

## C H A P T E R   T W E N T Y - T H R E E

In the end the Docent almost completely redesigned the inflatable dragon. That is: it now *became* inflatable, rather than wing-powered as originally envisaged. The thing was that the engineer wanted, from the first, to build a mechanism that was technologically capable, on its own, of doing what it was intended to do. If the device was to be merely magic-powered, you might as well, just get Fairy Ozma to *wish* the rescue party, tout court, to the outside world and have done with it.

That put no strain on Henk's mechanical-creative skills—and he *wanted* to put strain on them. He meant for the dragon to get where it was going on its own—and back again. He redrafted from scratch. He got rid of the vast wings. Constructed of bamboo and tin and designed to *fly*, they were totally impractical. Their weight was all out of proportion to their tensile strength. At the least undue exertion or unforeseen strain, one of them, if not both, would break loose, and even in Oz a one-winged flier cannot fly.

He kept vestigial wing excrescences as stabilizers—and to be a small reminder of the dragon that had been envisioned—but inflated the huge rounded *body* of the beast with ozogen, and Oyhho II became the last of the lighter-than-air craft. Head and claws, back-fin and tail, all appeared, and functionally, in

---

the modified flying machine. Henk conferred with Jinjur, Kaggi-Karr, Professor Wogglebug, and finally with the Emperor as to whether, in addition, the structure should be given life. No, they decided, that would just complicate things. The visitors from Oz to the outside world were having a credibility crisis as it was.

One vital activity the local tin-workers were called upon for and that was to throw up a great metal hangar to house the beast/engine. There on a day in the late spring the finishing touches were being applied when an urgent message from the Queen in the Emerald City arrived: "Ambassadors to outer world require transpo; prepare for immediate departure to meet them."

What had happened was this (as Princess Dorothy retailed it later): "We'd got ourselves to Auckland at last and checked into a cheap hotel. We didn't know how we were going to pay for it but we'd worry about that later. I'd had a bad shock. The news of what those four had done and the thought that perhaps even at that very moment hordes of outer-worldlings were besieging Oz made me desperate to talk to Ozma.

"We had of course the usual arrangement: at six each evening she'd look in the Magic Picture and see what I was doing. By the way, I don't know *why* she didn't remind the people at Emperor Nick's that that was the case. I'm sorry to think young Henk was so worried he was building dragons to come rescue me. Ozma could have relieved his mind at any moment. Admittedly, she didn't have anything very encouraging to report of us but at least she knew we weren't dead or in a dungeon.

"Actually after the first two or three days in America I didn't look out for the daily 'view-in' by Ozma. It was too depressing. But the evening of that day back in Auckland I did. I must have talked for hours! had a complete orgy of confessions about what a total flop our mission had been, how everyone was terribly polite and overwhelmingly generous and hospitable but that we just never could get one responsible person to take us seriously or listen to our tale as if it *were* anything but the eeriest fairy tale.

## THE TEN WOODMEN OF OZ

---

“The Picture doesn’t relay sound, of course, but over the years we’d got around that problem. Whenever Ozma was going to have a pre-arranged six o’clock look-in she’d have one of the people from the Anti-Deaf League<sup>s</sup> with her, who could lip-read. The person(s) being viewed couldn’t be absolutely sure which angle the picture would pick him up at. Personally, I don’t know why, but I always thought if I faced *East*, then I was facing into the Picture. But anyway—if you could get *to* one! —you tried to talk into a big picture mirror. That way you doubled the chance that the Magic Picture would pick up your lips head-on.

“Well, there was a fine big looking-glass in my hotel room and, as I say, I chattered on for hours. Naturally I couldn’t receive any message back. I could *tell* whoever was viewing but I couldn’t *ask*.

“So what I did was this: I said, ‘Ozma, we’re all *depserate* with longing to get back to Oz. But this mission! I *won’t* give up without one more try. We’re going to the American. consulate tomorrow and throw ourselves on their mercy: claim we got rolled and they took our passports and everything. Once back in the United States I—we, of course—will make our way to Washington.

I know this Najeeb Koxden by now. She’s a bit of a dimwit but very amiable. I’m going to get her to arrange *one* more interview with the President.

““He was very sweet last time. Oh, he loved hearing all about you—and the Scarecrow and Jack Pumpkinhead and everybody. But I was hampered by the well, known “credibility gap.” What it came right down to was that the president didn’t believe a word of what I was saying. He just thought I was a very nice young lady with a very active imagination—kind of a Ruth Plumly Thompson type.’

“The trouble was, you see, I had no *proof* of anything. The powers that be had decided when we left Oz that we weren’t to attempt any magic on our own. Actually we did have one bit of magic with us, by the purest fluke. The woodmen had their

---

§ See *An Orphan in Oz*. Editor’s note.

---

flower buttonholes and of course they were as lively and talkative as ever, months later. (So the boys claimed! I couldn't hear them.) The woodmen saw to it that they were in water every night—well, almost every night—with a little nutrient, so the flowers were feeling no pain.

“But, as proof of anything, that was no good. You see, grown-ups from and in the outer world (like me!) can't hear the flowers. Children could, and that's where all—well, most of—our headaches began. But past - oh, I don't know about eleven years old?—young persons get too sophisticated and the ability to hear the sounds of fairyland disappears.

“Forrest had a good idea. He pointed out to Mr. Koxden that the flowers never wilted, and wasn't that magic? But how were we going to prove *that*? Mr. K. had only our word for it that the woodcutters had been wearing those same buttonholes for weeks and months and they'd never drooped. Of course a busy man like the President wasn't going, to be able to keep one of the flowers in a glass of water for a week and then base a bit of foreign policy on whether it wilted or not.

“No, if we were going to get anywhere at the subsequent meeting I hoped to line up with him, we were going to have to have some big spectacular *proof*.

“So that was how I ended up my marathon spiel to Ozma there in the New Zealand hotel room: by an all-out plea that she send us something—just any little thing, or, preferably, great BIG thing—to prove that magic was real.

“After all, if magic was supposed to save the world, the least it could do was start off by saving eleven small insignificant creatures' credibility!”

## C H A P T E R   T W E N T Y - F O U R

Ozma's radiogram hadn't been quite ingenuous. In fact, it wasn't transportation the ambassadorial mission required. In a pinch they could wish themselves home to Oz quick enough. However, for the nonce they weren't about to do that. No, what was wanted of the great flying machine (still familiarly called "the dragon") was more complicated than that. Ozma thought she'd better follow up her alert by going to Emperor Nick's in person to explain.

She was of course being kept fully informed as to the progress of construction. At first, as she'd mentioned to her colleague Glinda, she hadn't been at all sure she approved. Whether the dragon would ever be given her permission to take off was a very moot point. But there seemed no harm in letting Dorothy's boy get on with the exercise of his very considerable engineering and architectural talents. When it came right down to it, his dirigible could always be put into service transporting holiday groups around Oz. That is, if the smog ever cleared, so people felt like going sightseeing again. Meanwhile it would be a functional way of getting about for people who *had* to do journeys, despite the smog, between the various domed areas of the country.

When Princess Dorothy's urgent plea came from Auckland

---

Ozma saw at once how the two projects could be combined. There would be a time lag while Dot and the woodmen carried forward their plans as far as they could. Meanwhile, Ozma would keep her eye on progress at Winkiezia. According to reports, the dragon was about two and a half weeks from completion.

Kaggi-Karr, as self-appointed guiding spirit and, undeniably, ('onlie begettor') of the scheme to build an airship, had always been of two minds about what the flight of the dragon was supposed to accomplish. If the truth were known, it was probably a 'third mind' that motivated her!: the urge to conceive, promote, and ultimately, she hoped, be in charge of a big operation attracting attention throughout Oz. But the two minds she was aware of were: were the Ozites setting off to rescue Dorothy? or were they going to fetch Dorothy so she could rescue them, the people of Oz?!

Traditionally, in Volkovian Oz, the latter was always the incentive when people (most often Kaggi-Karr herself) left the fairyland to bring back the American girl Dorothy (or her alternate-Oz equivalents, Elli or her sister/cousin Emmi/Enni; undoubtedly, if Volkov had lived longer, girls named Eppi and Eqqi would have gone to Oz). Please don't think Oz couldn't do with some saving right now. The dark grey haze that hung over the land was getting as bad or worse than anything Kaggi had known in the days of the Yellow Fog. For one thing, grey was an uglier color than yellow. Furthermore, in the old Fog days, at least Fairy Stella's (Witch Glinda's) rose-colored country had been spared. In the present blight the whole of Oz was affected, the western region worst, so that when the crow looked out the window at Winkiezia what she saw, if not grey-black, was a very very very dark brown.

But of course, looked at sensibly, Dorothy, in being away from the fairyland, was just exactly doing what she could right now to save Oz from pollution. She only planned to return to the country when she had *finished* doing all she could to save it. What might she, more than anyone else, do within Oz to that end?

## THE TEN WOODMEN OF OZ

---

No, Ms Kaggi saw that she must play up the “Dorothy’s plight” angle. That was why, when anyone hard-headed - like, most notably, Ms Jinjur - would say ‘Dorothy’s all right! Do you think Ozma’s going to let anything *really* happen to her pet out in the outer world?’ (Heavens, Jinjur couldn’t be jealous, could she?!), the crow would dart in and say, “Don’t be too sure! Naturally your queen wouldn’t ‘let’ anything happen. But maybe she couldn’t help it. How great is Ozma’s ability to control anything at all out in the great world? If she’s so all-powerful, why doesn’t she just twirl her wand and stop the pollution out there at the source? In fact, why doesn’t she magically stop it, at least, from blowing in over Oz? It’s obvious there are limitations even to fairy magic. Why, right this moment Dorothy and the woodmen might be in some terrible pickle and Ozma, powerless, is just scared to tell as about it!”

That was usually enough to make everyone press on with all speed to complete work on the dragon. Afterwards of course Kaggi-Karr was always rather sorry she’d thrown possibly unrealistic scares into Henkomankatogale or anyone else who cared.

Now here was Ozma herself, sitting on Nicholas I’s gold state throne (I must confess he had one such, though he almost never used it), holding a little court, and reassuring everyone that Dot and the woodmen were, indeed, in perfect safety. She brought her audience thoroughly up to date on what she’d seen of the girl’s adventures over the last months and especially the gist of the impassioned plea from Auckland.

“So now I’m announcing my blessing on your project,” she concluded—and here she handed down a small edict— “and I urge you to launch Oyhho II as quickly as it possibly can be done. I’ve just had word; at my six o’clock view-in last night I received the message I’ve been waiting for! Princess Dorothy and the men had just come from their interview in the Oval Office. Dorothy was speaking, in fact, from the powder room of a night club just down Pennsylvania Avenue, called the Awful Ovice. Isn’t that amusing? It seems it was the first place she could

---

manage to get to, to be on her own, by six o'clock.

"The President had been most kind and most condescending. He sent me particular and personal greetings as from one head of state to another—" Here the little fairy's eyes sparkled extra brightly and one felt that even she, on her exalted plane, had been a little thrilled to be noticed in the great world far away.

"It was just as Dorothy had foreseen. Mr. Koxden, as a long-time fan of Oz, was only too willing to believe—if only he could!—in the true existence *and* potency of our magic land. It seems he's read all the Oz books, even the off-brand ones—and some of those are *very* hard to come by these days, having been published in such tiny editions and, in many cases, having been thrown away by the original purchasers as soon as read—"

"How interesting," spoke Nick Chopper from his chair that had been pushed into the throne room. "Did Dorothy say any more about that, your grace?" The others too seemed to be harkening to the Girl Ruler's words with heightened attention.

"About what?" said Ozma, rather pleased than not to have this turn into a symposium instead of remaining a Speech From the Throne. "About Oz books still being written? Yes, they are! and yes, she did. Oh, not in her transmission yesterday but in the course of recent weeks. What did you want to know?"

"Oh, everything!" squawked Kaggi-Karr, every bit as intrigued as the Woodman. "Who's writing them? And are they real? I mean, do they report things that have really been going on in Oz? things founded on conditions and situations reported in the true history of Oz. For instance, the writers don't ignore your own existence, Your Majesty? That's one thing that's bothered me awfully since I 'came over', and discovered how grossly my alternate-universe home diverges from original 'canonical' Oz."

"No, that's all right," said Ozma with a winning smile. "I'm there, right enough. Or should I say 'I'm here'?" The smile became a trill of charming laughter. "As for who wrote—and still writes - them: I don't know who the people are. One's never heard of them. Apparently writing about our land is not a way



## THE TEN WOODMEN OF OZ

---

of getting celebrated out in the great world any more. Naturally Dorothy's tried to get hold of some of these latter-day Oz novels - but failed. It almost seems, she says, as if there's a conspiracy of silence about such unaccredited writers. She tried sending in - under her married name, so that the secretary wouldn't think she was someone trying to make fun of them - to join a big, apparently international, Oz club, but her questions about recently written Oz books went unanswered. As it happens, President Koxden has just lent her one he had on his desk. It's called *Toto in Oz*, by Chris Dulabone! You can imagine with what fascination Dorothy's going to be reading that!"

"But the other thing, Your Majesty?" reminded Henk, who was understandably more interested in affairs currently and demonstrably going on in Oz than in matters concocted in the brains of people far away who'd never laid eyes on the magic land.

"The proof?" Ozma knew what he meant. "Quite so. The President would like nothing better than to be convinced. Dorothy mentioned that HE mentioned the parallel with religion. A great many people would no doubt be overjoyed to accept the consolations of religion but it just isn't in the nature of human beings to believe things without, now and then, at least some tiny little shred of evidence. The difference, in our case, is that we can supply the evidence. That's what I want Oyhho II for!"

Her audience broke into a round of applause. All of them were instant in their understanding of what she implied.

---

## C H A P T E R   T W E N T Y - F I V E

“What should they be, your grace?” asked Glinda.

“That’s what I was hoping you’d tell me “ replied the Ruler of All Oz ruefully. “I’ve been wracking my brain. Of course anything too big is ruled out. That takes care of the Magic Picture as well as your *Glinda’s Book of Records*—”

“Although,” put in the sorceress, “I wouldn’t mind showing that around in various quarters in Dublin, just to indicate how many centuries farther back its records go than anything they’re keeping score on at the brewery.”

Ozma laughed at the sally, but then grew grave again. The two, with their maids in attendance, were on their way home from Wizard Wam’s by swan chariot. Nowadays, of course, the chariot had to be enclosed. Gone were the days of flying about with the wind blowing free through your hair and the sun bringing out freckles. You risked getting your shoes full of soot grains if you tried that. The sun was nowhere to be seen behind the constant undifferentiated pall of near-black that veiled the sky. It was always twilight of a winter’s day in Oz now.

“Wam’s contributions will do very nicely for standard examples of amulets, talismans, charms, periapts, magic wands, and wish-rings,” went on the Southern Sorceress and glanced at the sapphire-and-amethyst crate near their feet. “Whether

## THE TEN WOODMEN OF OZ

---

they'll work or not in the outer world remains to be seen. We won't leave it at that, of course. But our own offerings have got to be surefire."

"That's just it, isn't it?" said the fairy princess. "We don't really have any idea what's going to prove effective, and what isn't. Maybe everything will work—well, like a charm! But we can't be sure."

"And have you thought of this?" enquired the red witch. "What if the unforeseen happens and for any reason the dragon doesn't get back? That's why I'm not risking my absolutely most indispensable appliances."

"Nor I," admitted Ozma the Wise. "Just the same, what we send has got to be 'big medicine'. It's just exactly *proof* the outerworlders are wanting. So it can't be mere prestidigitator's tricks and illusions. Magic spells that don't come off would be worse than not trying to make any demonstration at all."

"Anyway, we've got the Garden contingent!" Glinda tried to cheer her friend. "Actually, we ought to be arriving there any time now. Can you see anything that looks like a dome—in the general murk?"

Ozma peered down through the plexiglass bubble but could make out no distinguishing features in the overall blackish-bluish-greenish obscurity of earth, so Glinda had to set her automatic pilot. "You think there's no doubt about the Careleaver Kids' viability out in the world?"

Glinda was pensive. "Dorothy's report was that even a mere sprig or sprout off one or another of the Kids was—well, not walking, of course—but talking sixteen to the dozen just days ago in Washington, five months after having left its 'roots' in Oz. A tiny instance, true, but as resounding a proof of the preternatural as, say, turning a common or garden pebble into a diamond. Yes, I know only the Ozites and suggestible small children heard the plants' voices. But when you get a fully legged troop of amaryllis performing the Waltz of the Flowers, then *everyone* has got to believe."

"I so hope you're right, Glinda," sighed the little queen. Just

---

then the chariot began on its descent for landing at the small spaceport outside the still almost new-looking dome of the Charmed Garden of Oz.

Ozma stumbled on the jeweled crate as she was about to alight from the chariot and her maid Jellia fluttered about, full of contrition. "Oh, Your Majesty! I'm so sorry! Shouldn't we put that box in the back seat?"

"It's my own foolish clumsiness, my dear," demurred the princess. "No, we wanted to keep the—er, box close beside us. It's very valuable, you know. But the main thing is; we need the rear tiers of seats and the floor for this crowd of walking flowers that's joining as here. I know you'll make them comfortable, won't you? They won't need to be in water for the short trip on to the palace... I wonder where they are? I thought the group would be waiting right at the gate."

"Here comes somebody now," indicated Glinda. Through the transparent double doors at what had been the old wrought-iron gateway beside a country road<sup>s</sup>, they could see a multitude of flowering plants swarming forward in disorderly and delightful confusion.

"That's more than 'somebody'," Ozma twitted her friend. "I wonder what was keeping them."

"Doesn't it look nice in there!" riposted the sorceress. "So green and fresh, and all the colors gleaming so brightly. It's only when you compare the two worlds side by side like this that you realize quite how dingy the unendomed countryside has become."

But now the doors flew open and the newcomers felt literally 'gulped' inside as into an air-pocket when the perfectly tempered (always 77 degrees Fahrenheit), faintly flower-scented air of the interior of the domed garden met the chill and acrid effluvium outside.

"Oh, come in, come in!" cried Grace Yuss, a gardenia bush who, on account of her sovereign beauty and peerless scent, had been chosen Queen For the Day on the occasion of the arrival of

---

§ See *The Charmed Garden of Oz*. Editor's note.

## THE TEN WOODMEN OF OZ

---

the great ones. "Somehow we all thought you'd be arriving at the east gate rather than the north. Did you have a nice flight? Oh, isn't it awful out there in the unprotected air! We're *so* grateful for our dome. We none of us would be able to stand it outside any more. But inside; why, it's paradise. It's really *better* than it was in the best of the old times. Now it never rains too much or too little, and it's never colder or hotter than we like. Or if there are some who like it 'too' hot or 'too' cold, they've their own small interior domes with private thermostat. But come, Your Majesties, we've got refreshments laid out under the poincianas. There's seed cake and mille-feuilles and elderflower wine - or branch water, for the teetotalers—"

"Wait! wait, my dear," the Queen of Oz finally had to break in. "It's delightful to be here and we're looking forward to the treats, but first; what arrangement can we make about the crate? out in the swan chariot? It's awfully valuable and we don't want to seem to be careless with it."

"Just leave that to me, Highness," put in Hal Oosineight, a big sturdy rhododendron. "Don't worry your little head about that.

I'll stand guard over it till you get back. Now you go and have a good time." The Careleavers still hadn't learned how to address royalty quite properly.

Well, they did have a nice time. Tall radiocarbon arc lights had been put up in the Garden at strategic points to replace the sun which no longer shone through sufficiently to keep the plants comfortably ticking over. Their light picked out colors brilliantly but was really a little *too* glaring, so the shade of the poincianas was welcome as the two queens sat down to a picnic on the grass. Princess Grace and a bevy of other floral beauties stood about (though ever so ambulatory, the flowers weren't really equipped for *sitting*) and occasionally refreshed themselves with a little of the branch water.

When the royal ladies had eaten and drunk to a sufficiency, young Bess Amy Mucho, a lively Spanish moss, called down from the poinciana; "Your Graces? If you don't mind, there's a

---

matter some of us have been wanting to take up with you." When the visitors had given their assent, she went on; "It's about these travelers—well, let's face it; refugees - from the outer world. We've been hearing about them from the Sticky Twins and we're frightfully curious. We had another letter only yesterday—

" Here Bess Amy tossed down a square of paper which Witch Glinda cleverly caught, then quickly tried to let go of, but failed.

"Ozma dear, I'll need your assistance," indicated the sorceress, whereupon the little fairy pulled the leaf from her friend's fingers and laid it down - or tried to.

"We'd better do this thing together, I think." Each of the ladies applied one fingertip to an edge of the paper and so succeeded in holding it down and right side up so that they were able to read the spidery handwriting under the half-dried layer of syrup. "It's Thyugar's writing," constated Glinda. "I'd know it anywhere."

"Hi, kids!" went the billet. "Hope you're enjoying your dome as much as we are. Just for laughs, Fweets and I are substituting the word 'dome' for 'home' most everywhere, and it's amazing how it fits. 'Dome, sweet dome', and 'There's no place like dome', and 'Dome is where the heart is'—and even, yes; 'Dome is where, if you have to go, they have to take you in.' Because, we love it so but at the same time we're feeling awfully guilty, thinking of all the poor domeless wanderers on the face of the earth and here are we, sitting snug as bugs and practically just rattling around in our own wonderful dome. We don't even bother going in the house any more except for a spot of cooking—or when it rains. Yes, Docent Henk came over with his gang one day last week and did a quick readjustment, so now our filter system works like it should. It was all done in twenty minutes! I think he said he'd got hold of some magic from the Girl Ruler—

"Here Ozma nodded in confirmation. "—so when he has the technical plans all laid out ready, he just has to pronounce an encantation or something and it's all made real.

"We're so glad we invited that bunch of kiddies from Canada. I must say they've fitted in perfectly. *No* trouble at all. Oh, well

## THE TEN WOODMEN OF OZ

---

some of the tiniest ones will act as if we're walking lollipops and try to lick us, instead of bestowing proper kisses. But by and large... Oh, and Aloysius P. is a great favorite with them too. All which makes us ask again; wouldn't you like to have some visitors?! Your dome is so much bigger than ours. I'm sure you could take care of a couple of hundred. Because we hear there are *thousands* camped out on the deserts, hoping to be allowed in—"

The ladies didn't read any further. It was too depressing. "*Tens* of thousands," said Glinda under her breath, "more like." Then there was a longish quietness.

"What about it, royal ladies?" called down Poincy Anna, when she noticed the silence. "Wouldn't it be a good idea to invite some of the people here? It's mostly—well, exclusively—children, I hear. I know they're a terror in gardens, pulling plants out by the roots and playing ball in the flower beds and falling out of trees. But I think among so many there could be sifted out a fair number who might be expected to show a due regard for plants. And if so, why, we'd love to have them."

"Oh, please," begged Ozma. "It breaks my heart to talk about it. It was decided by E.C.A.O. (and we have no higher authority than that) that somewhere the line must be drawn and no one further be allowed in. Oh, we could easily accommodate another ten thousand—with just a bit of a down-grading of amenities everywhere in the land. But after that? Another ten thousand and another ten thousand? until Oz was as overrun and awful as everywhere in the great world? It can't be done. One precious spot there must be kept—for a reminder to earth that once all earth was fair."

---

## C H A P T E R     T W E N T Y - S I X

Engineer Henk had naturally had the foresight to instruct that the Winkie tin-craftsmen erect the dragon hangar adjacent to the outer dome wall that now sheltered all Winkiezia from smuts and air defilement. The great sliding doors opened OUTside the dome—and while they were open it was made very sure that all other connecting doors inward to the endomement were close shut.

That's where they all were now; at the huge hangar doors, and the dragon dirigible was being nudged along, just barely avoiding scraping the inner roof of the building as it moved forward, partially inflated.

Kaggi-Karr was flying about half demented, stage-managing everything. The others who were to make the voyage were rather subdued. After all, none of them had ever been out in the great world before and they had very little idea what to expect. The ten adventurers (K.K. and her pal the Round Robin made twelve) were Henkomankatogale, his fiancée Jinjur, little bearded Lestar the alternate-Oz craftsman, Dr.Em. Wogglebug (got up again, thanks to Ozma's timely intercession as Oliver Wendell Holmes), the Tin Woodman's steward Ojo, and a gaggle of technicians from both Ozzes, including a capable air-navigator. That still left adequate room in the cabin part of the dragon's



## THE TEN WOODMEN OF OZ

---

interior for the group of people they were assigned to air-lift back to Oz. Alas, it did not leave room for the delegation of walking plants who had so been looking forward to the adventure! It was felt in the end that the dear destructible things under foot would be too much to cope with.

The take-off was being staged very quietly. Emperor Nick, on a special mobile platform, was there, of course, but Queens Ozma and Glinda were at home in their own respective green and red palaces, watching the whole thing on closed-circuit T.V. There was to be no bottle of champagne smashed. It wasn't that kind of a gala ceremony. They just wanted to get the whole onerous journey over with and get back home again.

The mayor of Winkiezia made a short speech, just to kill time as the great tanks of ozogen pumped their contents into the vast tin bag. The applause was strictly desultory as, during the last sentences of his address, the travelers were seen to be climbing up the rope ladder into the belly of the dragon. There was a slight air of August 19'74 about the scene as all the participants in the expedition grinned electrically and waved just before disappearing inside. They had to appear as if this trip was just the greatest lark they had ever taken part in, when in fact their hearts were in their shoes.

The ground crew loosened the stay ropes and the vessel began to rise slowly into the zinc-grey sky. From the observation windows the voyagers could see the people on the ground scurrying about and then very soon they were lost to view in the enveloping murk.

Henk was captain, of course, and generally in charge of decision-making, but in practice Koboble, the navigator, did all the navigating. The others just sat in the wicker chairs at the porthole windows ranged round the 'belly' cabin and watched what they could see.

Far far away stretched the brown land of the Winkies, growing just perceptibly darker toward the western horizon. But then as they gained altitude and headed north the distant outer frontiers of Oz came into focus and the viewers were surprised to

---

see how relatively less dark the sands of the encompassing deserts were.

Docent Henk explained; “The hot sands tend to incinerate a lot of the air-borne particles as they settle down. It’s only the really heavy-metal constituents of the polluted air that manage to survive resting on the desert floor, and that just produces a pale coffee-colored tone over-all.”

But before the airship got out over the desert it crossed a zone of country that was really black. “Oh, great heavens, what’s that?” squawked Kaggi-Karr.

It was her pal R.R. who could enlighten her. He’d been in every nook and cranny of entire Oz since (and before) she made him head of her Bird Messenger Relay Service. “If about a yard of the muck were scraped away,” he stated, “your black would be seen to be purple. That’s the Gillikin country.”

Jinjur had the longest personal memory of Oz events of anyone present (even exceeding that of Professor W.!) and she contributed: “I guess in the days when all Oz was purple the people down there never dreamed that one day black would be the color scheme—and not quite so easy to get rid of.”

Henk added his bit. “It’s quite awesome how the darkening of the landscape advances, isn’t it? I was in the Amethyst City less than a year ago and things were still distinctly violet-colored then: dark but certainly not black.”

“The degree of pollution increases in geometrical proportion, you know,” the doctor emeritus learnedly, “just like population.”

The others were willing to take his word for that, but Ojo got in roguishly: “Eventually there’ll just be one word for the two concepts, won’t there?: *popullution*. They’re really the same thing.”

The dragon dirigible was not out to break any speed records. Its advantages were maneuverability, payload capacity, and the convenience of its lifting agent: once the great gas-bag was filled you didn’t need tons of fuel to keep the vessel airborne. One little magic motor propelled the craft forward, but not at break-

## THE TEN WOODMEN OF OZ

---

neck speed.

By the time the dragon was over the land of Ev it had ascended to such altitude that landmarks, nay, the land itself, were not visible below and the travelers never knew when they passed out over the Nonestic Ocean.

Night fell but no stars came out. Planet Earth was enveloped in a pall of grime and you never saw things like stars any more. The moon was visible, when its phase was upon it, but as a dull grey-brown ball. The last love song celebrating the moon was published in 1994. After that the orb had no role to play in matters of matchmaking. Who could get worked up over what looked like a well-turned mud ball in the sky?

Koboble set the controls at north by northeast as they all retired to sleep. Visibility being nil, there was no point in anyone's staying up on "watch". Fortunately it was a period of calm stable weather. They had nothing to fear from storms. As for why the compass setting; it had for quite many decades now been established that the Oz continent (*Sempernunquam*) was not always quite in the same location in relation to other points on the earth's surface. True, the surrounding ocean, the Nonestic, always verged and merged into the Pacific, never any other great ocean, but one never knew in advance, in the case of any particular journey to or from Oz, whether one would discover *Sempernunquam* to be close to Australia or not far from the Philippines—or even connected by a land bridge to Lower California. It was the original free wheeling tectonic plate!

However, given this variable, if, on leaving the continent and once out over the water, you navigated north by east you were sure to strike land at last in a region known to be congenial, at least to North Americans: California or Canada or Alaska. As the 'halfway point' chosen for the upcoming rendezvous with Dorothy and the woodmen was Seattle, that's how Koboble steered.

---

## C H A P T E R   T W E N T Y - S E V E N

Despite all firm resolutions sworn to in New Zealand the woodmen went on ahead. Dorothy and Ms Koxden (and even Mrs Tubbs and the flock of retainers! who had got into the act again now that Dr. Choggolak had resurfaced in high circles in the continental U.S.A.) would join them at the last minute. But that would be days later and the ten woodmen saw no reason to go on kicking their heels in hot steamy Washington. They boarded the Amtrak for the other Washington.

The fellows were feeling a little sat-on. From an original attitude of misgiving and reluctance about embarking on this venture into the unknown, they had grown quite keen during their weeks spent in the indoctrination course at Sorceress Glinda's palace. They already had their interest in chopping wood to bind them in brotherhood. They didn't really need Woody Hackett (the joker of the group) to go around with a placard on his back reading "Woodmen of the world! Unite!!" They would have quickly organized themselves as a limited company anyway. Forrest Sawyer had gravitated to the position of chairman and each of the guys had some little office. Bûcheron Arbrisseau wrote a fine hand, so he was secretary. Skog Vedhuggar was fleet of foot and became their official "courier". Etc. All for one and one for all, they began to think

## THE TEN WOODMEN OF OZ

---

they would manage fine as harbingers to the “great world”.

Hence, it was with some disgruntlement that they learned that Dorothy Choggolak had been named Chief of Mission at the last moment. That was Nick Chopper’s idea, but since it was his idea also that *they* undertake this caper they thought that in raising a protest they would have no more leg to stand on than did the Winkie emperor himself.

Once they got acquainted with the young American princess they had to fall under her spell. I mean, they had no choice, did they? It’s a case of ‘Love Oz; love our Dot’. Or else—.

As for the girl, she thoroughly enjoyed bossing a bunch of men around. What woman doesn’t? But in her enjoyment she was gracious, so the woodmen’s grudging admiration was not long in changing into real affection

Then came that fatal day at San Francisco when the party of ambassadors got split up. That was those durn film publicists’ fault. The woodmen still didn’t understand how the whole operation from the word Go had been delivered into the clutches of that mob,

It just seemed to confirm the American credo that “You can get anything you want if you go after it.” The studio had wanted the publicity tie-in with the release of their new film so of course they were given it. It was the greatest social sin in American life to stand in the way of anyone’s making a fast buck.

Luckily (for the ambassadors) *The Return of the Wizard of Oz* had proved an awful flop, so the publicity department was giving the Ozites a very wide berth now. Somehow the film makers had the conviction that an Oz story line had to be very threatening and gloomy. Of course Baum himself in his maiden flight in Oz had forgotten about “leaving out the heartaches” and had crammed his story with threats by man and beast, kidnapping, imprisonment, deception, and sudden death. Unfortunately it appeared to have been that aspect of Oz that always caught movie people’s imagination and, true to form, *The Return* turned out to be a saga of mental ills, sojourns in dungeons, torture, betrayal, and disillusionment. The fans stayed

---

away in droves. The situation as regards appeal to genuine Oz lovers was made worse by such strange arbitrary changes in Oz cosmology as having the Wizard turn out to be Uncle Henry; the Tin Woodman and Tik Tok the Clockwork Man were shown to be brothers and their “metal Mother”, a vast robot made of stainless steel, was introduced as a character; and the Gnome King and Ozma led a Pluto-and Persephone existence as man and wife and co-rulers of the magic lands both above and below ground.

The woodmen were pleased. They could board the train in delightful incognito and not a person asked for their autographs. They headed out for Hagerstown.

If, however, they had thought of seeing additional scenery by going the old-fashioned way, they were to be disappointed. The unvarying pall of smoky haze was everywhere. Visibility out the train windows was on an order of about five yards. They could *just* make out objects that crowded close to the way-bed. They changed trains at Chicago. There was no welcoming party at the station. They had four hours to kill and spent them trying to pay a commemorative visit to the Baum homestead. The house proved to have been torn down to make way for a parking lot and there was not even a plaque. The woodmen left town scandalized.

Yet the journey kept on being a sort of Baum pilgrimage manqué. Their train went right through Aberdeen, South Dakota—but it *went* right through. They didn’t get off, fearful of being disappointed a second time.

Then a curious succession of events took place; *very* curious for people involved in an Oz adventure. The woodmen got picked up by floozies.

Four of the ladies, traveling together, entered the pullman where the men were sitting in pairs scattered here and there. As it happened, there was no one else in the car.

First the girls asked for matches and the Ozites courteously complied. Then they asked for cigarettes, but there they drew a blank. None of the men smoked. This made the floozies stare a

## THE TEN WOODMEN OF OZ

---

bit, and then Tajar Madera made things worse by launching into a proselytizing spiel, explaining that they were on a mission to combat air pollution and it wouldn't make sense for them to add to the latter.

One of the little bevy named Cindy Lou changed the subject by saying, "You fellas married?"

"Of course," chorused the woodmen.

"That's good," said Harriet with an air of increased confidence. "We wouldn't want to waste our time on guys your age who *weren't* married."

"Waste your time'?" echoed the naive Albero Boscaiolo.

"Why, yes," said Monique. "We were hoping to get better acquainted with you."

"That's fine!" said Albero and grinned broadly. He thought the ladies were awfully nice. There were no floozies in Oz. "Are you traveling far?"

"All the way from Philadelph-eye-ay'," sang one of the girls, "and on to Oregon. We're breaking into new territory."

"How appropriate!" said Bûcheron A. "Several of our friends at home are from Philadelphia, and another one or two from Oregon. This must be old-home week for Oz!"

"Oz'?" said Janine, who hadn't spoken before. "You mean like 'Over the Rainbow'?"

"Well, yes, that too."

"I thought that was just kid stuff."

"Not a bit of it," puffed Woody Hackett indignantly.

"What's the connection?" asked Harriet. "What's with 'Oz'?"

"We're *from* there," boasted Albero.

"Go on!" said the women and just stared.

"We are."

"Oz?! There's no such place."

"What do you wanna bet?"

Monique took over. She was perhaps a notch or two cleverer than the other girls and indeed was their spokeswoman. "Are you men claiming to come from a place everybody knows is imaginary?"

---

"It is not imaginary!" The spokesman for the woodmen took over. "That's what we've been trying to persuade people of for months. Oz is *real!* and we're *from* there."

"Go on," said the girls again. All thought of a pick-up had been left on the tracks miles behind. None of them had ever come up against anything quite like this. Though their customers often gave false addresses at least they tried to make them *seem* credible. "Can you prove it?" insisted the ladies.

"Yes!"

"Well—er..." "Sure we can." "Well, we could if—"

"If what? "

"Ladies," said Spokesman Forrest, "do you believe in magic?"

"Of course not!" They all gave him a horse laugh.

"Well, let me put it this way: Would you *like* to believe in magic?"

"Of course!" they all chorused and with even more conviction than before.

"We can do a test then." Forrest thumbed his buttonhole, where little Eva Poreight nodded modestly, a charming pink. "These flowers are alive." His friends were also showing their boutoniers. "I mean really alive. They can talk!"

"You're kidding," stated the floozies.

"Quite often children can hear them—even here, in America. You might be able to, as well. How about trying?"

Harriet looked perfectly willing and Forrest signed for her to move her head near his chest. Nothing averse, she laid her head right on it. For a moment a thought raised its head from the tracks. The train whizzed on. Harriet listened.

"I can hear your heart beating," was her verdict. "That's all."

Now everybody got into the act. Each lady had two breasts apiece, and more. To lay their heads on, that is. 'Unfortunately nobody heard any still small voice. The experiment was a flop.

Monique stared out the window disgustedly. It was getting dark(er than usual) . The men looked at each other, nettled. The flowers had all been talking at once!, they could hear it just as plain. But now the woodmen were being made out to look like



## THE TEN WOODMEN OF OZ

---

liars and idiots.

“We can *prove* there’s magic!” blurted Woody suddenly.

The girls glanced toward them disdainfully.

“Oh, yeah?” The other woodmen also looked at him enquiringly.

Hackett fiddled with his ring finger, then reached over and took hold of Monique’s hand. “Woody!” yelled Forrest, suddenly aware of what he was up to.

“It’s about time!” the Munchkin blurted back. “We’re only on this train at this minute as part of a project to prove there’s magic. We can do it right now! Watch!” he commanded his audience. Then he muttered, “Pryzxl!”

There was a sharp gasp from all sides. Monique had disappeared.

---

## C H A P T E R   T W E N T Y - E I G H T

Ozma was in the bathtub when the American woman arrived. Which of the two ladies was the more amazed at the encounter is a toss-up.

The ring/amulet mechanism was naturally so triggered that the user of the device was delivered into the immediate presence of the original giver of it, in this case Fairy Ozma of Oz.

Monique was utterly bewildered—and when she'd had a moment to think about it, terrified—at her sudden translation. Ozma, being used to magic and its effects in everyday life, was by no means terrified and only for a moment bewildered. Like the Queen of England when a stranger suddenly appeared in *her* bedroom, she played it cool. Ozma wasn't even "furious". She just said "Will you hand me my robe, dear?" Then like Venus she arose from the waves (rather small ones). The thoughtful little fairy princess laid her hand on her visitor's arm. "Don't be alarmed. Everything will be fine. I think I can guess that you arrived here by magic. Is it not so?"

"Er, well, yeah, I guess. Anyway, this dude said he was going-to show us some magic."

"Which dude was that?" asked Ozma, placing a folded bath towel on the edge of the tub and sitting there. She motioned Monique to take a seat at the dressing table.

## THE TEN WOODMEN OF OZ

---

"Oh, I don't know his name. He was just a trick we were trying to pick up for the evening—him and his pals."

"And who are 'we'?" said the fairy. When Monique hesitated, Ozma went on; "You spoke of 'we'."

"Oh, yeah. Hnh-hnh, " Monique snickered. "Some other women I was on a train with. We were going to the coast—on business."

"You are professional women, then?"

"Well, yes, you might say so."

"And the men? I think you implied there were several of them. There weren't *ten* of them, were there? by any chance?"

"Yeah! I think that's just how many there were."

"Ah." Ozma showed a comfortable smile. "I believe I know where we are then."

"I sure don't." Finding she was in such a very mild and unthreatening situation, Monique had got over her momentary fright. But she was *very* much disoriented and gazed around her.

"I—er, sort of run this show," explained Ozma and gestured to indicate the emerald-studded walls of the bathroom and by implication the whole emerald-studded palace around her.

The visitor exhaled a soft whistle. "Are you kind of a princess or something?"

"Yes; my name is Ozma. And yours?"

"Oh, the boys call me 'Monique'."

"And the girls?"

"Er—they mostly say 'Ms Mulroony'." Monique bridled slightly. "I was the manageress."

"I have some professional gentlemen staying here," related Ozma. "You might like to meet them. Just let me get into something. I won't be a moment."

The fairy stepped round the corner to her great walk-in closet and in not very long re-emerged. To make Ms Mulroony feel not out of place Ozma put on a purple satin dress she kept for (very) occasional wear and a feather boa.

While her hostess was about it Monique sat at the dressing

---

table and turned over with acute professional interest Ozma's various aids to beauty. She was curious as to how much Ozma's attractive appearance owed to the preparations that lay at this moment under her hand; lipsticks and high-liners in silver cases, a gold powder box, tweezers, nail scissors, and curling irons in various tones of ozynium. And what was this?; a pill box carved in jade whose label read "To be taken, one a month, for total gorgeousness." Well, no wonder.

Actually, Monique thought her own appearance quite fetching, even without the help of magic remedies. She picked up the princess' V-shaped hand mirror in its platinum frame and surveyed her countenance.

Then she turned to see the Girl Ruler reappear in quite a stunning ensemble. Ozma took her hand and led the way to the Veridian Verandah, where she rang for tea.

"Jellia," she said when her young maid appeared, "will you invite the Historian and Mr. Diggs to join us? We'll wait for them and then have tea and crumpets."

"Mr. Diggs," repeated Jellia Jamb. "You mean—"

"Yes, Mr. Diggs," the Girl Ruler cut her off. Considering the newness of it all to the visitor, Ozma thought she'd like to veil for a bit the fact that there were wizards on the premises. Other professions (by which she might name him) the Wizard had none.

Presently, when introductions had been made and everyone was cosily spreading clotted cream on the toasted muffins—or bismarcks for those who preferred them—Ozma opened the conversation. "Ms Mulroony came here at the invitation of the ten woodmen—"

"Is that what those guys were?" blurted Monique. She was now quite at her ease, having the adaptability of her kind. She cased the two geezers the little queen girl had brought in for the tea party as being pretty obviously too old to cut the mustard but they seemed harmless enough and she felt quite comfortable with them. "I thought they looked a little bit—rustic, shall we say?" she went on adopting her educated manner. She

## THE TEN WOODMEN OF OZ

---

chucked good-naturedly.

"They're quite sterling fellows, really," said Ozma, "and brighter than they look.

In fact, we're counting on them for a vital service to be performed for their fatherland. That is, we were..." She turned to look at her two male guests.

The Wizard and the Historian looked back questioningly. They suspected there was more to this gathering than just the social occasion, delightful though that was.

"We've been feeling rather frustrated, haven't we, gentlemen?" went on Ozma rhetorically, "by the fact that, though we can at any time see and even, after a fashion, converse with our traveling friends in the outside world, it is a good deal more awkward trying to convey any tangible objects to them. In the end we fell back on the extremely clumsy device of launching an airship loaded with - er, useful devices."

Ozma turned again to Ms Mulroony and topped up her cup. "Let me be frank with you, my dear. We're talking about magic—"

"Goody!" cried the woman girlishly. Then, "Don't mind me. I mean, I came here on a dare because I was - well, curious about magic. Now I'm more curious! Do you mean magic really works?"

"That is just exactly the question that's been exercising us!" declared Ozma. "*Would* our magic work at all in the great world outside? Sometimes it seems to, sometimes not. Sometimes magic dispatched into that world just doesn't arrive. You remember Miss Dorothy's silver slippers, Wizard?"

Monique stared. Of course it was all nonsense, but this wouldn't be *the* Wizard of Oz?!

"Yes, indeed," said that worthy, as if answering her thoughts. "And then just now this other case; the flowers the woodmen have with them. That too is magic of a sort but we learn that no one—no grown person not from Oz—can sense their life."

"That's right!" crowed Monique. "Some of the yokels—er, I mean the fellas—had us try to hear their buttonhole flowers talk.

---

We thought it was just a come-on."

"You heard nothing?"

"Not a peep."

"There, you see, Wizard?" said Ozma. For the orientation of their visitor she did some further explaining:

"Mr. Diggs proposed — oh, months ago — that he simply 'step across' to the great world, into our Ambassador Choggolak's presence, and hand her a mixed box of magic tricks. I was against the plan. There is one thing we have learned: any magic device, formerly functioning effectively here in Oz, if it proves *not* to operate in the outer world, also is found to be non-operative any longer when recalled to this country. It would seem that some sort of theurgical 'wasting' occurs in certain types of magical charms in the act of transfer to a non-magical setting. Furthermore, that wasting is definitive both for the outer world and subsequently for the fairyland as well.

"I thought such an errand on his part might be a waste of time and also of magic. Now I've changed my mind," the fairy confessed. "Circumstances have forced us to send off, *quand même*, a shipment of magic goods to America. Now I'd even like to add to it — and, indeed, speed up the process."

Everybody looked interested, if not, in all cases, comprehending. Ozma needed no urging to proceed.

"You'll be wanting to rejoin your friends, I think?" Ozma looked at Ms M. kindly. She had already assessed that Oz was perhaps scarcely a likely place for Monique to take up residence.

"Oh, yes!" agreed the floozy. Then she realized how she really felt. It was too late. "Er, well, yes the other ladies will be expecting me." But oh, what a pang! The not ill-natured creature, vulgar as she might be, knew with sharp suddenness that the way of life she had chosen for its adventure, variety, and (albeit paid-for) moments of rapture was tasteless ashes in comparison with what she might have enjoyed in a land of romance, beauty, and - real! - magic.

"So when we send you back," Ozma went on smoothly, "we will be so grateful if you'll carry along, in a small zip bag chained

## THE TEN WOODMEN OF OZ

---

to your wrist so there's no chance of its being lost, a supply of charms to be delivered to the Ten Woodmen of Oz."

---

## C H A P T E R   T W E N T Y - N I N E

The day dawned dark, as usual, and on floated the great quiet dragon, belying its name by being fire-free and unflapping. Jinjur got breakfast for the aeronauts, who had slept rolled in blankets on the padded floor. Oyhho II was definitely not designed to be anybody's home away from home. All available space had to be maximally 'crammable-full', so no fixed seats, bunks, or other fitments than the control consoles were to be found.

Expedition Leader Henkomankatogale looked out the windows and was surprised to see that what was visible of the sun was directly on the vessel's starboard side. He stepped with some smartness to Koboble at the steering deck.

"Can this be right, chief?" he said peering forward into the unrelieved gloom.

"Sure is," reassured the Winkie pilot. "Sempernunquam turned out to be closer to Alaska than anywhere else. I've set the pilot for Anchorage, then we'll follow straight down the coast –if you agree. Meanwhile there's land for landing on in any emergency."

Henk shrugged. "Good enough... Think there's any reason to go down? Send messages or anything?"

"Don't see why. Everything's going according to schedule.



## THE TEN WOODMEN OF OZ

---

We'll reach Seattle by tomorrow noon."

But there Koboble spoke too soon.

A tiny noise in the distance, the first from outside the aircraft that the voyagers had heard since lifting, developed within seconds to an ear-splitting roar. At the same moment infrajet planes sped past the windows at what seemed the speed of light. So abrupt was their passing that the eye had only a 'subliminal' impression of having seen them. But they returned.

Now their speed cut in an instant, so that the planes remained hanging in the hazy air like giant humming birds.

"It's those six-point jets!" cried Henk excitedly. "They've come to escort us! Well, whatta you know! I've read about them, but never seen 'em, of course. They're fitted with six powerful jets—"

"Yes, boss," interrupted Koboble calmly. "But 'escort us' where? See those red markings?"

Jinjur screamed. Or no, it must have been one of the others. The young woman was after all too self-possessed for that. But it was she who affirmed in a tone of utmost excitement; "Russians! We've been captured!"

This was confirmed all too soon. Two of the strange aircraft encroached on the right. Koboble was forced to alter course or risk midair collision. When he had set the navigator at north-by-northwest the instant retreat of the planes made clear that he had got the message.

The hijacked ones could have resumed their breakfast then but somehow no one cared to. The sky pirates seemed in no hurry. They just gently nudged Oyhho II ever more westerly while holding the convoy along an exclusively cross-water route. At about eleven o'clock in the morning, after hours of fevered speculation by the fearful air travelers, they received signals to mount.

Slowly the great air-bag rose, obeying Koboble's skilful piloting. Up ...up...up the rise continued, until the first symptoms of oxygen starvation among the aeronatus came on. Ojo distributed the pressure masks but in fact they proved scarcely

---

necessary for just then signals came to halt ascent. At the same time the vessel was to turn in on a much more directly northerly tack.

It would be dispiriting to retail the course of the alarmed, excited and ultimately quarrelsome and dejected talk that filled the expeditionists' day. They were all bright and dedicated people. There were no hotheads among them. They all knew that all they could do was what they could not help but do: obey the commands of the aggressors who had come on them out of a—well, not clear, but 'unsuspecting'?—sky.

Of course there were those who argued for resistance. Koboble was one, Ojo another—and Jinjur. She remembered her days as an amazon leading a great army. Perhaps here once more was a chance for military glory.

But what?: *How* could they do anything to resist? Ignore the 'herding' the infrajets were exercising upon them? That could only lead to collision, catastrophe, and a collapse in tatters into the sea. Not in flames, of course, for ozogen was unflammable, but that would be small consolation as they struggled in the waves under the wreckage of the great tinfoil bag.

The only positive result of the day's exchanges was that the genesis of their plight was gradually pieced together. The products of logic and some hints of world news that one and another had heard were fitted into a pattern that for the nonce satisfied the poor hostages' mystification. The exchange took place early on in that fatal morning.

"Russians!?" exclaimed Prof. Wogglebug. "But Russia is not at war! except with Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, and China. I mean they're not at war in the Pacific Ocean region. How could they carry out such an act of aggression here?"

"Easy," said Ojo. "Remember what they did to the Korean airliner in 1983:. They were not 'at war in the Pacific' then either."

"*And* they didn't get involved in one as a result," reminded Henk with a hollow laugh. "Maybe they won't now either."

"But why?" puzzled little Lestar. "It isn't like the Russians to

## THE TEN WOODMEN OF OZ

---

commit acts of *unprovoked* aggression.”

The others stared at him somewhat but then remembered where that other Oz of his came from. Of course for Lestar and his three comrades aboard the flight there had been nothing to choose between Afghanistan and Nicaragua.

“What I don’t understand,” declared Jinjur forthrightly, “is how Ozma and the Wizard and Glinda could let us get involved in anything like this! Glinda gets a summary of world news every day of her life. If the world’s at war she should have let us know.”

“Right, my dear,” seconded the Wogglebug. “Ergo, the world is not at war. Oh, lots of small wars -” and the professor ticked off twenty-two penny-ante armed conflicts currently in progress, some of them with antecedents going back twenty or thirty years. One characteristic of late-twentieth-century wars was that, once started, they never stopped. Both (or more) sides were kept supplied by their allies, so the conflicts ticked over functionally from year to year without, however, ever escalating to measures drastic enough to *settle* any war decisively. “But there’s not any official ‘world war’ going on,” finished the doctor emeritus. “Not that I’ve heard of, anyway.”

“Let’s not be naive,” put in Henk. “All of us were alerted months ago to the possibility of just this kind of situation. Don’t you remember how the ten woodmen’s tour was broken up by a diplomatic incident? the Russians claiming reversion of Alaska because some old treaty was declared invalid?”

“Pooh,” snorted the Wogglebug. “That sort of thing goes on daily in the outer world. No one took any notice. The Soviets didn’t actually try to land in Alaska and take it over, did they? Certainly Glinda couldn’t have begun to brief us on every little political squabble going on anywhere in the world.”

“Just the same,” pursued Henk, “the Russians never withdrew the claim. Now we’re feeling the brunt of it.”

With that they subsided into a mood of depression that lasted them all day. Sometimes they tried to imagine that the darting hummingbird-like movement of the accompanying infrajets

---

planes was changing character and then somebody would say: "Look, the planes on the left have disappeared! Have the Americans finally sent somebody to the rescue? and the Russkis have gone to fight them off?"

The failure of friendly aircraft to come to their support surprised the voyagers almost as much as the aggression of the unfriendly craft. True, the idea of such air support, *before* anything happened, had not crossed their minds. Convoy aircraft had not hovered round the Hindenburg in 1938, and that was only a year before the world was engulfed in war. It was certain, however, that the great drifting dragon was visible on the world's air reconnaissance screens, so at least *now* why were squadrons not racing to their relief?

"Hah!" scoffed the Doctor Emeritus. He, of all those present, had actually visited America in a public capacity (Kaggi-Karr went there 'privately') on more than one occasion and fancied himself rather an "old. America hand". "Have you known the United States to *do* anything in a crisis? Let's remember Pearl Harbor. They had everything to forebode from Japan in those days and yet were caught with their trousers at their ankles. Since then they've grown even less prone to dispatch military aid without a *lot* of deliberation."

Nobody found anything to rebutt. They flew on into the night and the darkness.

## C H A P T E R            T H I R T Y

Meanwhile, back at the ranch...

Since the eighties it had been traditional for the President to have a ranch, even if like Pres. Koxden, he was from the sidewalks of New Jersey. Furthermore it was de rigueur for the president to spend every weekend *on* the ranch. That was how it happened that Jycayd Koxden and Mrs Alahuza Koxden and Miss Najeeb Koxden, with their special guest, Dr. Dorothy Choggolak, were way beyond the hills in Idaho when word came of the shocking incursion by Soviet aircraft.

The President looked as grave as only a president can. "Darn," he said. At the ranch it was the done thing to talk country-and-western. Besides, in this era 'country' was no longer 'corny'—not when doctorates were given for dissertations on "The Contribution of Tennessee Ernie to the Development of the Fifteen Flat Scale" or "Truck-driver Argot as a Basis for Semasiological Standards".

The President continued; "I was starting to believe in it all, Doctor. And now this!"

They all stared intently at the closed-circuit T.V. Of course it was only the newsreader's face that was seen. No glimpse was afforded of what might have been seen on radar screens transmitting impulses from the actual theatre of events. Television

---

had early given up the practice of sending pictures of newsworthy happenings. You just saw people talking *about* the happenings. Nevertheless it was important to stare fixedly at the announcer's face. If you tried to maintain that you got just as much by merely listening to him, you were not considered a serious person.

Dorothy was inclined to be hysterical. After all, she had a son aboard the doomed airship. The Koxdens just looked deeply concerned. It didn't stop them from passing around the canapé plates and dip bowls or popping out to the fridge for a coke.

"I'm deeply disturbed," said the President afterwards. This was after they'd watched for hours the reports that there were no new developments and everybody was getting sleepy. "This might just be the straw that breaks the camel's back." Such a simile came naturally to one of his ethnic background.

"Oh, Dad! Do you mean it?" cried Najeeb. "I mean East and West have been in conflict continually now for fifty years and more. There's never been a time in this century without war. But after all neither has America ever in history been at war with Russia. Do you think it *could* come now?"

"Sweetheart, the potential is always there. It's like with earthquakes. The friction grinds and grinds, the tensions build and build, and then one day there has to be a break and resolve the strain. Yes, I think it could come now:"

With awe they all stared anew at the T.V. screen. Dorothy left at the crack of dawn for her flight on to Seattle.

## C H A P T E R   T H I R T Y - O N E

“There! “

Monique slipped the bracelet handle off her arm and handed the scant-foot-square canvas-covered case to Forrest Sawyer.

“Ozma said I could have the box,” she lied, “after you’ve got all your goodies out of it.” Or if she wasn’t strictly lying, it was only because she’d practised a little blackmail earlier. But great stakes were on the board here. Ms Mulroony had conceived a vast ambition and all other considerations went by that board.

For the nonce she played a very close hand. It would never do to let anyone know what she had in mind, either her girls or these rubes, who believe it or not, really were from a place called Oz. She was just terribly ingratiating in every direction.

“Now do you believe?” said Woody Hackett with sparkling eyes. He’d had more than one mauvaise quart d’heure in the three hours the floozy had been gone. Still, he had already proved his point, and if the woman was never seen again, well, he reckoned it was in a good cause.

Right at the start the success of his undertaking was evident. If the ten woodmen’s mission in the world was to make people believe in the efficacy of magic, they could have had no more total triumph than the present. Of course there was a little screaming at first and calling of the conductor by the frightened

---

women. "They've kidnapped our friend!" they yelled, and demanded that he do something about it.

"Now, now, ladies, keep calm," soothed the comfortable-uncle-type functionary. If he wasn't the brightest that merely helped in the present case. "You say one of your group has left you?"

"Yes! She just vanished - in a puff of smoke!"

"You know, there wasn't any smoke, honey," chided Cindy Lou. "The boys don't smoke so we didn't."

"Anyway, she disappeared! And these guys are responsible."

"Maybe she went to the ladies' room."

"She vanished! I tell you. A person can't vanish, even to the loo."

"I'll just check." So the conductor just checked, and found there was no one in the nearest two toilet rooms.

"She could be concealed under a seat." Harriet and Janine folded their arms and tapped one shoe-tip while the conductor, whose name was Edgar Gibbons, looked under the seats.

"Maybe she got off the train," suggested Mr Gibbons.

At that Cindy Lou screamed again sharply. "Why do you scream?"

"If she got off the train, she's dead!"

The train hasn't stopped the last twenty minutes."

The conductor snapped his fingers, then consulted his pocket watch "That's right!" Then he looked sharply at the ten woodmen.

"Did you kidnap the missing passenger?" he demanded.

"Count," said Spokesman Sawyer, perhaps a bit smugly. "When you kidnap somebody you have to go with them. There are still ten of our party here."

"Yes, that's so... Er, lemme see your tickets."

So Forrest produced the ten ticket strips. All that proved was that they had tickets. Now Gibbons eyed them all closely and individually.

When he got to Boscaiolo and Tagliabosco, the darkest of the group of men, he said, "You're the fifth?"



## THE TEN WOODMEN OF OZ

---

The two looked back at him a bit uncertainly but Sawyer spoke for them. "That's right, chief," he lied coolly, and the conductor was content.

It should perhaps be explained here that in 1993 Congress passed an Act requiring that every group of persons being together in a public place and comprising more than three individuals must consist of one quarter or one fifth black, whichever was the more practicable. This contingent was familiarly known as "the fifth". (Cindy Lou was the fifth - in her group of four!)

Fortunately, "black blood" being so much stronger than "white", anyone with even a dark tan was automatically accepted as being negro for the purposes of the law. Albero and Legno, who were from the south of Oz, were just dark enough of tint to pass muster.

The conductor went off, muttering to himself, and that seemed to be the end of that passage. The three floozies perforce subsided from their agitation, and all the more so when Albero said, "Don't worry, ladies. Your friend turned up in front of Princess Ozma, the kindest fairy in the world. Nothing can happen to her."

"Fairy'?" said Harriet. "You guys aren't fairies yourselves?"

"Oh, no."

"That's right, you did say you were married."

"Most of us, that is to say," supplied Forrest. "Three of the fellas aren't."

"At their age? So maybe they're fairies?" There seemed to be a conflict of connotation here but when Harriet, Janine, and Cindy Lou got established that Coupeur du Bois, Waldo Baumschneider, and Albero Boscaiolo were unmarried men but that there was no reason why they should *not* be married, they went and sat beside them. Then the woodmen were subjected to an intensive onslaught of charm.

It is a truth universally recognized that where men are impervious to the allure of magic women in general are prone to believe in it. The proof of the proposition is to be seen in the fact

---

that every woman in the world who can afford it has a vanity table but not a single man does.

Faced with the result of Mr Gibbons' thoroughgoing researches the women had to believe in magic. That larrikinish-looking soi-disant woodman had done *something* and Ms Mulroony had disappeared. The explanation easiest to believe in was magic. So, if magic was real, and these men possessed the secret of it, would you not give your soul, not to mention the body, to be allowed to share in it? That was why it was now the turn of Albero and the others to have some bad quarter-hours during the next two. Fending off the affectionate ladies was not easy. Actually, Albero was not even sure he wanted to fend, but the other fellows were looking.

Monique's return, just before the train went into a Montana tunnel, merely shifted everything into a higher gear. At the apparition there was a bit more screaming by her friends—of amazement and satisfaction. Then the new arrival seated herself beside the spokesman of the woodmen.

"Well, aren't you going to open it?" Monique tapped the cover of the inner emerald box like she'd learned to do from T.V. commercials.

"Oh—er, well, I thought I'd wait till the fellows and I are alone."

"Not on your nelly," declared Ms Mulroony equably. That box was carved from a single giant emerald. She was going to have it or die in the attempt. "Princess Ozma said it was the *least* I should have—for bringing the contents back to you. Don't forget; I could just have gone off with it, and kept the box *and* all the magic for myself."

No, you couldn't thought Sawyer. He knew that much at least about how a spell of Ozma's worked. He said nothing, however, and grudgingly felt about for the catch to the lid of the box.

Just then the Silver Bullet hurtled into the tunnel. When it emerged, why, there was the box open before them and all its treasures displayed. Almost all. In that one moment of darkness razor-sharp Monique had reached across and deftly palmed

## THE TEN WOODMEN OF OZ

---

one object of the contents, the first that her hand encountered.

Forrest picked up a little blue bottle and read the label: "Take one at bedtime for complete invisibility." Then a little brass box on which was inscribed: "Hum into me your favorite tune." That was too much of temptation for musical Forrest. He immediately lifted the tiny casket toward his mouth and began to hum the melody of "Stella by Starlight".

When he had finished, they all could hear an infinitesimal sound from within the box as of harp strings being plucked a mile a way. Then suddenly a great symphonic theme, played by a 91-piece orchestra, burst on their ears, loud enough to fill a concert hall comfortably. Everybody clapped their hands to their ears in dismay but there was nothing they could do about it until the twelve-minute recital had played itself out.

"Don't try any more of the items" suggested Arbol C., "okay, Forrest? Just pass em out." Then all the woodmen made room in their pockets to receive one or two of the trinkets.

Soon the emerald casket was empty and had been reluctantly handed over to Monique Mulroony, who clasped it to her bosom like a can of Gibbs' Pork and Beans, as if to say 'Nobody is going to get this emerald box away from me—ever.

---

## C H A P T E R     T H I R T Y - T W O

It was still night and they were still flying. There was only place at the controls for one navigator and that was Koboble. Everybody else had subsided into troubled sleep. Even the crow Kaggi-Karr had given up kibbitzing and perched on the intercom microphone, her head under a wing.

As stated, there were no hotheads on the flight, and, as stated, if there were any, Koboble was one. Not "hothead" exactly but, in a disagreeable situation, given rather to resistance than to collapsing inertly into acceptance. All night alone at the controls he'd had time to think - and to resent.

That was how it happened that shortly before what ought to have been dawn but wasn't, when Koboble saw the flashes of pink light which were the way the infrajets signaled in the dark hours that they were closing in, he altered the wheel to port - then stopped. He stood for a long moment in deep thought, while the fate of large parts of the world hung in the balance. Then he slowly swung the wheel back to the right.

There was a squawk and a screech of reversed jets from the two aircraft to starboard and then the pink lights began to dance in a very fury. Koboble took no notice. While he stubbornly directed the dragon on toward the north he kept saying to himself; "What's the sense of letting ourselves be captured? To

## THE TEN WOODMEN OF OZ

---

save our hides? Because everything else will be lost. But our lives aren't in danger! We're from Oz and one thing at least the authorities have seen to; we're protected by every power of magic. On the other hand, if we resist we might *just* get out of this with a little something *besides* our lives."

The planes were indicating by a feverish dipping and return then dipping again, that Oyhho II was to descend. The convoy had already come a long way down from the rim of oxygen depletion. A consultation at the maps with Commander Henk had persuaded Koboble that that high flight, a temporary measure, had been for the purpose of staying out of range of possible anti-aircraft batteries when they crossed the Aleutians. Now they were near where the noses of Alaska and Siberia sniffed at each other like combat-ready dogs. Land in Siberia? Koboble wasn't thinking of it.

The altered tenor of the noise of the attendant jets had begun to wake the passengers. Before they could come to sufficiently to start to argue with him Koboble gave the wheel a sharp tug a further two notches to the right.

He shouldn't have done that. It was an unconsidered move by the otherwise thoughtful and controlled Winkie technician.

There was a cry of tin with a vengeance as the back-thrust of the jets of the nearest plane to starboard disintegrated a yard-broad area of the dragon airship's skin. The highly volatile ozogen began to escape with a vast whoosh that reverberated like the voice of doom in the suspended cabin and brought every sleeper to his feet with violence.

Henkomankatogale shoved Koboble from his seat with scant ceremony and took over the controls. "Brief me!" he yelled, and the conscience-stricken Winkie began to lie and confess all at the same time;

"I don't know what happened! but the bag's obviously ruptured. We're between the Diomedes. I meant to bring her down in American territory. Maybe you still can. Hold to starboard! the more the better."

They were coming down... fast. But much *too* fast.

---

“Get into your crash straps!” screamed Henk and the terrified passengers rushed to obey. Round the arc of the cabin wall, welded to a broad ozyinium band were a series of tall pale yellow cocoon-like objects resembling mummy cases standing on end. Into one of these dashed each of the eight unoccupied travelers and pulled the two padded sides close around him, locking the belts. The principle was rather like that of going over Niagara in a rubber ball... Unprovided with “cocoon”, Kaggi-Karr and the round robin just concentrated on staying airborne.

Down, down they dropped. There was no thought of staying air-supported any more but what the commander and the navigator *could* do was to give maximum thrust to the engines that drove the craft forward. They might just be able to ‘outrun’ the collapsing tin bag by a few yards when they finally struck earth. That might afford the possibility of escape from the collapsed passenger cabin as an alternative to staying to be entrapped and smothered by the deflated dragon-hide lying spread out over and about them on every side. Furthermore, every mile further to the east they might hurl themselves was one mile more that might enforce assistance to them from the Americans.

At last! an area of the planet’s dark surface loomed into sight, filling the entire window view as the aircraft plunged in its sharp fall. Was it...?! could one believe one’s luck? and was it *land* below?! not the frigid sea one had every reason to expect.

Henk and Koboble waited till the last second when they were no longer exercising any direction over the falling vessel’s movement but were only horrified spectators; then they dived for two open “cocoon” close by.

The impact knocked everyone unconscious, including the two birds.

## C H A P T E R   T H I R T Y - T H R E E

Dorothy and Najeeb crowded into the limousine-length taxi with Mrs Tubbs and the crowd of retainers and sped to the Mount Vernon West Hotel. In the lobby they were met by the worried woodmen and, curiously, four ladies who appeared to have joined their party.

“Have you heard?” were the princess’ first words even as she seized outstretched hands in ardent salutation. If her entourage had not been along she might well have embraced one or two of the Ozites in her relief and satisfaction at seeing old-familiar faces again.

“Yes,” confirmed Spokesman Forrest. “We’ve been glued to the television set since we got in. Isn’t it horrible! Our mission that was supposed to be one of pure peace has led to this...”

The rest of what he might have had to say was drowned out as everybody in both parties talked at once. They made two lift-loads going up to the suites that had been engaged for them. In the elevator Dorothy found herself standing next to a youngish woman in silver-fox furs who astonished her by saying “Princess Ozma has told me so much about you! I’ve been dying to meet you.” It was an hour or two later before the Kansas girl got quite clear how the Philadelphia woman was able to make any such statements.

---

In the main apartment they crowded to the T.V. room and settled down to watch. They might have been any American family (rather a large one) engaged in that most typical of all American activities - or, perhaps, substitute for activities. In the present crisis uninterrupted news bulletins drove even *M.A.S.H. IV* from the screen.

The latest was that Soviet amphibious troops had landed on the barren north shore of Little Diomedede and were engaged in hand to hand fighting with totally unprepared American National Guardsmen. Unsurprisingly the Russians had rolled forward to occupy the north third of the little islet. Now the ABS man on the spot in Nome relayed the news that the third had increased to a half and it was feared that by nightfall the entire fragment of American territory would be in enemy hands.

"How queer to hear them talking of the Russians as outright 'the enemy'!" exclaimed Ms Najeeb, awed. Then, "Oh, look, there's Daddy!"

The scene had switched to the Rotunda of the Capitol in Washington, where Pres. Koxden stood at a microphone, ringed at a distance by statesmen looking grave. "My fellow Americans," he said in measured tones and looked both sad and dedicated as he went on; "It is my tragic duty to inform you that a state of war exists between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, a situation long feared, never believed ultimately possible, but now for better or for worse upon us. In an apparent bid to support a claim of sovereignty over Alaska made six months ago, the Soviets came ashore at Whale Head Point on the island of Little Diomedede off the western Alaska coast at oh-four hours mid Pacific time this afternoon. The nominal force of 230 U.S. Marines stationed on the island since January, as well as National Guardsmen, were immediately engaged and shortly overpowered.."

The details rolled on and the group in the Seattle hotel room listened breathlessly to hear named the ultimate occasion for the assault. It never came. "But how queer!" exclaimed Dr. Choggolak. "He never said *why* the Russians came in!"



## THE TEN WOODMEN OF OZ

---

That was left to News Behind the News to reveal at their, as usual, sensational midnight broadcast. "Why!" screamed the wild-blond-haired announceress. "Why did the Russkis choose just today to make their grab at sovereign U.S. territory? That's what you've all been asking yourselves. Here's the story, folks! AND! it's over to Peter Twiddle in Moscoh!"

Twiddle's epicene face, swathed in furs (although it was May), was seen against the background of the Kremlin, and the lahdidah English voice announced that "the rumor here is that a renegade aircraft, apparently something like an old-fashioned dirigible, was shot down today over the northern Pacific by Soviet Air Space Patrol jets. The vessel crash-landed in American territory. It is not known who, or what, was aboard but apparently it was something so vital that occupation of the scene of the crash was essential to Soviet policy. It has further been learned..." Twiddle droned on about intra-party squabbles in the Presidium that seemed to have nothing to do with the matter that so engrossed the minds of the people in the Mount Vernon West suite.

Dorothy and the woodmen were devastated. (The others, aside from Ms Koxden, had little or no idea of what was at stake.) There was, however, nothing they could do. Worn out by the events and emotions of the day they all went to bed and slept long into the morning.

The next day was full of action but nothing that pleased anybody very much. Najeeb Koxden returned to Washington to confer with her father and bring earnest messages from the Oz delegation. Late that evening the President phoned Dorothy. "Magic, my dear? I'm afraid it's too late for that. We will have to put your operation on Hold until this other affair has been settled. I think it's going to be a long haul. Neither side can voluntarily give an inch. Public relations wouldn't stand for it—"

Dorothy had to interrupt the President's blandities. "But what about my friends aboard the dragon airship?! I have to know about them!"

"We can't say anything to the media, of course," soothed the

---

President. "The announcement that a magic-powered aircraft was on its way to America from a continent no one had ever heard of would not go down well with the public. It would be the death blow to the Administration's credibility. Personally I am deeply regretful. It would have been swell to see the folks from Oz—" For just a moment of intimacy Mr Koxden spoke ranch-style. Then he recovered. "Every measure must be taken to avoid the suggestion of frivolousness." Then again he relented; "But I can let you know this much, Princess; a twelve-man commando unit has been assigned to get through to the survivors from the airship—if any."

That raised a spark of hope in Dorothy's breast, though she thought Mr Koxden might well have left off those last two words.

Meanwhile other disagreeable things happened. Mrs Tubbs, the secretary, the chauffeur, the cook, and Dorothy's personal maid, disappointed at the departure of the President's daughter and noticing that the T.V. camera crew and the last of the reporters had disappeared, gave notice, to go into effect immediately.

Seeing the staff depart, Monique and her floozies picked quarrels with the woodmen and flounced off. The ostensible motive was the continued and un-called-for presence of "that stuck-up piece calling herself 'princess'." I think at least this development caused the ten woodmen more relief than distress, though Albero Boscaiolo was seen to look blue. Spokesman Sawyer raised no objections when, as a last act, Ms Mulroony required him to sign, and swear to before a notary she called in, the typed statement she had taken care to get the secretary to run off before her decampment. The statement amounted to a bill of sale and affirmed that Forrest Sawyer, for some astronomical sum, had disposed of one jeweled casket to the party of the second part, Mrs Monique Mulroony.

The women hurried to the Amtrak station and made use of the final portion of their tickets to Portland.

By then Dorothy and the woodmen were feeling washed up on the proverbial shelf of rock. "What about it, Princess?"

## THE TEN WOODMEN OF OZ

---

queried Sawyer at last (by now they'd been at the Mount Vernon for three days). "Shall we go back to Oz?"

"Oh, Forrest, how could you?" Dorothy raised a tear-stained face. "Go away and leave my boy to a cruel fate in a Russian gulag? I *have* to wait here till the last hope is out."

"Okay. We wait with you." Forrest sighed and opened a fresh jigsaw puzzle box. Anyway the government was picking up the tab for the Mount Vernon West plus carfare, so the group had no financial qualms.

Actually the desponding ambassadors had not all that long to wait, for once upon a midnight dreary as they pondered, weak and weary, over many a quaint and curious puzzle piece that wouldn't fit—as they nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a rapping tapping at their chamber door.

"Goodness," said Princess Dorothy. "Who could that be?"

Woody Hackett was first off the mark.

He'd just been kibbitzing anyway, was standing, and was nearest the ornate rococo main door of the apartment. He stepped across and twisted the wrought simugold doorknob.

Two birds fluttered into the room. They were Kaggi-Karr the Crow and the Round Robin.