

ASTRA'S TOWER

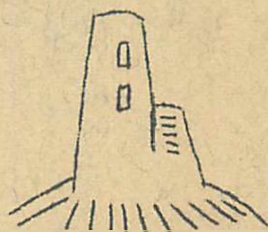
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A MEETING



by Marion Zimmer Bradley

IN THE HYADES

THE THEORY OF INTERLOCKING FANTASY-WORLDS has always fascinated me. Suppose that some day, through the work of unguessable agencies, Conan should be confronted with Tarzan ... Sherlock Holmes match with Dr Fu Manchu ... Northwest Smith face adventure a step away from the Grey Mouser?

HERE I HAVE ENVISIONED A MEETING between Regis Hastur, hero of the Merdinian-Darkover fantasies, and.....but you may decide for yourself the true identity of the man who called himself Speranzu.

THE MERDINIAN-DARKOVER cycle, which I have also drawn upon for the "Terran Empire Novels, is a self-contained world with its own geography, history, and languages. Some accidental similarities of names, discovered AFTER I had read The Lord of the Rings, caused me -- like the loremaster of Minas Tirith -- to "reflect at leisure on the history of tongues." Such names as Castamir, Lindir, Arador, Eldarion, Estel, have long been current in the chronicles of the Hasturs. Names of course, are free to anyone inventive enough to make use of them; for instance at one time it seemed to me that no sooner would I locate or invent a name for use in a story, than Leigh Brackett would promptly use it in one of her fantasies! All this simply states that my special background of linguistics and folklore is by no means unique.

THIS CAME TO MY ATTENTION while working on one of the sword-and-cloak fantasy adventures, this one about Regis Hastur, and sending it to my brother to read, chapter by chapter, as completed. He remarked -- provoking me -- that he hoped "the persual of the Tolkien books will influence your work...I think it's just what you need. "

THE FOLLOWING EPISODE, THEN, was begun with the intention of writing a pastiche of the Tolkien style, and sending it to him without comment, as just another of Regis' adventures -- the point of the joke being to see whether Paul realized it when his leg was being pulled. But before I completed the episode I had lost sight of the joke and was interested in the possibilities of this curious interlocking of two separate private worlds of fantasy.

AS THE FIRST, THEN, (we hope) in a series of Apocryphal Adventures, we present a meeting in the Hyades.....

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THE KADARIN LAY BEHIND HIM; the lower sloped of the Hyades lay behind him; and on the evening of the fourth day since he had set forth from High Windward, Regis Hastur led his horse wearily along a trail that descended steeply into a valley filled with evening mists.

He was tired and worn. His wounded hand ached with the dampness and cold, although he could hold reins and knife, now, without pain. But before him the final ridge of the Hellers still barricaded his way, an obstacle which he must cross before finding the citadel of Des Trailles.

He had met with few travellers on his way; no one left their home now unless they must, with the country to the South rising in war, and Regis had taken the least-known trails. Sometimes these had led him to abandoned shepherds' huts where he had snatched a few hours of broken sleep, woven with evil dreams and the shock of waking in fear, hearing in his mind something like soundless cries in Danilo's voice. But whether these were true Seeing, or mere phantoms born of his dread, he could not guess.

Only rarely, and when no other means would serve to tell him which of the confusing trails would lead most rapidly to his goal, did he drew forth the starstone from concealment. In its depths, colours swirled and no true sight, nor did he try to concentrate upon the swirling for clear vision of Danilo's face. It was enough that when he thrust it away again he could feel the unmistakable pull --- to the left or to the right, forward or backward -- telling him which way Danilo had been taken by his captors.

The night before, he had slept, cold and cramped, in a little thicket near the roadway; before dawn he had wakened to hear hoofbeats and voices, and from his hiding place seen a company of men passing by. They were Dry-towners from Ardcarran and Daillon, their faces smeared with barbarous colours after the fashion of those folk in war; since their passing, his road had been deserted save for silent farms where dogs barked menacingly as he rode by, or a ragged child would peep from behind a hedge as he passed. But all the afternoon even these signs of life had been lacking; he rode through bleak hills stripped clean of life and plucked of people as if by some monstrous gardener gathering in his crops.

He did not dare turn his thoughts south, nor try to see in the crystal how the Rangers fared behind him; and in fact his brain quailed at thought of the wrath that would fall on his head when Gwynn Leynier discovered that he had ridden alone into these hills.

But in his mind he defended what he had done. After he had taken a wound at the battle of High Windward, Gwynn had intended to send him to safety; he was no further use in battle now, and the capture of Danilo had shown them all that the foes were even more eager for Sevenser hostages and prisoners than to inflict death: so that his presence actually endangered the band of Rangers. But before Gwynn could send him, with the escort his Hastur rank demanded, Regis had gone secretly to Dyan Ardais.

"I am no child!" he had flamed at the seconde, "to be sent here or there under guard in time of war! Nor can Gwynn spare the men! Danilo rode alone from Syrtis to High Windward to warn us -- I can ride alone to Edelweiss, or let me put a shift about my knees and call me princess of Hasturs, not prince"

Dyan Ardais -- tall, rangy, cruel of eye and heart -- surveyed him intently, and Regis wondered if the Sevenser had seen through him; but Dyan was not one of the telepath Leyniers, and at last he had said only "Be it so, young Hastur. Pledge me but your word in honor to ride directly to Edelweiss without turning from your path, except in necessity if you meet armed men, and you may go unescorted. I will answer to Gwynn."

And Regis had given his word; and to Edelweiss he had ridden, indeed -- for clothing which would be inconspicuous in the mountains, for food and a horse better suited to mountain trails than his beloved Melusine and which, at need, he could abandon. And, not least, for the blue crystal he wore about his neck, the starstone given to him reluctantly by his sorceress sister. But Gwynn would have seen through him. Gwynn would have bidden him to ride to Edelweiss without turning aside, but Gwynn would also have bidden him not to depart thence without orders.

Now, four days later, he found himself in the hills, alone and afraid.

Now, at the bottom of the valley, he heard the faint trickle of a stream; the horse lifted her ears and nickered softly, and Regis patted her neck. "I am thirsty too," he murmured, "we will drink, and you shall graze a little, but then we must push on; there is no time for sleep tonight, chiya*

He went on murmuring childishly to the animal, because it eased his tension to speak aloud. "Yes, and soon I must turn you loose, you cannot take the road over the Hellers. You have a willing heart, but I shall need hands and feet more nimble than yours, lass. Where will you go, I wonder? To someone, I hope, who will appreciate you as you deserve. You are much too good to wander for long unclaimed in such a country of outlaws, but even a renegade of the Hellers might be good to such gift from the horse-Gods."

He halted as the horse threw back her head, sniffing as if at some unexpeted scent. Regis smelled it now, too; wood smoke. He stopped, checking the animal with a hand on her bridle, and looked around.

Down here in the valley it was already quite dark. He could just see a pale glint of smoke away to the left, rising from behind a high, conical mound of rock -- only a blackish outline at one side of the path. The fire was well concealed behind it; even now, the telltale smoke had diminished to nothing. Eyes less keen than those of Regis would not have seen it at all; and there was always a smell of burning in the hills ravaged so often by forest-fire.

Regis hesitated. Anything might lie behind that mound. Yet it was too quiet, he thought, for an armed encampment; no stamp of horses, no sound of men's voices, and above all no challenge from the guard sheh an encampment would surely

* Chiya; casta-cahuenga for "little lass."



have posted. Shepherds, doubtless, or charcoal-burners. Or some solitary outlaw, or even an innocent hunter -- unlikely as it seemed for anyone to come here for his hunting.

In any case his path led past the mysteriously concealed fire, for it curved around the mount, in the perfect way for an ambush; and Regis had no desire to stop an arrow or a knife coming noiselessly out of the dark. Yet if he drew off now, he might lose his road in the dark and wander long before he found it anew. Suddenly making up his mind, he drew his hobbles from the saddlebag and tethered the horse's front feet so she could not wander far away; there was grass, though coarse and bunched, here at the bottom of the valley.

Carefully he crept toward the mound. From its top, he thought he could look down unseen at the hidden fire, and decide how many were nearby, and whether they were likely to be a threat to him.

One wiser in woodcraft than Regis could have made this mistake---skilled he was indeed, in the mountains of his own country, but he had never before come into the Hellers; the regularity of the mound signified nothing to him except an easy lookout and an easy climb. He set his feet carefully, among the loose stones, and did not see in the darkness the network of cracks and holes winding across the surface. He did not, indeed, like the "feel" of the mound underfoot; but even when he put his foot into a hole, he only reminded himself that snakes, at an hour like this, would be curled up asleep, and went quietly on, feeling for footholds with his toes.

He reached the top and paused, with an uneasy sense as if something were crawling on his body. He brushed at himself nervously, put his foot into another hole, recovered his balance and looked down toward the glint of the fire below.

A mist was rising from the narrow stream that ran along the rocks; beyond lay a cluster of dark trees, and within the trees the small fire, and a dark oblong that might, or might not, have been a sleeping man.

The crawling sensation persisted; Regis put up his hand to brush at his neck, then gasped as an agony like fire stung through his palm. The next instant another stabbing pain ran through the ankle above his boot; he jumped and fell, sliding, along the broken holes. A rock rattled loose, and another hot and terrible needle pierced his wrist with a pain so awful that he could not have forced back a yell if instant death had been the penalty. He heard sudden, clattering feet and scrambled desperately to fling himself back across the ridge and get away--

"This way! Quick!" Strong hands jerked him up to his feet; he stumbled, fell against somebody, and then a man, only a blur in the twilight, was raining swift, beating blows on his body and head. Regis cried out and raised a hand to protect himself, but the man went on slapping at him, meanwhile shoving him roughly down the slope and on to firm ground. He stooped quickly to brush at his own clothing; then came back to Regis, slapping all over him; jerked him around, then sighed with a gasp of relief.

"I think that's all --" and as Regis swayed and stumbled, the man held him upright with strong hands. "Here, come this way -- what blundering fool would try to cross a mound of scorpion-ants in the dark?"

Regis gasped, but still could not speak. They splashed across the stream and out into the light of the small fire; by it, Regis could see his rescuer, or his captor, clearly. A tall man, unusually tall and rangy, clad in dark unfamiliar clothing; in the firelight his face looked sunbeaten and weathered and grim, and his eyes were grey and stern. "Blundering young fool," he repeated, still gasping with his efforts, "you came near to meeting a dreadful death, but that my ears are sharp. Had I not heard you until you cried out, by the time I reached you, you would have had a thousand stings and your body by now would be bursting like a rotten apple with their poison!"

"I --didn't know," Regis stammered. The man pushed him down by the fire ---where, feeling deathly sick and faint, Regis was glad to let himself fall -- and knelt beside him, taking his arm and pushing back the sleeve, then unfastening the topmost clasp of Regis' ankle-boots. Arm and leg were already red as fire and swelling fast and the man looked grave, touching the wounds with strong gentle fingers; then he sighed and straightened up with something, which, in a face less grim, might have been a smile.

"Your luck is better than you deserve," he said. "Three stings, no more. You will have a swollen arm and leg, but by morning you will not be much the worse. You may even be the better, if this teaches you to keep away from such things -- pain is a rough teacher, but a good one. Had you had a dog or a horse with you, they would have had the sense not to set foot on the mound!"

Regis sat up. "Are you not hurt?" he asked, "You stamped all over the mound --"

"My boots are thick; also I knew what I was about, and I moved too swiftly for them," said the stranger. "Well, one thing is certain, you cannot go far on that foot; so I

must have a guest at my fire, it seems. Though company is what I sought to avoid. Now tell me what you were doing, crawling about on a scorpion-ant mound in the pitch-dark."

"I too was seeking to avoid company," said Regis, and the stranger threw back his head and laughed, an unexpectedly merry sound. "But those I tried to shun would have been wise enough in the ways of their own woods to stay off the barricade I chose to give me shelter! But what is a boy your age -- for now I look well at you, I see you are only a boy --- doing in these hills, alone and wandering so late?"

"I am old enough to be out at night," Regis said stiffly. "I was--hunting."

"You are ill equipped for that," said the stranger, standing above him almost menacingly, "no bow, no spear, no snares -- and no woodcraft. Whatever your quarry, you could hardly come at it with less skill." He surveyed Regis in silence for a moment. "My hunting was better, you see," he said at last, and gestured to the fire. Regis could see that over the flames a rough spit of green wood had been rigged, on which a large bird was roasting with little sizzles. It smelled very good. The stranger said "And since the better hunter must show hospitality to the less -- there is plenty here for both." He pointed to where the trickling stream splashed down from the rocks into a shallow pool, only a few feet away. "Take off your boot and bathe your hand and foot," he said, "it will lessen the worst of the swelling. Then we will eat, and --" he added, his eyes kindling to sternness again, "we will talk."

Regis felt confused and, oddly, annoyed; it was apparent that the man dismissed him as someone too ineffectual to take seriously as a possible foe; a harmless boy to be helped out of a blundering mistake, but no one to worry about or challenge. It occurred to Regis that this was probably the safest mask he might wear --while the stranger did not take him seriously, he was not apt to be dangerous.

And yet there was something about the man --the stern glint behind his eyes, perhaps -- which warned Regis; this was no one to trifle with. He would not be easy to deceive.

But somehow Regis did not believe this was one of the renegades of the hills. He warned himself not to place overmuch trust in any stranger because of a chance courtesy; but from what he had heard of the outlaws of the Hyades, instead of rescuing him from the mound, they would have been more apt to stand by and listen to his shrieks with laughter, jeering at his shrieks and watching him die with pleasure; or, if by chance he escaped, to thrust him back.

Nor did the stranger speak the jargon of the hills, but addressed Regis in the casta tongue of Carcosa, speaking with ease and skill, although his accent was something strange and the words phrased a little differently than a lowlander would have spoken them.

The man was still regarding him with something like amusement in his grey eyes, and it struck Regis that in any case, offered hospitality should not be requited with distrust. And courtesy was second nature to a valley Sevenson.

He said quietly "There is food, and some wine, in my saddlebags. She, too, would be safer behind the mound. If you

will wait a moment, I will fetch her."

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"Stay where you are! You will get no boot on that foot again for two or three hours," said the man. "I will bring your horse out of range of any light-fingered passer-by. I advise you, now, to try that cold water on your foot." He went swiftly away, moving with the noiselessness almost of a shadow, and Regis, abashed by the repeated admonition -- given as if to a child -- sat and bathed his arm and his foot as he had been bidden. At first the shock of the icy water was as painful as the bites, but after a time he felt the pain begin to subside.

He looked around the small clearing. What he had thought, from his lookout, to be the form of a sleeping man, was only a long, rolled-up cloak of sombre grey, without ornament of any kind; beside it lay a sword-belt and sheathed sword, but there was no sign of any other pack or gear of any sort except a loop of cord which Regis guessed to be the snare he had used for taking the bird now crackling and browning over the fire.

At last the stranger appeared, leading Regis' horse, and the boy heard him talking softly to the animal in some tongue he could not understand, as he unsaddled the mare and tethered her to a tree. Oddly, his way with the horse was more reassuring to Regis than his grim hospitality. He came back to the fire, moving silently in long steps, and prodded at the roasting bird with the point of a long, finely-wrought knife.

"I too have small store of traveler's food," he said, "and this will not keep or carry well. So let us spare what we can take with us, and eat well on what tonight has given." So saying, he cut up the bird and extended a generous portion to Regis. Regis bowed as best he could while still seated, and accepted it. Hungry after several days of cold food, it seemed to him that few fine feasts had ever tasted so good as this wild bird roasted over a hidden fire.

Yet he spared a moment to observe his host. His clothing was shabby and travel-worn -- as indeed was Regis' own, an old hunting-suit of Gabriel's, too large for him -- and rough and poor; but his boots were well made of good leather, and the leather gauntlets tucked into his belt were lined with fur. The knife, though plain and the hilt much worn, was beautifully forged of a silvery metal. He ate, though as hungrily as Regis and as if he, too, had eaten poorly for some days, without any hint of unseemliness or greed; and when they had both eaten as much as they could hold, he gathered up the bones leisurely, buried them in the sand, and carefully cleaned his fingers in the grass. Then, returning to the fire, he sighed, regretfully.

"To sit by a fire is pleasant in the wild," he said, "yet I feel we would both be safer without the light. I have no taste for raw meat, or I would not have dared to build it and leave it lighted for so long. It betrayed me to you, and might bring others. By your leave, I think we had better put it out."

"It is your fire," said Regis, startled by the tacit assumption that they might have common foes, "you need not ask my leave to put it out!"

With noiseless laughter, the stranger covered the fire until no spark remained visible, and then damped it with water. One burning branch he laid aside for a moment, a glowing coal; then, seating himself a little way from Regis, drew something



from his pockets. To his amazement, Regis saw that it was a pipe, which the man proceeded unabashedly to fill.

"Will you smoke?"

"No indeed!" said Regis, startled to real discourtesy this time, "what do you take me for?"

The stranger laughed, aloud this time.

"Forgive me! I had forgotten for a moment, almost, in what land I was travelling! Well now; that tells me more about you than a hundred questions, young man; for here in the mountains and in every other land I have known, men smoke --where the custom is known--but it is unseemly for women. Only in the Seven Domains of Carcosa have I seen a land where women alone may smoke without fear of ridicule or worse.* So -- what is a son of the Seveners doing in these mountains which your people fitly call Hellers?"

"I may have leave, surely, to hunt in my own mountains?"

"Hunt? Not, I think, for rabbits or birds!"

"Be that as it may," Regis retorted, "you who question me must know that strangers are seldom seen in this land, and seldom do we give them leave to wander about where they will. What is my host's name, that I may thank him fitly for his hospitality?"

The man, dark in the small light of the glowing branch, was filling a small pipe. Regis knew --from Gwynn's tales--that this was not, beyond the Kadarin, the mark of effeminacy which it would have been in the Domains; indeed, he had seen Miguel Leynier smoke --though of course he did not do so publicly. Still, it made him remotely uncomfortable.

"By your leave, then?" the stranger said, raising the branch and lighting his pipe. His face was weatherworn in the red glow, and careworn too; but he looked kind when he smiled. "Well, my young hunter who hunts without snares or bow, I do have leave to travel in these hills, given me in Carcosa; though I am now on my road home and out of your country. As for my name-- well, I have many names, almost as many as the lands I have seen. And here the sound of my name is a word with another meaning. But if you will, you may call me Speranzu, which is the fashion of your language for the name I bore in childhood."

"And where is your country?" Regis asked, and again he smiled, sending a pale ring of smoke away over his head. "It lies far to the North of here, and no one within your borders has heard so much as the name, I guess." He spoke the name, but it was only a form of harsh syllables to Regis.

"No, I have seen no country but my own. Though from the hills near Castle Hastur, the borderland of Corandolis may be seen."

"Corandolis is a fair land of many mountains," said Speranzu. "I travelled there, and I know it well."

"You must be a great traveller," said Regis, a little wistfully.

"There are few lands I have not seen, for all my life I have walked strange roads. Though indeed this is far afield for me. Yet it lay on my road from Corandolis, and I was in haste to return by the swiftest path. I grieved, as I came, to see war rising on your beautiful lands. Had I not been summoned away on an errand which would admit no delay --and of which, forgive me, I may not speak -- but tonight we are far from war, so let us not speak of such things. What brings you to this mountain country? If you must hunt, why not in the fairer hills to the

*In Sevensen chronicles, when sorcery was given into the hands of women, Varzil the Good gave them exclusive rights to the two herbs, cannabis for divination, tobacco for consolation.

South, where no scorpion-ants lie in wait for the unwary?"

"I think, by your leave," said Regis, politely, and without deliberation falling into the stranger's manner of speech, "that we will not speak of my errand either."

"Be it so," said Speranzu courteously. "We are travellers met by chance, no more, and I have no wish to pry. For your land is beautiful, and your people kindly to strangers, though I would venture to say that they see very few."

"No, we have turned our back on the world," Regis said. "Our mountains guard us on all sides, so that we are shut away from the world without."

"Yet this has made your land peaceful. There are many sorrowful shadows outside your hills. I hope you need not see them."

"Peace? When you rode through war?"

"Such small wars as this--" Speranzu began, then broke off.

"Shadow or no shadow, I would pass beyond our borders one day," Regis said. "Have you seen our one harbor city of Temora? It looks on the sunset like one window of a dark castle, open on the wide world outside. Ships come and go there, and the sea carries tales away --"

"I have been in Temora," said Speranzu, "and on the seas beyond Carthon."

Regis drew a long envious sigh. "On the sea! On the sea! One summer I dwelt at Valeron near the shores --I was a child then-- and I spent each moment I could steal, slipping away to the wharves and harbors, listening to the tales of the sea-folk ---"

Speranzu smiled again. "So you love the sea? Most of your people seem to fear it! Take care, my boy, for the love of the sea is a strange passion. Once waked, it never dies....or so my own people are wont to say."

Regis sighed again, this time with resignation. "Is it so? Yet the Hasturs are forbidden to leave this land, unless the need is desperate, so I have little hope to travel...."

"Yet I see in your eyes that you are not one to sit content in a great house nursing dreams. You may wander even as far as I, though I hope through more peaceful days, before you pass beyond this life."

"I wish I might hear your tales of travel," Regis said.

Speranzu's face, grim in repose, looked kindly when he smiled. "Then bear me company through these hills, young hunter. I am summoned away to my own country, but I need not make more speed than you can well accompany me, and my road lies through Nevarsin, where you may find a safer road home."

"I wish I might," said Regis gravely. "But my own errand takes me into the Hellers, sir*, and I have need of desperate haste. I would not even have rested tonight, had I not fallen by mischance among the scorpion-ants. But, Speranzu, perhaps I may requite courtesy with courtesy, yet leave me in your debt. Tomorrow my roads lie where no horse may travel. I feared that I must simply abandon her to any chance comer. Your road lies through Neversin, and you can press on by ordinary pathways; take her, then, and leave her at Nevarsin Monastery in the name of Regis Hastur. If I return in safety, I can send to reclaim her."

*Sir; Merdinian Dom, more courteous than messere.

"Regis Hastur," said Speranzu, raising his head sharply, "Now this is particularly strange; my friend; perhaps we will not part company so soon as I thought!"

In a spasm of sudden panic Regis put his hand to his dagger, attempting to scramble to his feet, but Speranzu did not move.

"Put away your steel, lad," he said. "I am no renegade nor outlaw --nor even so would I take even an enemy at disadvantage when he had had food at my fire and was in trust of me. Sit down and hear my tale! For it strikes me that your desperate haste may bear on this. Late yesterday, and alone, I lay hidden by a watercourse up that way --" he pointed, "while some of those filthy folk watered their ponies, trampling and fouling the clean pools and quarrelling like--" he used a word Regis could not understand; it sounded like 'irrh' "And as they talked, I heard them say that Regis Hastur lay bound and a prisoner in the Forst of Des Trailles. No man can travel in these lands without knowing of the Hasturs, and I wondered if I should ride in haste to Nevarsin and bear them this news. The problem was settled for me when they sighted my horse and gave chase, shooting the poor beast down with their poison-arrows, and I was forced to flee with little but my knife and sword-belt ---though I would gladly have dyed both with their blood," he added grimly, and his eyes were cold again. "You do not seem to have escaped such bondage, yet you have not the look of one who would lie about his name or lineage. Are you one of this luckless child's kin --for indeed, from their talk I gathered that this Regis Hastur was no more than a child!"

"A child in years, but one who has played a man's part," Regis said, and covered his face with his hands. "He is in the forst, then, as I feared...."

"Very well, Speranzu," he said at last, never looking up, "I will tell you my tale, and perhaps you can give the counsel I feared to seek from my own elders. For I can see; you are one to trust! Yes, Speranzu; Regis-Rafael Hastur am I, and their prisoner is but an unlucky boy who by ill fortune wore my cloak into the battle. And his own bravery --"

"Wait," Speranzu said, "You tell your tale from the middle to both ends, Dom Regis; begin at the beginning!"

So Regis told him of the burned Ranger station, of the ambush and Danilo's desperate ride to warn Gwynn's detachment; and while he told this, he could not keep from explaining briefly why Danilo was not himself a member of the Rangers--

"Ranger?"

Regis repeated the casta word, Andruado, border-runner literally, and Speranzu nodded.

But he did not interrupt again, though he smiled briefly at the story of Danilo's bravery, and his nostrils flared in disdain and contempt when Regis touched on the reason why Danilo had incurred the enmity of Dyan Ardais. Regis explained then how -- in token that Danilo was under the direct protection of a Hastur-- he had laid his own cloak, with the silver-fir signs of the Hastur clan, about Danilo's shoulders....and the trailmen had mistaken Danilo for a Hastur, and carried him away as a hostage.

At last Speranzu nodded slowly. "A brave resolve you made, to rescue your friend, Regis-Rafael Hastur. But foolishly, I fear."

"Foolhardy in truth," said Regis, "and not so brave as you say, Dom. For I cannot let Dani be tortured on my behalf. Yet how can I, alone, storm their evil-forst? The most likely thing seems that I will join him in captivity. Yet even that--if it must be, it must. Better that, than that he alone should bear torments meant only for me."

"Spoken well and bravely," said Speranzu. "And do not despair that you are all alone. Indeed, one man with his wits about him may accomplish more than a company of armed men. For, if what I hear is true, force alone could not take their forst. Nor could an army go that way. But alone--one may get in, and if one can get in, two can get out. You spoke of touching your friend's mind--can you still see him?"

"Not unaided; I am young and the Hastur gift wakes but slowly," said Regis. "This I have." He drew the crystal from its place and slipped the chain over his head. Only a fleeting picture came to him of Danilo, his face smudged and dirty, lying in exhausted sleep, twisted strangely to one side. Regis shivered and thrust the crystal away. Then, seeing that Speranzu was watching him curiously, he passed the stone to him.

"See, if you will. It is my sister's witch-stone. There is no harm in it. It will show you, if you wish, the face of the one you long to see. Would you know how it goes with those you love in your far country?"

The man looked at the starstone curiously. "Such things have all perished from my country, or been drowned in the sea," he said. He glanced at it, but only briefly; it seemed for a moment that an almost wistful longing came into his face; he seemed younger, smiling as if in happy memory.

"Fair are the woods of my land," he said, "and fair as the star of the twilight is the face I would see. Yet in such comfort lies danger to one who must wander long. No, Regis, I will not gaze into your seeing-stone. For you, who use it in great need, it is well; but such things used lightly and for mere heart's ease often prove a man's undoing." He passed the crystal to Regis. "Put it from sight, my lad, before my resolve lessens."

Regis bowed gravely and obeyed.

"And now let us sleep," said Speranzu. "Tomorrow I will go with you the first few miles of your way. More than that, I may not leave my own road, and indeed my help would after that be only hindrance. Yet such help as I can give shall freely be yours. I think I can guide you unseen almost to their gates."

Regis spoke confused thanks, but Speranzu shook his head. "The need of all men of honor and valor is one need, my friend, and in serving you I thus serve my own aims. Each step against evil lightens the shadow which lies over our world. Surely you know this much." He rose, covering the last traces of the fire carefully as he spoke.* "Judge not even the lord Ardaïs too cruelly; some men there are who, losing the thing they love most, seek for a time to win it back by baser means. Yet, in men of high blood and honor, save in madness, they come at last to see and to do

*A few paragraphs are omitted here, dealing with counter-discussions of varying customs which would not be relevant to the main progress of the narrative; discussions of adoption procedures, the place of an eldest son in heirship, and the don' amizu.

the better thing. While I tarried in Nevarsin, I met the Lord Ar-
dais, though under other guise and another name, and I know him to
be a proud man and a cruel; but wise, and skilled in many arts,
and valiant; a virtue which excuses many faults, Regis Hastur. I
have known many of such sort....he may at last come to honorable
ends."

"May he indeed," said Regis. "I find it hard to believe."

"Wait then till it happens, with judgment unbiased," said
Speranzu, and stretched out on the ground, wrapping his cloak
about him. "Only years bring patience to await a good end without
trying to hasten it unwisely. Sleep, then, and find wisdom."

Speranzu wakened him before dawn, and after eating a little
of their cold food--there was no time for fire-- they took a
track running to the North, far from the path Regis had chosen.
His swollen arm was still red and painful, but he could wear his
boot and use his hand without much trouble. He rode, at the
older man's insistence; and Speranzu strode along at his side,
keeping pace without apparent effort. The land was empty and the
trail deserted, and Regis, as they went, made some comment on the
man's swift unhurried pace.

Speranzu laughed. "Others have said so before you; one name
I hear in my country might be made, in your tongue --" he hesi-
tated, "Andaruguari*or Dom Zancaduilla**... ai, your language
defeats me! But long travel has made me hard and swift indeed,
like all my folk."

And as he went, he began to while their steepening road with
tales of his travels, in a kaleidoscope of colorful words and
names that bore whispers of enchantments; glimpses of white and
shining cities and towers, broad plains where herds of horses
roamed--"Not unlike the lands of your Leyniers, young Hastur--"
and dark looming mountains, whose very names were like magical
spells of mist and shadow and dim colours; of battles with wolves
and strange creatures more evil than the trailmen, and the endless
struggle between forces ever in opposition, those who sought peace
and those who sought only to destroy it. The words were like
trumpet-calls, and as Regis listened he felt stirring in him the
longing to see such lands and fight such battles as these...

Speranzu smiled as if reading his thoughts. "But the
battle lies everywhere; and not least here, Regis. And to an
untraveller man of my country, what I could say of Al-Merdin would
be enchantment beyond all enchantment, mountains of fire, tall
cities of crystal and blue, lakes of deep cloud, and the strange
birds of your forests."

They had now come to a fork in the road, and he halted,
saying "Now our path leads along a track too steep for your
horse. We will leave her here, and I will guide you a mile or
so further, and set you on your clear road, then I must be off
on my way --although your generous loan will indeed shorten my
journey, more time I dare not spare."

"You have already been too generous," Regis said. And as
he was to learn later, the path he had planned to take, before
encountering Speranzu, would have cost him two days wandering.
For, although it led indeed by the proper direction, it would

*Andaruguari - "Gadabout"Zancaduilla = "Master Long-legs"

have led him to a sheer rock-wall beneath the forst, and he would have had to retrace his steps and go the long way round.

Speranzu hid the horse in a thicket near the road, and they began to climb up a final ridge toward a knife-like crest. The pass was well-hidden, and they went slowly, often spread-eagled and grasping at rocks and handholds. It was a hard climb, and Regis had reason to remember, thankfully, his climbing holidays in the hills, before they reached the top of the ridge. At last, however, they reached a place where they could stand erect and walk and Speranzu led him, swiftly now, along a narrow defile, then halted.

"There lies your path," he said; and far away, just visible among the trees, Regis could see the uppermost ribs of the forst--the evil forest fortress of Des Trailles. "Take this way, keeping ever to the left, and you will reach their citadel --which is not such a fortress as it seems. Remember, they think themselves best guarded by the chasms and crags which surround their forst."

He stood silent for a moment, looking into the long valley, and seemed to hesitate. At last, with a deep sigh, he turned to Regis.

"And now I must leave you," he said. "It goes against my heart to say farewell in the midst of such perils. Yet truly, more peril than aid would a companion bring to you on such a road as you must take now. May you come to a good end," he said, and laying his hands on Regis' shoulders, he looked long into his face.

"I will not wish you peace," he said at last. "for that is a degrading wish, nor valor, for you have it. I will say only; use but half the wisdom of your good courage, Regis, and you will indeed bring this errand to success."

"Many words I could speak to thank you," Regis said, "but what I feel does not lie within the power of one man's tongue to speak. You know what I would say, I think."

"I do," said the man gently. "Indeed, I grieve to say farewell so soon. I would we had met when your need was less desperate, and my errand in your country had still some time unspent. It comes now on my heart that we shall never meet again in this world; from the moment I crossed your borders, I have felt that this land lies in a time apart from my own. Here I am a stranger from a different age of the world, and strange were the ways that brought me here. But my heart will long remember the lake and the towers of Carcosa and not least, the valiant Lord Hastur-lord. Worthy of honor indeed are the Seveners--though I thought not so when first I came into your country."

"Indeed we have scattered and fallen from the past," said Regis, "I could wish you might know the lord Gwynn, or my grandsire, the Lady Cassandra, and not judge us by the least in my house. Yet if I may say so, Lord-- you are yourself like to one of our Great ones, out of the past. And I shall seek ever to have, one day, such wisdom and courage-- and such kindness to awkward young fools and lesser folk."

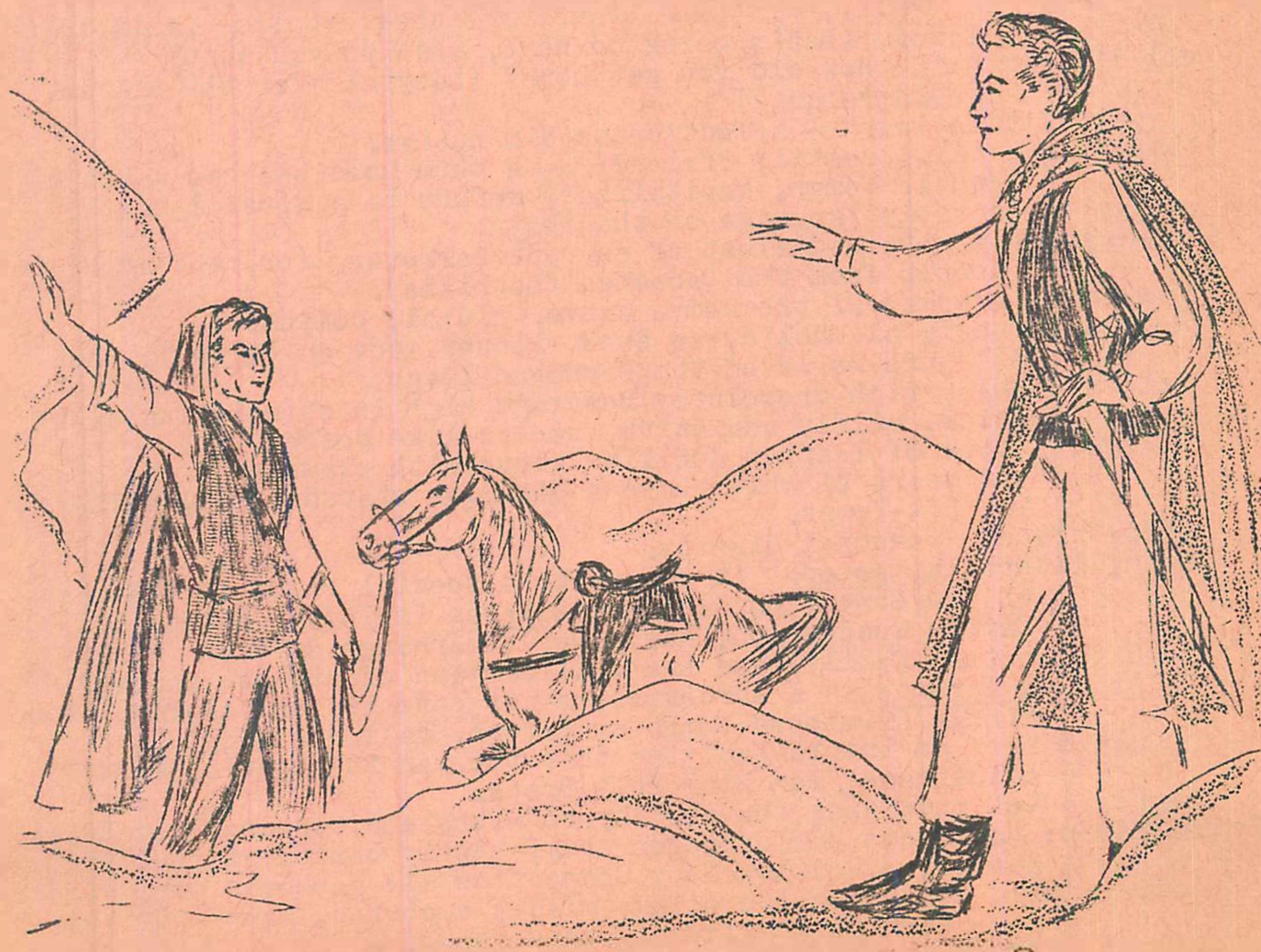
Speranzu smiled. "Say not lesser folk," he answered, "for of one kindred are we come, Master Regis, in the beginnings of the world, you and I; though our ways lie apart."

"Will you not tell me your true name, Lord?" whispered Regis, a curious thrill touching his heart, "Are you indeed one of the Sons of the Lord of Light?"

"Nay, not so high, nor by the name" said the man he had called Speranzu, softly. "Gladly would I entrust my true name to your keeping, son of Hastur, who are kin to Arador and Eldarion and the sons of the Elder Kindreds. Yet have I sworn in hondr, never to speak my name or lineage outside the borders of my own country, and even at journey's end I will not break that pledge. But my heart is glad that I have known you. Think sometimes of me, Regis Hastur." He embraced him and spoke a few words in a curiously liquid, lovely tongue, words that remained like the sound of a song in Regis' memory; "Now have I said farewell to you in the fashion of my own country."

"And I after the fashion of mine," said Regis, returning his embrace. "'Farewell, kord, and whatever God you honor, may he reward you with your heart's desire.'" He watched sorrowfully as his friend turned and quickly, never once looking back, made his way down the steep and rocky path and was lost to sight, seeking again the road that would take him to Nevarsin and from thence by strange roads, never to be seen again in Carcosa or the lands of the Seven Domains.

Then, resolutely, Regis Hastur turned his face toward the valley and the last stage of his own desperate journey. But the stranger's last word of farewell remained, like the lilt of some alien bird-call, in his memory forever; "Namarië."



GLOSSARY OF MERIDINIAN-DARKOVAN TERMS USED in The Door Through Space (Ace, 1961), THE PLANET SAVERS (Amazing, March 1958) and The Sword of Aldones/Planet Savers (Ace, 1962)

- Adelandeyo- formal greeting "Walk with the Gods" of greeting or farewell.
- breda; dear or darling (male, bredu); used in family situations, or to a lover. (literally, "cherished one.")
- chaks; a furred nonhuman race, anthropoid by descent; docile, shy, with a high-level culture of their own now decadent; very common in Darkovan-league worlds as servants.
- chieri; a human or slightly more than human race showing decided similarities to persistent Irish legends of elves, or fairy folk, and having a wholly alien time-sense.
- chi' zei? Literally, what for (familiar) thee? Colloquially translated, what's going on here, what do you want?
- chi z'voyin qui? How did you get here? (babytalk for chi zei sei a voyin lo qui?)
- chiya; "little lass" - affectionate diminutive.
- comyn; an equal. com'ii; "friend" -- a term used only to a social equal. Comyn, capitalized, refers to a special caste.
- casta; the courtly language of the Comyn.
- Cahuenga; a mountain dialect of corrupt Darkovan. (or, the mountain people from the Cahuenga foothills).
- comynara - a woman of the comyn caste. plural, comynari.
- firi; a strongly alcoholic, ~~my~~ sweet liquor made on Vainwal, the pleasure world of the Darkovan league.
- jaco; a popular rich chocolatey beverage high in stimulating alkaloids, mildly addictive, served like coffee.
- kifirgh; a type of leather duelling glove with claws of razor-steel, the scars of which have a peculiar status symbol value in the Dry Towns.
- kihar; "face"- personal dignity.
- laran; literally, power. It refers to a special right in the caste of the Comyn; one who holds laran is in the direct line of family succession, has power to arrange affairs for his entire family, and has full command of his psi powers. A leronis is a sorceress; a vai leronis, or Valeron, is a highly developed Comyn sorceress, called a Keeper.
- sandal-wearer; an insult implying that the man in question is effeminate; men wear only boots.
- shegri; a bet involving the ability to withstand torture; decadent.
- shallavan; dangerous hallucinogen drug, highly toxic, viciously addictive, outlawed by Compact on all Darkovan worlds.
- shallan; mild non-alcoholic drink, mildly euphoric, made from the same herb as shallavan, very popular.
- reis; a Darkovan coin; four to a Terran Standard credit.
- sekal; a coin of almost no value, used to denote worthlessness.
- skean; a small narrow dagger worn in the boots, or cloak-clasp.
- thu fead; literally, the forbidden dwelling. Usually a temple.
- terrana; spaceport jargon for "Terran" on League worlds.
- vai dom; worthy lord. Often used ironically.
- Zandru; Merdinian-Darkovan God possessed of nine hells and an infinity of scorpions and other tortures.
- Z'par servu. "At your service"; a formal-polite phrase.