like to thank the BBI's all over the country who called or wrote to find out if anything was wrong, offering any help they could give. I appreciate it, all of you. If I may quote a second hand account, W.D. Richter once told BBI Directors Kollywood, Illinois Kate, and Catnip, "The Blue Blaze Irregulars are very important to me because I feel like we're all together on this. All 7,000 of us are part of **Team Banzai**." I must agree.

While I'm on my soapbox, there is one other item I must mention quickly. In The Wire staff listing, Scholar is credited as "Printer's Devil." By definition, this is someone apprenticed to a print shop. But, like a true BBI and an integral member of what has been called "Team Zine", Scholar's contribution has gone far beyond the job description! I don't have room here to elaborate, but if you opened your first issue and, before reading a word, said something like "Boy, this looks great!" you have Scholar to thank. The next time you need printing done in Poughkeepsie, call Copywise Printing on Route 9.

On to the main point. Besides my own 'zine, I've gotten many calls and letters asking about World Watch One #3. By now, you (hopefully) have gotten your copy. What I feel I should mention is the *future* of the BBI's. (Please keep in mind, I alone take responsibility for this page. Catnip would probably not even approve of what I am about to say...but be that as it may...they are my friends and I feel I must do something!) You see, all the real work has been done by a very small (6) group of fans in Los Angeles. 20th Century Fox has put little money, and certainly none of its staff, into the functioning of the club. Dianne Wickes (Hollywood) is the only BBI Director working for Fox and she is a receptionist/office coordinator. She is not officially a PR person. The rest of the BBI Directors are professional people from other

walks of life. They work for the club on a volunteer basis, out of love for the film and devotion to the fans. I'm telling you all this as a preface to saying, they are worn out. Burned out might be more accurate. They are wondering if it is worth going on. Two years after the release of the movie, with little hope of a sequel, do the fans really care enough for them to keep knocking their brains out? (Again reminding you, these are my words, not theirs.)

If you are still interested in a Banzai Fan Club, if you want to keep the fantasy alive, if you look forward to Buckaroo Banzai Against the World Crime League, then please do a few small things. If you are an official BBI, send in your postcard to the Walkers. If you can't find the postcard, write a letter and let them know you are still interested. I have a suspicion that if they don't get enough response, that will be, as they say, **It!**

The other thing you might do is take a minute or two to write a short letter to the Directors in L.A. (They do get a ton of mail as it is...so please keep it brief.) Let them know you appreciate their work. Much of the mail they receive is complaints about delays or address mix-ups or whatever. Many people have an image of a professional firm with rows of secretaries and an amazing computer data base. In fact, it's just "the gang" getting together on Sundays to stuff envelopes, type addresses, and lick stamps. Everyone can use "warm fuzzies" now and then.

On the other hand, if you, seriously, are not as interested in BB as you once were, they need to know that, too. Perhaps it is time to let it drift into video tape limbo, making way for the more popular successes like Star Trek and Aliens. But, remember, it took Star Trek twenty years to get where it is. Alien was just a cult film before the sequel. Or, in the words of an oriental proverb...

"Behind every able man there are always other able men."

A problem of historians, archivists, and storytellers since the beginning of time has been the decision of what to put in a tale and what to leave out. There is always a richness of detail necessarily omitted for the sake of the narrative, detail that has little if any impact on the actual events, but which could give us insight into the men and women who made that history. To preserve that richness and offer that insight into common men in uncommon situations, I have begun this collection of the very personal moments that official histories rightly overlook.

-- Risk.

To Each His Own

Courtesy of Reno
as told to Risk

Perfect Tommy often gazed long and unblinking at places and people and things, his head tilted, his lips curved in a vague smile, amused by something only he would find humorous and that, more often than not, only he could see at all. But he was not given to staring blankly, only half aware, particularly at the laquered rest that held Buckaroo's father's swords directly across from where Perfect Tommy sat insulated from World Watch One. But then, he wasn't given to crying either, and his eyes -- and my own -- were red from it.

We loved Rawhide. And Rawhide was dead. Felled by a red Lectroid spider meant for Buckaroo.¹ His last act was one of such selfless courage that we doubted our ability ever to do justice to the example he had set for us. Yet, with John Emdall poised to destroy our world to save her own and Buckaroo Banzai alone charged with preventing it, we all would quite likely have to try.

Dying, as Rawhide had, for B. Banzai and the world, was not what frightened us. At least what frightened me had nothing to do with death, but with our standing by Buckaroo, lending strength when his threatened to fail him, providing a pragmatic vision when chaos trapped him in its whirlpool, offering direct and simple suggestion that only a man uncluttered and unimpressed by the confusion could discern. In short, be everything Rawhide had been to the Boss, to Team Banzai and the Institute.

1. Though our grief was premature, we had no way of knowing that and sparing ourselves that torment.

I doubted we could do it. I knew I couldn't, not alone, and I didn't want to try. Rawhide was more than just a friend with a quiet shrug and a fast gun; he had been our rock in a stormy, too-adventurous way of life. He had been our anchor, as well as Buckaroo's, and now in the face of Armageddon, we were drifting free. If I had been less numbed by grief, I would have been more terrified than I had ever been in my life.

As if reading my thoughts, Perfect Tommy levered his gaze away from the braided sheaths and looked straight at me. Tommy cultivated a self-image beyond his years, but in this confession his youth was painfully obvious. "I've never been scared like this."

"Neither have I."

But the answer hadn't come from my voice. Buckaroo Banzai leaned in the doorway, his weight supported through his arms by the door's frame on either side of him. We both looked up at once, no longer surprised at his silent approaches, and rose in unison in the assumption that he wanted the privacy of his room returned. He had been generous to offer us this solitude, while Big Norse filled him in on what had transpired in the time we had stolen from Earth's final hours to lay our late friend to rest in the cryogenics vault.² Now that the Boss was once again abreast of events, it was natural for him to seek the same solitude, for rest and for making his peace with the loss of his best friend.

He leaned back, taking his weight from the doorway, and entered the narrow

2. See "Rawhide Rides Again"

room. He looked at us both with more understanding and concern than any lesser man could have mustered in the face of such a deep, personal tragedy. Perfect Tommy drew from that sympathy and seemed to snap back into focus. The sharp, clean lines of his shoulders and the arrogant angle of his jaw returned once again to perfection. Buckaroo smiled and squeezed his shoulder.

"Big Norse needs relief downstairs. Think you can handle it?"

"Of course," Tommy quipped back with a hint of offense in his tone. To imply that he couldn't handle it implied that he was less than perfect. But Buckaroo reassured him with a wink as he watched the youngest Cavalier stroll out the door.

When he was gone, Buckaroo faced me, his eyes indicating the sling that held my wounded arm immobile. "Are you okay?"

The simple, gentle question was more than I could bear. So often the fate of the world had lain on the head of Buckaroo Banzai. Too often he had held someone he loved in his arms, helpless, as they died. Presidents and generals turned to him for aid, and even we Cavaliers depended on him for hope and answers when the times were too dark for hope and there were no certain answers. But when was the last time anyone had asked the great Buckaroo Banzai, with any compassion, if he was okay?

I had made my peace with Rawhide's passing as I helped carry his body to deep freeze. But I could never stop the pain I felt every time I thought of what Rawhide had meant to Buckaroo. My throat swelled with anger at the injustice that would steal that last true sanctuary from him now. Yet I couldn't ask what I wanted to. Not because my voice was trapped in the anger, but because I wasn't Rawhide, and only he had ever returned B. Banzai's concern as an equal. I turned away to prevent Buckaroo from reading the tangled rush of emotions from my face, but I moved too late. I saw his pain for me in his eyes even as I turned, and that made my own pain cut that much deeper.

"Reno, don't," he said. "I need you to be able to look at me." He waited while I tried to quiet the grief I felt for this man and all he had lost, then he added softly, "Please."

I faced him and asked, "Are you okay?"

Buckaroo smiled, a faint image of his best smile, and tipped his head in a shrug. "He's with Peggy. They'll look after each other, keep each other company..."³

There was more, but his gaze left me as he his eyes moistened and his composure trembled, preventing him from finishing. I said it for him. "And wait for you."

His lips reformed that same faint smile and he focused on me again. "And wait for me. Which might not take very long if we slip up."

"We won't."

"We'll see."

There was none of the predictable cynicism or doubt in his clipped response, just a simple observation of fact. We would see, and before the sun set on this very day. I thought of Pecos then and wondered if she too were waiting with Peggy and Rawhide⁴, and if the evening would see us all reunited. I hadn't realized the length of minutes we shared in silence until Buckaroo spoke again and put them in the past.

"Reno, I want you to take Apache into Yoyodyne."

I straightened in shock. "But Apache is..."

Our eyes met, and held, and I didn't finish the sentence. Apache was Rawhide's unit, and Buckaroo knew that even better than I did. To state the obvious would

3. See Extradition from Hell

4. This, too, was premature. Pecos escaped handily, as she has chronicled elsewhere.

sound like a protest, and looking into Buckaroo Banzai's eyes and seeing the reason for the request reflected there, I couldn't object. I had assumed Apache force would stay and guard the Institute, Mustang Sally having never led a combat raid. Capable as the brown-maned mathematician was, I doubted the Boss would risk the fate of our entire species on her untested leadership. I had assumed I would fight beside my own Bravo Unit, striking the Lectroids in their nests and, probably, dying with them of paralysis from a Lectroid spider dart.

But I hadn't thought as widely as B. Banzai had. I hadn't considered that to the interns of Apache, Rawhide had been more than a friend. He'd been their drill sergeant, their teacher, their conductor, confessor, mother and father all rolled into one. Rawhide was their leader and none of them could stay behind while others battled the evil that had torn him from them. They would want...they would need to avenge him in honest combat. Or, at least try.

But I still had my reservations. Bravo would voluntarily stand down and patrol the Institute and be tormented by the inaction, just to give Apache their justice. But Apache belonged to Sally now, not to me. Buckaroo, watching me, must have read the thought from my face.

"I've talked to Mustang Sally. She wants it this way as well."

And still I hesitated, and for a moment I couldn't isolate why. Then the reason settled over me like a pall, reviving the fear that B. Banzai had, for a moment dispelled. It wasn't Mustang Sally I'd be replacing. It was Rawhide.

"I can't."

"I don't want you to."

His eyes searched mine, open and supportive, and I knew we were both responding to the same unvoiced thought. He laid a hand on my right shoulder, avoiding the injured left, and stepped closer, enveloping me in his

hypnotic, trusting and trustworthy gaze. I knew if I stood fast to my refusal, nothing would be held against me. In fact, I felt certain



Buckaroo would find an honor and loyalty in my refusal equal to that he would see in my acceptance. All he asked was that I think about it.

He turned and walked from his room.

But the picture was wrong as I watched him pass through the doorway. No one peeled away from the wall where Rawhide would have leaned, waiting patiently, ever alert. No one followed B. Banzai as naturally as his own shadow followed, to protect his back. Buckaroo left me and returned to his duty in World Watch One very much alone.

I pivoted away from the sight and found myself eye to eye with my reflection in Buckaroo's mirror. Another time I would have wondered at the coincidental allegory, but the abrupt realizations left me no quarter. I would not be the one to fill that loneliness for Buckaroo, and it endeared the man to me even more that he would not expect me to try. I wasn't Rawhide and I could never be. But I could lead Rawhide's team - - the best the Banzai Institute had ever trained thanks to Rawhide's inimitable leadership -- against the creatures that had killed him and Sam and so many others I couldn't then know.⁵ I would lead them and, if we survived, I would hand Apache, and Rawhide's legacy in them, into Mustang Sally's care and continue to be Reno Nevada, B. Banzai's friend, if not his brother, and happy for that.

As the decision formed itself into a comfortable future, I found the camouflage black Buckaroo kept in the drawer at my right and drew a jagged, horizontal line under each eye. It was undoubtedly far from true Apache war paint, but it was for Rawhide, whose spirit I hoped would stand with us through the coming battle. And for Buckaroo, a tear on each cheek, as black as the void Rawhide's death had left in his life, as black as the sorrow in each of us - - but big like a clown's happy tear, because somewhere the fates had to be laughing for sheer joy at the love Rawhide had planted in us.

5. Mustang Sally herself would be added to this list before the day was out, never to take the reins of Apache.

I joined Buckaroo Banzai moments later in World Watch One, just as he ended his transmission to President Widmark. He saw me as he straightened, and his gaze hung on me as if reading every intended meaning into the camouflage black on my face, though I had not intended it to call his attention. He nodded and pressed his hand against my back in gratitude as he squeezed by, summoned by New Jersey at the microscope at the other end of the console. And as Buckaroo joined him, that comfortable future grew a lumen brighter. I recognized in New Jersey's unassuming innocence and intensity as he explained the anti-lectroid-biotic Professor Hikita had developed that afternoon, a man who might fill B. Banzai's aloneness, though Rawhide would doubtless disapprove his inexperience.

I smiled briefly, watching them. Then, biology not being my forte, I looked over Perfect Tommy's shoulder at the readout on the Black Lectroid ship. Judging from the awing data there, we had a long afternoon ahead of us before we could relax and enjoy any future. At the end of New Jersey's bioanalysis, Perfect Tommy half-turned from the console to Buckaroo to report on the doomsday armament from Planet 10.

"They're armed for bear, Buckaroo," I agreed, properly subdued.

But then, so were we.

THE CAVALIER

The Banzai Institute is a fascinating place to live and work--you run into old friends and meet lots of new people. We just couldn't wait for Earl Mac Rauch to write another Buckaroo Banzai novel, so we took matters into our own hands. THE CAVALIER is a collection of some long and short stories about the past, present and future of our Team Banzai friends and introductions to some of the other people who make the Banzai Institute what it is.

All the familiar faces are here--Buckaroo, Rawhide, Reno, Perfect Tommy, New Jersey, Professor Hikita, Sam, Billy, Pinky, Mrs. Johnson and Penny Priddy. You'll also get to know folks you've only met in print, like Peggy Banzai, Pecos and, yes, curse him, Hanoi Xan. And to meet some totally new Team Banzai people--Downtown, Peanut, Black-Jack, Rejoice, Gareth and many more.

The directors of the Blue Blaze Irregulars have put their collective talents to work to bring you our points of view on the Buckaroo Banzai universe. The more than twenty stories have been written--individually and in collaboration--by Fern "Sunshine" Marder, Lori "Illinois Kate" Oberscheven, Denise "Catnip" Tathwell, and Carol "D.J." Waiske. Artwork, cartoons and computer graphics by Dianne "Hollywood" Wickes and "D.J." 200 pages, offset print.

THE CAVALIER is an independent project conceived, engineered, and funded by the New York office of the BBI. It is NOT an official fan club publication and its contents represent the views and efforts of its contributors only. Unfortunately, that means that we've got to recoup the production and mailing costs.

To order THE CAVALIER: Send a check or money order for \$10.00 (\$7.50 + \$2.50 1st class postage)

Please make checks payable to: Fern Marder
Address: 342 East 53rd Street, #40
New York, NY 10022

BULLETIN-BOARD

BIL-BI-BILLY
FORGET FELICIA.
BRYCE AND I STILL
NEED YOU.
H-M-H-MAX

CATNIP,
WHAT'S A
SPHYGMOMANOMETER
FOR ANYWAY?
TOMMY

Reno -
I like the
sign
Who did
it?
-Buckaroo

Tommy,
Drop by my room
later and I'll show
you. Aw.
D.J.

Boss,
I agree. Tyger, a talented BBI
from Arizona, drew it up. -Reno.

AH-HA!
Catnip!

To the BBI's at
large,
Thanks for all
the info on the
Mark of Yocco
-Popcorn

BOOKS
THE UNITED WAY
REPRESENTATIVE WILL BE
HERE ON THURSDAY. I
EXPECT EVERYONE IN THE
COMMON ROOM AT 0815, EVEN
SHARP! YES, EVEN
IF YOU KNOW THE PRESENTATION
BY HEARD TOMMY!
Rawhide

World Watch Wire
To: Shadow, Popcorn, Low Ball, Lady Jazz,
Spaceman, Scholar, Brit, Dragon Lord, Kitten,
Reno, Catnip, Hollywood, Kate, Apache, Shadow &
Mion ... Thanks for keeping me going!
Shackey

buckaroo

Nice Day for a White Wedding

by Apache

It was two in the afternoon and the Institute seemed to be on siesta when the phone rang.

"This is Carey Schreiber at East Brunswick General. We have an urgent case. Is Dr. Banzai there?"

"One second," Miss Johnson said. Putting the anxious physician on hold, she rocked forward from her reclining position, put down her morning cup of coffee and buzzed the Cavaliers' common room all in one practiced motion. "Buckaroo?"

"Not here-- try the stables."

Instead, Miss Johnson switched to the Institute's private communications system, punching in signals for Buckaroo, Rawhide, and the garage, meanwhile informing Dr. Schreiber it would be an extra moment.

The garage got through first. "Buckaroo'll probably need a car in a few minutes," she informed Sam. "I'll tell ya where."

Buckaroo, who lately had tended to be forgetful in the matter of Go-Phones, predictably didn't buzz right back, but just as predictably, Rawhide did.

"East Brunswick needs a neurosurgeon on the phone," Miss Johnson said.

"Right," said Rawhide. Rawhide tended to know, somehow, more or less where the Boss was at any given moment. Pecos called it his mother-hen radar.

Sure enough, within three minutes Rawhide had tracked Buckaroo to the shady lakeside spot he'd chosen for an hour of quiet reading. Miss Johnson patched the

hospital through on Rawhide's Go-Phone and sent the car to fetch Buckaroo. Rawhide decided to ride Buckaroo's Appy in from the lake and then follow him to the hospital.

"Sam, we need someone to drive Rawhide to East Brunswick." Her last call completed, Miss Johnson picked up her coffee, not very much cooler, and rocked back to her previous nearly-supine position -- only to spill the coffee all over herself seconds later when, unheralded, the Institute's pair of air aces walked in, accompanied by a very Aussie cry of "G'day, love!"

"Wow!" Miss Johnson bounded to her feet, getting a big hug from young Rocketsox and a big hug and a serious kiss from Flyboy, who happened to be scheduled to marry her that evening. "I thought you'd still be airborne."

"We came over the Pole," grinned Rocketsox, exuberant as a puppy. Flyboy, whose hair showed scattered gray, shot him a quelling look.

"Refueling where?" Miss Johnson demanded. She pulled back a few inches in her fiance's arms. "You don't have that kind of range."

"Aw, we put a booster tank in the trunk," said Rocketsox uneasily.

"Bullshit."

"I love a woman with an elegant turn of speech," Flyboy declared. "Come along, my sweet, let's go dress in white." The sudden thickening of his New South Wales accent was a dead giveaway.

"You must have me confused with someone else," Miss Johnson stood her ground. "Someone dumb. I'm the one who's young, but not stupid."

Flyboy, whose fighter jock skills had been honed in three wars fought before his bride was born (and two since), sucked the breath in through his teeth. "You might say we coasted on the downhill parts," he explained.

Understanding dawned in Miss Johnson's eyes. "You came in empty," she said flatly.

"Needle on the big E," crowed Rocketsox, who couldn't see the look on her face. "They told us we're the biggest glider ever to land at LaGuardia."

"No foam," Miss Johnson continued.

Flyboy touched his fingers to her cheek very gently. "Bubblebath," he said. "Besides, they would've billed Buckaroo for it. How could we explain that?"

Miss Johnson stood rigid for an instant, then shook her head and unleashed a right that wouldn't have knocked over a dandelion. The veteran pilot held the fist to his chest for a moment, then bent his head to kiss it.

"God, I'd love to meet you at 30,000 feet," he told her.

Rocketsox snorted. "Smokin' hole in the ground is all you'd be," he pronounced in Kentucky hill-country tones. "She's got you crashed and burned right here."

The affianced couple laughed at him.

"I'm on for another four," said Miss Johnson. "See ya after that." She kissed Flyboy again, and settled back into her chair as the two aviators moved for the bunkhouse stairs. "Hey Rocketsox, be sure you take a shower," she shouted after them. "I want you smellin' like a rose at nine o'clock."

"Isn't that after your bedtime?" the flier shouted back. Laughter echoed out of the stairwell.

"No, just close to it," Miss Johnson murmured.

Only sixteen, she had already been living at the Institute for eight years,

having slipped over the fence one night and been found asleep on the grounds by Rawhide in the pre-dawn hours.

"Who might you be, miss?" the cowboy had asked the sleepy child.

"Miss-- Johnson," she had said. And then refused to say anything further for several weeks, while Buckaroo Banzai and the New Jersey police, and ultimately the FBI and Interpol, had attempted to trace her. No missing child in the world proved to meet her description: the Institute had custody of a very young enigma.

In the end, it was Peggy who'd gotten her to talk, Peggy who had realized what the child needed to hear before she'd risk another word. She'd been sitting by herself, rocking, in the room they'd given her, staring out the window at the cool pleasant view of maples and pines, a row of willows fringing the lake in the distance. Peggy knocked and came in and started talking without even waiting for the tense, thin girl to look at her.

"You can stay here," Peggy said. "You can stay here forever."

And that was the key. Eyes closed, Miss Johnson remembered how the thin child had whipped around and shouted with every ounce of strength in her body: "I want to!"

How did I know? Miss Johnson wondered. What instinct led me here? She had lived with the stray cats in the subway for as long as she could remember. She'd learned to read almost by accident-- first the train schedules and billboards, later picking up commuters' abandoned newspapers. Not long ago, she'd found it again, in the archives, a reference in the Post to "...the Banzai Institute, New Brunswick's newly-fledged asylum for stray geniuses. At this unorthodox think tank, no one has a past, no one even has a name that pre-dates his arrival..." Eight years old, she'd stowed away in the luggage compartment of a bus from the Port Authority to Newark. From

Newark, she'd walked...

The Institute had been so small in those days. For the first year, Buckaroo, Peggy, Rawhide, and Pecos had been her teachers. Even Professor Hikita, apprised of the peculiar results of her IQ test, had permitted occasional visits to his laboratory.

And then it had seemed there were new people every week, and steadily increasing funds as some of the early patents became money-makers: Buckaroo's nuclear magnetic resonator, Zoo Story's oil-eating microbes, as well as the auto suspension, rejected by Sam in disgust, which had been joyfully greeted by racing crews from Indianapolis to Sears Point.

She had grown with the Institute, becoming its receptionist when, age 9, she picked up a ringing phone and answered in perfect train-announcer's diction, "Banzai Institute, can I help you?" Pleased and touched by her earnestness, Buckaroo made her the Official Receptionist and Putter-in-Touch on the spot. It proved to be a job that expanded its administrative scope every year, especially once Rawhide began delegating financial and musical duties to her.

And all through the years, when it became just a smidgen too much, when the little girl from the subway tunnels had felt a sudden impulse to run for the safety of darkness, there was Peggy, the person she loved best in the world.

It was Peggy who explained to her the mysteries of her own adolescent physiology, Peggy who shared the painful secret of her violent crush on a Cavalier, Peggy who had talked to her with absolute candor about what it meant to be utterly in love with a man, particularly when that man was Buckaroo Banzai.

It had been too late to thank her when Miss Johnson learned that it was also Peggy, barely of legal age herself, who'd signed the guardianship agreement that made it possible for a very young enigma to stay where she belonged.

Miss Johnson opened her eyes and stared at the ceiling without seeing it, then smiled a little as a half-suppressed memory surfaced. She'd come upon Buckaroo and Peggy one afternoon shortly after they'd fixed a definite date, addressing them with a long-suffering air:

"Gee, Mom and Dad, it's about time you made it legal. It's been kinda hard to explain to the kids at school."

Last year, the much-awaited marriage of Peggy Simpson and Buckaroo Banzai had seemed to all of them to be the perfect garland on the Institute's success. The union celebrated everything the Institute stood for, its splendid achievements not only as a place of scholarship, but as a family home.

And all of it turned to ashes in a single minute of apparent murder, followed by months of painful mystery. Buckaroo and Reno had even penetrated Sabah, stronghold of the venomous Xan, but to no avail...

And when they came home, they'd brought two new recruits along.

Flyboy and Rocketsox had joined up only weeks after Peggy had died. Buckaroo and Reno had left for Asia immediately after the abortive exhumation of Peggy's empty casket. The two fliers, one a grizzled veteran, the other his extraordinarily gifted protege, met Buckaroo and Reno in a Rangoon bar. After hearing even a somewhat truncated story of Buckaroo's quest, they volunteered to help. In a craft of their own, held together almost literally with the proverbial spit and chicken wire, they flew surveillance night after night, their planes' bellies all but scraping the jungle foliage. And they had managed the daring pickup of the Institute's heroes from atop Xan's very fortress, taking their homebuilt VTOL craft supersonic scant milliseconds ahead of Xan's ground-to-air-missiles.

That remarkable jerrybuilt jet had been their ticket to residency together with Rocketsox's pleasant baritone and Flyboy's startling proficiency with the blues harp.

The pair came through the door with Buckaroo and Reno as they returned from the jungle, and started automatically to follow them up the stairs to the bunkhouse. Miss Johnson, in the middle of greeting her comrades, had jumped to cut them off, only to be told, "It's OK. They stay."

"There, you see little girl, we're all right. So retract your vicious clipboard and repeat after me, Pass, friend." The one Buckaroo called Flyboy had brilliant blue eyes with strong lines around them that told of many years of squinting into the dazzling light of high-altitude skies. A sardonic smile flashed in his deeply tanned face. The voice was pure Outback.

"Pass, friend," Miss Johnson intoned obediently, with a blisteringly accurate imitation of his accent. "Does Flyboy mean jets or trout?"

The man's young partner burst into laughter and clapped him on the shoulder. "Come on Rocketsox, don't hold up the show."

The Australian shot one last glance at Miss Johnson, whose blighting hauser was already succumbing to her innate friendliness, then turned to follow his friend. "No, no, you're Rocketsox...I'm Flyboy."

Reaching the inner door he asked, "Hey Reno, is that Munchkin down there one of your residents, too?" But it was Buckaroo, his face set in a mask of grief and exhaustion, who answered.

"Oh...no," he said softly, "she's not a resident. She's a native."

Word of the team's lack of success had already circulated. The Institute, grief-stricken, but hopeful for the past ten weeks, now settled into a kind of prolonged mourning. It would have been inaccurate to characterize the Institute as gloomy, for cheerful perseverance under all conditions was a fundament of its philosophy, but it was true that the living exemplars of that philosophy were, those days, somewhat altered at best.

Peggy, the brightest light of all, the woman whose mere presence in a room made everyone there feel more vital, as if suddenly privy to a joyous secret -- Peggy was gone. Buckaroo had little of his previous springy character, and plunged deep into arcane texts as he sought to make his life go on, substituting sheer discipline for pleasure in his work. Rawhide's quiet, massive presence served as the stabilizing influence it had always been, assuring the continuity of the Institute's routine. But he, too, seemed essentially distracted and while no one would have dared to voice it to him, it was widely believed that Rawhide was deeply worried for Buckaroo's sanity.

And the other Cavaliers and long term residents, whose scholarly yet serendipitous approach to life provided so much of the Institute's character, were also seen to draw protectively close around Buckaroo and each other. Altogether, in the bleak winter of '81-'82, the Institute seemed to have lost its bounce.

And in the middle of that, Miss Johnson and Flyboy had fallen deeply in love.

It happened fast. By way of apology for his initial snub, Flyboy invited Miss Johnson for a spin in his jet. At first he pulled the standard fighter jock stunts, hoping to part her from her sceptical self-possession with a dazzling series of inverted loops, zero-gee reverses and power dives. He began to actually like her when, over the comlink, he heard his youthful passenger respond to these acrobatics with an enthusiastic cry of "Rock 'n' roll!"

After that, he whimsically leveled out, dodging in and out of clouds, joyriding, following the contours of a billowing cumulus formation he found over the Atlantic, flying for the sheer fun of it.

As they played in this airy landscape, Miss Johnson felt the numb shell she had lived in for months falling away, as if sluiced off by the brilliant light that flooded the

cockpit. Sunshine, the color of Peggy's hair... She experienced a sensation of perfect happiness, followed instantly by the most profound grief.

Frightened that the erratic sobbing he heard from the front seat was symptomatic of oxygen deprivation, Flyboy had landed immediately, only to find the brash young woman he took into the skies transformed into a grief-stricken girl who needed desperately just to be held. Holding her, then and in the days that followed, the veteran pilot whose only previous permanent address had been the stratosphere, discovered that, in coming to the Institute, he had come home at last.

This flowering love was no secret; indeed, the wintered-in Institute needed this item of felicitous news as much as any bit of gossip that had ever circulated through its grounds. It seemed truly to presage a spring that would come, after all, even to the heartsore members of Team Banzai.

The first crocuses were barely pushing their green hooks through the ground when Flyboy paid a purposeful visit to Rawhide.

"I need to ask you about a bit of Institute...er, protocol, or procedure, or whatever," he began, uncharacteristically stiff.

Rawhide, running tests for the purity of his protein extracts from drosophils melanogaster in search of the perfect livestock feed, eyed Flyboy momentarily and turned back to his readouts. "Miss Johnson handles it," he answered. "Thought you knew that."

Flyboy went straight to the point. "It concerns her," he said bluntly.

Rawhide nodded, apparently unsurprised. "Then you want to talk to her guardian," he said, then brought himself up short with a memory. "That was Peggy."

The Texan let the printout run through his hands unheeded for a long second. "Guess you'd better talk to Buckaroo," he

offered. He shut his comp down. "I'll come along."

The two men found Buckaroo hunched over a collection of papers on brain stem trauma in a corner of his study. Rawhide spoke first. "Uh, Buckaroo, we got a little matter that needs your attention."

Buckaroo looked up, impassive. Once again Flyboy spoke directly.

"I want to marry Miss Johnson," he said, the Outback accent becoming strong in his speech. "But she's a minor and I don't know if... well, if you let people marry each other around here."

Buckaroo frowned slightly. "I don't let anyone do anything," he said gently. "No one here is either master or servant. The question is whether Miss Johnson wants to marry you."

Flyboy exhaled. "I haven't asked," he admitted. "I do expect the answer is yes. But it raises the other question: she's little more than a child. She must have a guardian somewhere whose permission I need." He paused. "Rawhide here says the guardian was, em, your wife."

Rawhide's eyes held Buckaroo's for several seconds; he'd guessed correctly that this was yet another consequence of Peggy's fate that hadn't occurred to his friend.

Buckaroo looked back to Flyboy, seeming a little more tired. "Then you need my consent, as Peggy's heir," he said levelly. "You have it. But don't mistake Miss Johnson for a child. Her years are few, but she ceased to be a child long before she came here."

"Thanks." Flyboy couldn't wait to leave. Buckaroo's old friends might be able to ride out the redoubtable physicist's diminished condition of the past few months, but the constantly active pilot greatly missed the intrepid warrior and tactician he'd met over a shot of Jack Daniels in Rangoon. This Buckaroo, as close as he could be to clinically depressed,

made Flyboy very jumpy.

The same nervousness prompted him to joke to Rawhide, as they left the study, "I dunno, what d'you think, then-- you think he'll be the sort of father-in-law that turns up on the doorstep now and then to cadge a few quid?"

The comic accent rang hollowly in the hall. Rawhide favored him with a glance from under lowered brows, then moved away toward his lab. Superficially, that glance was no more than unamused, but somehow one felt considerable menace in reserve. There's probably nobody, certainly including me, whose guts he wouldn't cut out for Buckaroo, Flyboy reflected. He thought of his first wingman, of the way they'd thrown their Spitfires into the low skies over Surrey and Sussex and the City of London itself-- and he thought of how he'd felt when he saw his wingman's plane vanish into the Channel water with hardly even a splash. Poor Rawhide, in some ways...Buckaroo was alive. Flyboy moved off in the opposite direction.

Buckaroo and Rawhide returned from East Brunswick at five o'clock. Parking the Saab, they ran into Reno and Rocketsox, in the garage concocting streamers and sundry attachments for Flyboy's ragtop, which was to be used in the newlyweds' departure on a honeymoon the next day. They walked back to the house in a group.

Reno broke the silence as they went in the main door. "How're things at the *allegemeines* Krankenhaus?" he asked.

Miss Johnson looked up at them with a smile, as Buckaroo began his answer. "Couldn't do much today. Subdural meotoma, only partly fluid. We drilled burr holes to relieve the pressure but... today he could only be stabilized." Rawhide handed Miss Johnson a parking stub and a gas station receipt, which went straight into the proper drawer.

"Interesting case," Buckaroo continued. "A boy from the correctional Institute. Apparently one of the other boys gave him a radio with a bomb built in. This one held

the radio up to his ear and it exploded."

"A real boom box," cracked Rocketsox.

Buckaroo shot a glance at Rocketsox that said eloquently what he thought of the tasteless joke. Rocketsox subsided. Rawhide stepped into the silence.

"Kid's hair was a real interestin' color," he remarked. "The most vivid shade of..."

"Red," Buckaroo said tiredly. "Bright, wet, red." He walked away.

"...shade of blond," Rawhide finished. His eyes followed Buckaroo.

"What's eating him?" marvelled Rocketsox. Buckaroo Banzai habitually discouraged negativism or defeatist thinking in any form. Even Reno, though he said nothing, was clearly taken aback by this unprecedented utterance.

Rawhide, meeting Reno's eyes, slid his gaze to Miss Johnson's desk and then looked back at his friend and comrad-in-arms.

Understanding, followed rapidly by a look of concern, flashed onto Reno's face. "As bad as that," he muttered. The Institute had not known a formal festivity since the bitter events of the previous fall, and many of its residents had secretly feared that the celebration of a marriage there might slow or even reverse their founder's gradual restoration to normal spirits. This, however, had been the first sign of it.

Even Rocketsox had deduced the truth. Whirling with sudden violence, he shouted at Rawhide, "It would take me and Flyboy no more'n six hours to mount an airstrike that would blow Sabah right off the planet. Why don't we do that? Why?"

Rawhide took the question at face value, but his answer was directed at Rocketsox's unspoken sympathy as well.

"Because there are innocent people in there," he said quietly. "You know that."

"Including, maybe, Peggy," Reno said reluctantly. Rocketsox, his rage already passed, stared at him.

Rawhide drew a deep breath. His normal drawl grew even slower. "Yeah. Maybe." He headed upstairs.

As Rocketsox and Reno also headed for the inner door, Miss Johnson, who'd sat quieter than a churchmouse throughout this exchange, jumped up. Catching Reno's arm on a seeming impulse, she asked, "Mon vieux, mind the store awhile, OK?" and, without waiting for an answer, herself bounded up the bunkhouse stairs.

Buckaroo was in his room. Rawhide was with him when Miss Johnson arrived but left almost immediately, dropping a hand on her shoulder as he departed.

Miss Johnson watched him go. "What a swell person he is," she commented, as if discovering it afresh.

An automatic smile, indicating abundant agreement, came and went on Buckaroo's face, but when he spoke, it was of Flyboy. "Your fiance asked Reno the other day if I was playing with a full deck," he told her with a vestige of his old humor.

"No!" Miss Johnson was torn between outrage and amusement.

"Yes. I asked him to think about designing a jet that would fly on the ground," Buckaroo said. "He didn't seem to think much of the notion."

The Jet Car, Buckaroo's inherited obsession. And with it, the mythical Oscillation Overthrunder that had kept the Professor immured in his lab these forty-odd years. Miss Johnson smiled. So Flyboy was going to be caught in that project's toils? Good.

"He will," she told Buckaroo. "Let him think about it a week or two, and then he'll get out a sheet of paper, and then another one, and then another one...you know."

Buckaroo nodded. That was how the Institute, his great brainchild, had been intended to work from the first. His thoughts shifted to Miss Johnson and he focused on her intently.

This scrutiny provoked an unaccustomed reticence in his youthful friend. "Uh, you know, about today..."

Buckaroo nodded.

"...we could put it off..."

"No." Buckaroo's response came so quickly it was almost harsh. "Of course not."

Miss Johnson let her breath out. "I knew you'd say that," she confessed. "Why I really came is... I need something. You know, something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue?"

Buckaroo's brows drew together. "You changed your mind?" He had offered her Peggy's wedding dress, in which she had once masqueraded as Peggy to unmask the traitorous Captain Happen, and she had been firm in declining that offer.

Miss Johnson's eyes widened in alarm. "Oh, unh-uh, it isn't that." No way she was climbing into that particular brocade again.

Swallowing, abruptly shy, she continued, "It's not the something borrowed, it's the something new...and I wanted to get it from you..."

A scant four hours later, the whole Institute had gathered in the big common room to see Flyboy marry Miss Johnson. A murmur went through the crowd when Rocketsox had turned to the bride and said, "do you, Evelyn Johnson, take this man..."

Flyboy's past military fame

meant occasional recognition, and his real name was well known. But in eight years, Miss Johnson had never even hinted at her first name, nor indeed, acknowledged to anyone that she had one. Nevertheless, her voice took up the response steadily, "I, Evelyn Johnson, take you..."

Rocketsox tone suddenly grew flip. "That being the case, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the State of New Jersey, and by virtue of the currency invested by me in the Universal Life Church, I now pronounce you man and wife. You..." he wagged a finger at his friend and mentor, "may now kiss the bride, and the devil take the hindmost."

And much later, when everyone was considerably less sober, Buckaroo rose to address the assembled, and somewhat dishevelled, multitude. He seemed almost his old, vital self as he raised a glass to propose a toast.

"We are gathered tonight to observe a solemn occasion in the life of the Institute and the lives of our two dear friends. I mean, of course, Flyboy and Rocketsox, who have managed to keep their feet on the ground for nearly eleven continuous hours. Credit for this unprecedented achievement goes to Miss

Johnson, whose..."

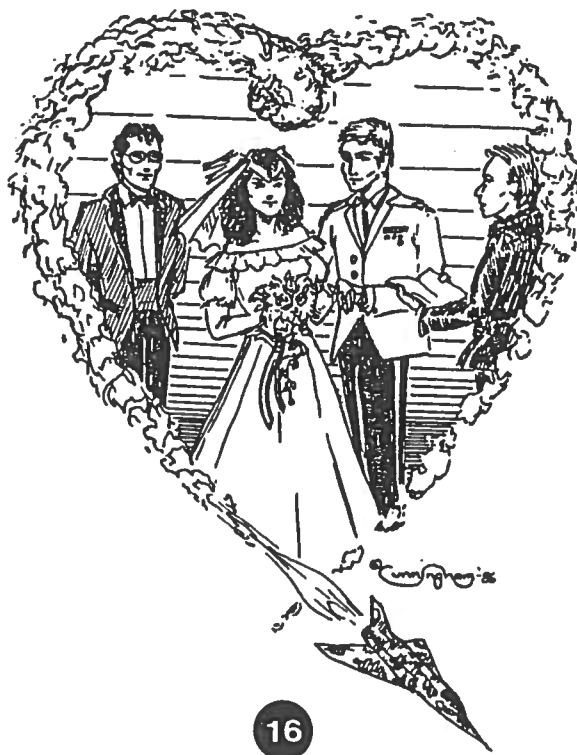
"That's missus, mate," Flyboy called up to him.

A playful grin, rare in these latter days as a desert rose, and as lovely to those who beheld it, spread across Buckaroo's face.

"Mrs. Johnson," he corrected. Looking down at the groom, he added puckishly, "You couldn't really expect 'Mrs. Flyboy', could you?" Rawhide shot a curious look at his lifelong friend, and strangely satisfied by what he saw, ventured a smile of his own.

"I give you Mrs. Evelyn Johnson," Buckaroo said, "her health, her happiness, and the continued nimbleness of her fingers on the keypads of our Go-Phones." This toast was met by numerous cries of "Hear, hear!" accompanied by copious, if wholly unnecessary, drinking.

His toast completed, Buckaroo settled back into a chair next to the newlyweds, the grin lingering on his face. He tapped Mrs. Johnson's wrist, and when she turned to him, said with a quiet chuckle, "Your Mom would've been proud."



ALPHA CLEARANCE

c/o World Watch Wire, 1118 Oakmont Dr. #2, San Jose, CA 95117

Dear Sharkey,

There was one main problem with the first issue of World Watch Wire. It was too short! That means I enjoyed reading it, and didn't want it to end, which means at a minimum that the stories were wonderful. I liked your two-part bios of the contributors - please continue that. Copernicus' illustrations were a plus. And the bulletin board was fun. I hope more people will send in cute things for it - it added an aspect of realism to my fantasy, too, which I liked.

I would like to see more stories that tie Buckaroo into the "real" world, as he was in the movie. Perhaps a story connecting Buckaroo with the work of the Cousteau Society or incorporating the work of Buckminster Fuller. I think Fuller would have enjoyed Buckaroo.

Looking forward to the next issue.

Mrs. Peel
Sunnyvale, CA

Jim -

Thanks for sending the first issue of the World Watch Wire. It's a terrific magazine, and once again reminded me of the surprising level of enthusiasm out there, as well as talent.

We had a terrific meeting with the ABC people. One more pass through the script, and we'll see if they're ready to put their money where their mouths are.

As things progress, we'll let you know if we can use the Wire and the BBI's in any way.

Best,
Dan Lupovitz
Granite Productions
20th Century Fox

(Whoa! High praise from the assistant to the producer and director, not to mention the double for Lord Whorfin's feet! I would like to add a little to Dan's letter. According to BBI Director, Catnip, at the meeting with ABC, W.D. Richter handed a copy of the first issue of The Wire to network executives as "an example of the kind of excitement and creativity they can expect as a response to Heroes in Trouble." Needless to say, the Wire staff is bouncing off the walls!

And here it is, as promised...the winner of the **Bad Buckaroo Writing Contest**. We received several good entries. Sorry, Tommy. Although yours were, in fact, very poor writing...the fact that they came from Reno's novels disqualifies them. Nice try, though. -Sharkey)

Buckaroo Banzai
Against the Enemies of Time and
Space
by Pink Panther

The Doctor, renegade Time Lord, lands his malfunctioning TARDIS early one morning, in a secluded area of the woods, on the grounds of the Banzai Institute. He ventures out to investigate where, and when, he is.

Buckaroo Banzai, on his usual 5 mile morning jog, finds the Police Call Box on the trail and, his natural curiosity aroused, steps into it to investigate. Once inside, he is startled by its dimensional transcendentalism (a structure that is bigger on the inside than on the outside) and trips over K-9. He puts out his hands to break his fall and

activates the TARDIS console, dematerializing it. He continues to fall and hits his head, knocking him unconscious.

Buckaroo awakens and steps out to find that he has been teleported to an unknown destination! He glances around and is confronted with a wall of Daleks and Cylon Centurions armed with laser rifles aimed at his heart.

"Exterminate! Exterminate!", the evil minions chanted.

Buckaroo realizing that his life was in danger and he was defenseless, fled down a dark corridor. He enters a room and, while catching his breath, looks around for something to defend himself with. As luck would have it, he had stumbled across a weapons museum. He finds a fully charged Sandman Particle Beam Generator Gun and, releasing the safety, goes into the hall to confront his enemies.

As soon as he steps out, these evil creatures fire and mortally injure the famed musician/physician/physicist. As he lay down dying, his sensitive ears pick up a manic, but familiar, laugh. He looked up and saw, with those intense blue eyes, three of the most evil creatures alive - Darth Vader, Supreme Klingon Commander, and Hanoi Xan - each brandishing deadly Laser Disruptor Rods!

Xan laughed again and sneered, "At last, young one. I have found you!"

Buckaroo Banzai, with all his remaining strength, pulled the trigger, killing one of the three wicked beings.

The remaining two laser blasts completely annihilated him.

(P.P., Your prize is well deserved! Enjoy. -Sharkey)

In Our Last Chapter: When small-time hoodlum Sammy Kreuger dies at the Institute's doorstep, an autopsy reveals the same mysterious symptoms that killed another man Buckaroo had examined in California. A search of Kreuger's effects turns up an airline ticket to Florida and a cryptic note challenging, "Stop the Pain. Wed the Shark." Now, Buckaroo, Reno, Rawhide, and New Jersey race to Florida to question an ex-con in the hopes of finding answers to this ever deepening mystery...

Buckaroo Banzai and the Zealots of Pain

by
Jim Van Over

Chapter Two Rendezvous with a Shark

A few hours by plane, then a quick chopper flight brought them to Longboat Key, a small town on an island about ten miles long. It wasn't hard to find James "Sharkey" Korngold.

"O! Sharkey?" one of the locals had answered, eyeing their wardrobe sceptically. "Sure, I know 'im. 'Bout two miles that way and you'll see the sign."

The sign was a barechested mermaid, the weatherbeaten figurehead of a ship long gone. Beneath her tail hung a carved placard:

SHARKEY'S CHARTER
Ships and Planes
By the Hour
By the Day
By the Trip

They parked in front of a small building from which a pier reached out about a quarter mile to open ocean. Boats and seaplanes of all sizes were moored along both sides. The entire structure looked as though it had taken all it could from the sea.

Inside, the office was empty. That is, no one sat at the large oak desk. Seafaring decorations cluttered every available space. The walls hung with fishnets and maps. A brass clock chimed behind the desk and an aquarium filled with colorful fish stood in one corner. Reno reached for the harpoon that leaned against the doorframe. He hefted it, testing the weight. "This guy's got a thing for the sea. This is real."

B. Banzai inspected the room as he crossed to the desk. "All of this is real. It just may not be authentic. Sidney and I will do some snooping in here. Rawhide, you and Reno look around outside. See if you can find the proprietor."

"That won't be necessary."

At the sudden sound, Reno and Rawhide both reached for hidden guns, spinning to face the speaker. The voice had come through the round window. An angular, lined face



squinted in. "I'm right here, mateys."

In another moment, the man limped into the office. His long stout fingers grabbed the lapels of his blue trenchcoat. Grey eyes narrowed as he fixed them on Buckaroo. "What be ye snooping for, young fella?"

Buckaroo laid his hands flat on the desk. His men relaxed. "For you, if you're Jim Korngold."

"Aye, that I be. And what would ye be wantin' with Old Sharkey?"

Reno stifled a laugh as Buckaroo continued. "A man named Sammy Kreuger died at my house this morning. Did you know him?"

The old man combed his fingers through gray hair. He moved around the desk, slowly lowering himself into the leather chair. His limp disappeared with his dialect. "Samuel is dead? How?"

Dr. Zwibel spoke up. "We don't know, Mr. Korngold. We were hoping you could help us." He produced the scribbled note. "He had this."

Korngold took the scrap, read it, then closed his eyes. The only sound was the steady rasp of his breath. "The pain," he finally said, looking up. "It got him, too."

B. Banzai sat on the desk, looking into the sea-gray eyes of the man in the chair. "What pain, Mr. Korngold? What's this about a wedding?"

He looked confused. "Wedding?" He look at the note again. The aged eyes crinckled as his cheeks pulled to a smile. The smile cracked to a laugh made of salt and bourbon. "A wedding," he repeated between scrapes of laughter. "Arr. Faith buckos, there's no wedding. Samual had chartered me plane, *The Great White*. Booked passage to Peru, he did. We were supposed to leave tommorrow. Wednesday. It's an abbreviation." Another fit sent him off.

Buckaroo grinned at his men. As the laughter subsided he asked, "How well did you know Sammy Kreuger?"

Korngold squinted, peering under bushy gray brows. His right index finger tapped the desktop. Once. Twice. "Ye be Buckaroo Banzai. Didn't recognize the lot of you with your guitars."

Reno burst out, "Hey, a fan!"

"Not likely, mate. Never could stomach rock music. But I read *People* magazine like everyone else."

New Jersey sniffed a laugh as Reno shut his mouth.¹ Buckaroo repeated, "Were you friends with Sammy Kreuger?"

"Not really," Korngold sighed. "I knew his father, Dick, better."

"Excuse me," Rawhide interrupted, "Dick? Richard Kreuger was Sammy's father?"

Korngold nodded.

Rawhide whistled and New Jersey breathed a quiet "Wow." It was Reno who asked, "Who is Richard Kreuger?"

"An explorer." New Jersey explained.

"One of the best." Rawhide added. "And one of the last. He had an idea about a lost civilization in..." Then it struck him. He turned to Korngold. "...Peru."

The old man nodded again. "About 17 years ago, Richard Kreuger headed a party to search for this 'lost civilization' of his. Besides the scientific folks, Dick brought his wife and two children along. I skippered them into Peru. Samuel was the only one who came back. Dick, Joanne, even little Rachel were all killed.

1. The well-intentioned article had produced some unexpected, and unpleasant, consequences as chronicled in, "We the People."

According to young Samuel, the villagers had some way of conjuring pain."

"Villagers? Then they found a village?"

"Yes. Samuel made it to the ship, stumbling and delirious, raving about pain and dinosaurs and quivering hands."

Dr. Zwibel squinted, turning his head as if to hear better. "His hands were quivering?"

"No. No, the natives pointed at them." Demonstrating, he raised one hand to eye level. It trembled as if palsied. "That is how they cause the pain."

Reno snorted, "By pointing?"

Korngold shrugged. "Aye, mate. That's how he told it. When we made port, Samuel scuttled. I never saw him again."

"Until this." Buckaroo prompted as he reached for the note.

"Aye. Until he called me three days ago. He wanted to go back. He said he'd just discovered something important in his father's notes on the city. It was to be Samuel, myself, and one other man."

"Lawrence Moore?"

Korngold stared at B. Banzai. "Yes, that was his name. How did you know?"

Buckaroo turned to include the entire group in his explanation. "Lawrence Austin Moore was one of Britain's top geophysicists. Until two days ago, he lived in Palo Alto, California."

New Jersey lit up at the realization. "You mean he's the one who died just like..." he cut himself off, realizing what he was saying. "Oh. I'm sorry. That is, I didn't mean..."

Sharkey dismissed the comment

with a wave. "No offense taken, laddie. But it does fit the pattern, eh Bucko?"

Buckaroo's men watched for their leader's reaction to the nickname. But B. Banzai only sighed and answered, "Yes, Sharkey. It fits the pattern. Someone doesn't want us in Peru."

"Hanoi Xan?" Reno asked anxiously.

"I don't know. But that is what we're going to Peru to find out."

* * * * *

Twelve hours later they roared through a particularly dark Peruvian night in *The Great White*, a powerful twin-prop Bonanza PV-2. Sharkey had insisted on piloting, allowing the Cavaliers time to alternately sleep and plan. Now they all grouped near the front of the plane.

"Roger, Callao tower. Going to heading two-zero-nine. Talk to you again in a few days. Muchas gracias. N1559 X-Ray out."

The radio crackled its response, then went silent. Buckaroo turned in the co-pilot's chair. "Well gents, we're on our own. Callao has cleared us to land in the jungle. Now, it's up to Sharkey to put us down in one piece, right skipper?"

The pilot seemed grim. "Aye, Bucko. We'll be making a safe port, all right. If any man-jack o'ye has any doubts, ye can jump ship here and walk."

The group chuckled. Reno peered through the windshield at the feeble attempt the plane's lights made at cutting the darkness. "I sure wish we could wait until daylight. I can't even see the jungle, much less a clearing big enough to land in."

"It be out there, laddie." The would-be pirate jabbed his finger at the map clipped to the control panel. "Right there, if memory serves."

The indicated spot was just above and to the right of a small lake. Unclicking the map, Reno scrawled a big black "X". "To mark the spot," he explained in his best Long John Silver imitation.

After a few more chuckles, Buckaroo said, "Okay, down to business." He stood up, putting one hand on Korngold's shoulder. "Sharkey, just buzz the stewardess if you need anything."

"Aye, Bucko."

The Cavaliers moved to the back of the craft where they began preparations for landing. Rawhide busied himself stowing the gear they would leave behind. New Jersey rechecked the medical kits for the seventh time. As Reno helped Buckaroo secure the rest of their equipment, he leaned close to the boss' ear. "Buckaroo," he began softly, "I'm not sure I trust this pirate captain of ours."

B. Banzai looked at his friend. "Why not, Reno?"

"I'm not entirely sure. It seems too convenient. We found him awfully easily, then he insists on coming along, claiming to know right where we're going. How do we know he's not one of Xan's agents? What if he's flying us into a trap?"

Buckaroo spared a quick glance in the direction of the cockpit. "In that case," he returned his intense blue eyes to Reno's, "we'll get there that much sooner."

"What..?"

Reno Nevada never finished his question, for at that instant the thrum of the twin engines ceased. There was a second of silence, almost welcome after the hours surrounded by noise. The plane lurched, dropping from under their feet. Sharkey's yell reached their compartment.

"We've lost all power. Batten down, mates. We're in for a rough sea."

All four Cavaliers dashed toward the cockpit. B. Banzai spun on them. "You men stay here. Save as much gear as you can. Get the 'chutes ready. If we need them, we'll be in a hurry." He disappeared into the cockpit, closing the door between compartments, leaving his men to stare in shocked helplessness for an instant before the craft dropped again. They scrambled to follow their leader's orders.

"What' up, Sharkey?" Buckaroo asked, sliding into the co-pilot's chair and grabbing the control wheel. It struggled to free itself from his grip.

Look for yourself, me Bucko. All the instruments are either dead or crazy."

B. Banzai surveyed the myriad of dials and gauges. The fuel tank registered half full, the ignition switch was on, but the altimeter spun ever faster downward. His biceps already sent twinges of complaint. He shouted to be heard over the blasting of wind and moaning of ailerons. "How far to the clearing?"

Sharkey shrugged. A drop of sweat fell from his chin. "I don't think we're going to make it. You'd best jump ship after all."

Buckaroo twisted around, freeing his left hand to yank open the cabin door. "Rawhide," he shouted, "Reno, Jersey. Bail out. Try for the clearing. Got that? I said hit the silk! We'll be right behind you." A kick closed the door, preventing argument.

"There she blows!" Sharkey pointed into the racing clouds. A vague reflection suggested the lake. "I'll bring 'er in this time. Ye best jump, Bucko."

"Too late. We're too low." B. Banzai cinched the strap of his seat belt. "Besides, you're gonna need some help with this wheel."

The response was soft, but sufficient. "Aye."

Reno double checked the wind and

his direction. The bright green silk billowed full and beautiful above him. He was drifting over the lake toward a good size clearing. Carefully, he lifted his Go-Phone from the zippered pocket on his sleeve. "Rawhide, do you read? Come in, cowboy. Where are you?"

"Halfway between heaven and hell," answered Rawhide, his deep rumble barely distinguishable from the wind, "as usual. I can see you below me at about 7 o'clock. Any sign of New Jersey?"

Reno couldn't resist. "I think it's just this side of Pennsylvania."

"Here. I'm here. To the left of you guys," came the doctor's voice, anxious, but controlled. "Look at the plane."

Reno pulled his guide cords to pivot left. New Jersey's white chute floated into view, but the small plane caught and held his attention. It was going down, and in a bad way. "Look at her pitch. Why don't they give it more power."

"Maybe they can't," New Jersey answered. "The skipper said we'd lost all power."

"Then they should jump!" Reno fought down his panic.

"They won't," Rawhide said quietly. "Look how low they are. They'll try and

put her down in the lake."

"With no power? Can that be done?"

"Wait and see, Jersey. Wait and see."

From their vantage point, the Cavaliers could see both the lake and the plane perfectly. Reno noticed absently that the landing gear was up as the plane crested the trees, as though raising its feet to make way for a vacuum cleaner. A gust of wind leapt from the cold lake, rocking the small craft. The nose dropped, leveled, and a spray of water engulfed the plane. It skipped twice, like a rock thrown by a child.

"They're gonna do it." Reno cried. But the plane took a sickening roll. The right wingtip caught the water, then dug in like an oar. The drag yanked it to the right, then flipped it end for end. Horror rose in Reno's throat as he hung, helpless, watching the plane cartwheel. The left wing broke loose. The nose crashed one last time into the dark water, then *The Great White* skidded out of sight in the thick trees of the shoreline.

"Oh God," New Jersey breathed over the Go-Phone. "Oh my God."

Reno nodded silently in the darkness.

To Be Continued:



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