

WHEN TIME WAS NEW

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ILLUSTRATED BY MORROW

He searched through time for a dream — and didn't know it when it came true!

I

The stegosaurus standing beneath the ginkgo tree didn't surprise Carpenter, but the two kids sitting in the branches did. He had expected to meet up with a stegosaurus sooner or later, but he hadn't expected to meet up with a boy and a girl. What in the name of all that was Mesozoic were they doing in the upper Cretaceous Period!

Maybe, he reflected, leaning forward in the driver's seat of his battery-powered triceratank, they were tied in in some way with the anachronistic fossil he had come back to the Age of Dinosaurs to investigate. Certainly the fact that Miss Sands, his chief assistant who had cased the place-time on the time-scope, had said nothing about a couple of kids, meant nothing. Time-scopes registered only the general lay of the land. They seldom showed anything smaller than a medium-sized mountain.

The stego nudged the trunk of the ginkgo with a hip as high as a hill. The tree gave such a convulsive shudder that the two children nearly fell off the branch they were sitting on and came tumbling down upon the serrated ridge of the monster's back. Their faces were as white as the line of cliffs that showed distantly beyond the scatterings of dogwoods and magnolias and live oaks, and the stands of willows and laurels and fan palms that patterned the prehistoric plain.

Carpenter braced himself in the driver's seat. "Come on, Sam," he said, addressing the triceratank by nickname, "let's go get it!"

Since leaving the entry area several hours ago, he had been moving along in low gear in order not to miss any potential clues that might point the way to the anachronistic fossil's place of origin—a locale which, as was usually the case with unidentifiable anachronisms, the paleontological society that employed him had been able to pinpoint much more accurately in time than in space. Now, he threw Sam into second and focused the three horn-howitzers jutting from the reptivehicle's facial regions on the sacral ganglion of the offending ornithischian. *Plugg! Plugg! Plugg!* went the three stun charges as they struck home, and down went the *a posteriori* section of the stego. The anterior section apprised by the pea-sized brain that something had gone haywire, twisted far enough around for one of the little eyes in the pint-sized head to take in the approaching triceratank, whereupon the stubby forelegs immediately began the herculean task of dragging the ten-ton, humpbacked body out of the theater of operations.

Carpenter grinned. "Take it easy, old mountainsides," he said. "You'll be on all four feet again in less time than it takes to say 'Tyrannosaurus rex!'"

After bringing Sam to a halt a dozen yards from the base of the ginkgo, he looked up at the two terrified children through the one-way transparency of the reptivehicle's skull-nacelle. If anything, their faces were even whiter than they had been before. Small wonder. Sam looked more like a triceratops than most real triceratops did. Raising the nacelle, Carpenter recoiled a little from the sudden contrast between the humid heat of the midsummer's day and Sam's airconditioned interior. He stood up in the driver's compartment and showed himself. "Come on down you two," he called. "Nobody's going to eat you."

Two pairs of the widest and bluest eyes that he had ever seen came to rest upon his face. In neither

pair, however, was there the faintest gleam of understanding. "I said come on down," he repeated. "There's nothing to be afraid of."

The boy turned to the girl, and the two of them began jabbering back and forth in a sing-song tongue that resembled Chinese, but only as the mist resembles the rain. It had no more in common with modern American than its speakers had with their surroundings. Clearly they hadn't understood a word he had said. But, equally as clearly, they must have found reassurance in his plain and honest face, or perhaps in the gentle tone of his voice. After talking the matter over for a few moments, they left their aerie and shinned down the trunk, the boy going first and helping the girl over the rough spots. He was about nine; she was about eleven.

Carpenter stepped out of the compartment, vaulted down from Sam's steel snout and went over to where they were standing. By this time, the stego had recovered the use of its hind legs and was high-tailing—or rather, high-backing—it over the plain. The boy was wearing a loose, apricot-colored blouse which was considerably stained and disheveled from his recent arboreal activities, a pair of apricot-colored slacks which were similarly stained and disheveled and which terminated at his thin calves and a pair of open-toe sandals. The girl's outfit was identical, save that it was azure in hue and somewhat less stained and disheveled. She was about an inch taller than the boy, but no less thin. Both of them had delicate features, and hair the color of buttercups, and both of them wore expressions so solemn as to be almost ludicrous. It was virtually a sure bet that they were brother and sister.

Gazing earnestly up into Carpenter's gray eyes, the girl gave voice a series of sing-song phrases, each of them, judging from the nuances of pronunciation, representative of a different language.

When she finished, Carpenter shook his head. "I just don't dig you, pumpkin," he said. Then, just to make sure, he repeated the remark in Anglo-Saxon, Aeolic Greek, lower Cro-magnonese, upper-Acheulian, middle English, Iroquoian and Hyannis-Portese smatterings of which tongues and dialects he had picked up during his various sojourns in the past. No dice. Every word he spoke was just plain Greek to the girl and the boy.

Suddenly the girl's eyes sparkled with excitement, and, plunging her hand into a plastic reticule that hung from the belt that supported her slacks, she withdrew what appeared to be three pairs of earrings. She handed one pair to Carpenter, one to the boy, and kept one for herself; then she and the boy proceeded to affix the objects to their ear lobes, motioning to Carpenter to do the same. Complying, he discovered that the tiny disks which he had taken for pendants were in reality tiny diaphragms of some kind. Once the minute clamps were tightened into place, they fitted just within the ear openings. The girl regarded his handiwork critically for a moment, then, standing on tiptoe, reached up and adjusted each disk with deft fingers. Satisfied, she stepped back. "Now," she said, in perfect idiomatic English, "we can get through to each other and find out what's what."

Carpenter stared at her. "Well I must say, you caught on to my language awful fast!"

"Oh, we didn't learn it," the boy said. "Those are micro-translators—hearrings. With them on, whatever *we* say sounds to you the way you would say it, and whatever you say sounds to us the way we would say it."

"I forgot I had them with me," said the girl. "They're standard travelers' equipment, but, not being a traveler in the strict sense of the word, I wouldn't have happened to have them. Only I'd just got back from foreign-activities class when the kidnapers grabbed me. Now," she went on, again gazing earnestly up into Carpenter's eyes, "I think it will be best if we take care of the amenities first, don't you? My name is Marcy, this is my brother Skip, and we are from Greater Mars. What is *your* name, and where are *you* from, kind sir?"

It wasn't easy, but Carpenter managed to keep his voice matter-of-fact. It was no more than fair that

he should have. If anything, what he had to say was even more incredible than what he had just heard. "I'm Howard Carpenter, and I'm from Earth, 2156 A. D. That's 79,062,156 years from now." He pointed to the triceratank. "Sam over there is my time machine —among other things. When powered from an outside source, there's practically no limit to his field of operations."

The girl blinked once, and so did the boy. But that was all. "Well," Marcy said presently, "that much is taken care of: you're from Earth Future and we're from Mars Present." She paused, looking at Carpenter curiously. "Is there something you don't understand, Mr. Carpenter?"

Carpenter took a deep breath. He exhaled it. "In point of fact, yes. For one thing, there's the little matter of the difference in gravity between the two planets. Here on Earth you weigh more than twice as much as you weigh on Mars, and I can't quite figure out how you can move around so effortlessly, to say nothing of how you could have shinned up the trunk of that ginkgo tree."

"Oh, I see what you mean. Mr. Carpenter," Marcy said. "And it's a very good point, too. But obviously you're using Mars Future as a criterion, and just as obviously Mars Future is no longer quite the same as Mars Present. I—I guess a lot can happen in 79,062,156 years. Well, anyway, Mr. Carpenter," she continued, "the Mars of Skip's and my day has a gravity that approximates this planet's. Centuries ago, you see, our engineers artificially increased the existent gravity in order that no more of our atmosphere could escape into space, and successive generations have adapted themselves to the stronger pull. Does that clarify matters for you, Mr. Carpenter?"

He had to admit that it did. "Do you kids have a last name?" he asked.

"No, we don't, Mr. Carpenter. At one time it was the custom for Martians to have last names, but when desentimentalization was introduced, the custom was abolished. Before we proceed any further, Mr. Carpenter, I would like to thank you for saving our lives. It — it was very noble of you."

"You're most welcome," Carpenter said, "but I'm afraid if we go on standing here in the open like this, I'm going to have to save them all over again, and my own to boot. So let's the three of us get inside Sam where it's safe. All right?"

Leading the way over to the triceratank, he vaulted up on the snout and reached down for the girl's hand. After pulling her up beside him, he helped her into the driver's compartment. "There's a small doorway behind the driver's seat," he told her. "Crawl through it and make yourself at home in the cabin just beyond. You'll find a table and chairs and a bunk, plus a cupboard filled with good things to eat. All the comforts of home."

Before she could comply, a weird whistling sound came from above the plain. She glanced at the sky, and her face went dead-white. "It's them!" she gasped. "They've found us already!"

Carpenter saw the dark winged-shapes of the pteranodons then.

There were two of them, and they were homing in on the triceratank like a pair of prehistoric dive-bombers. Seizing Skip's hand, he pulled the boy up on the snout, set him in the compartment beside his sister, and told them to get into the cabin fast. Then he jumped into the driver's seat and slammed down the nacelle.

Just in time: the first pteranodon came so close that its right aileron scraped against Sam's frilled head-shield, and the second came so close that its ventral fuselage brushed Sam's back. Their twin tailjets left two double wakes of bluish smoke.

II

Carpenter sat up straight in the driver's seat. Ailerons? Fuselage? Tailjets?
Pteranodons?

He activated Sam's shield-field and extended it to a distance of two feet beyond the armor-plating. then he threw the reptivehicle into gear. The pteranodons were circling high overhead. "Marcy," he called, "come forward a minute, will you?"

Her buttercup-colored hair tickled his cheek as she leaned over his shoulder. "Yes, Mr. Carpenter?"
"When you saw the pteranodons, you said, 'They've found us already!' What did you mean by that?"

"They're not pteranodons, Mr. Carpenter. Whatever pteranodons are. They're kidnapers, piloting military-surplus flyabouts that probably look like pteranodons. They abducted Skip and me from the preparatory school of the Greater Martian Technological Apotheosization Institute and are holding us for ransom. Earth is their hideout. There are three of them altogether — Roul and Fritad and Holmer. One of them is probably back in the spaceship."

Carpenter was silent for several moments. The Mars of 2156 A.D. was a desolate place of rubble, sand and wind inhabited by a few thousand diehard colonists from Earth and a few hundred thousand diehard Martians, the former living beneath atmosphere-domes and the latter, save for the few who had intermarried with the colonists, living in deep caves where oxygen could still be obtained. But twenty-second century excavations by the Extraterrestrial Archaeological Society *had* unearthed unquestionable evidence to the effect that an ultra-technological civilization similar to that of Earth Present had existed on the planet over 70,000,000 years ago. Surely it was no more than reasonable to assume that such a civilization had had space travel.

That being the case, Earth, during her uppermost Mesozoic Era, must have presented an ideal hideout for Martian criminals, kidnapers included. Certainly such a theory threw considerable light on the anachronisms that kept cropping up in Cretaceous strata. There was of course another way to explain Marcy's and Skip's presence in the Age of Dinosaurs: they could be 2156 A.D. Earth children, and they could have come back via time machine the same as he had. Or they could have been abducted by twenty-second century kidnapers for that matter, and have been brought back. But, that being so, why should they lie about it?

"Tell me, Marcy," Carpenter said, "do you believe I came from the future?"

"Oh, of course, Mr. Carpenter. And I'm sure Skip does, too. It's —it's kind of *hard* to believe, but I know that someone as nice as you wouldn't tell a fib — especially such a big one."

"Thank you," Carpenter said. "And I believe you came from Greater Mars, which, I imagine, is the planet's largest and most powerful country. Tell me something about your civilization."

"It's a magnificent civilization, Mr. Carpenter. Every day we progress by leaps and bounds, and now that we've licked the instability factor, we'll progress even faster."

"The instability factor?"

"Human emotion. It held us back for years, but it can't any more. Now, when a boy reaches his thirteenth birthday and a girl reaches her fifteenth, they are desentimentalized. And after that, they are able to make calm cool decisions strictly in keeping with pure logic. That way they can achieve maximum efficiency. At the Institute preparatory school, Skip and I are going through what is known as the 'pre-desentimentalization process.' After four more years we'll begin receiving dosages of the desentimentalization drug. Then—"

SKRRRRREEEEEEEEEEEEK! went one of the pteranodons as it sideswiped the shield-field.

Carpenter watched it as it wobbled wildly for a moment, and before it shot skyward he caught a glimpse of its occupant. All he saw was an expressionless face, but from its forward location he deduced that the man was lying in a prone position between the two twelve-foot wings.

Marcy was trembling. "I—I think they're out to kill us, Mr. Carpenter," she said. "They threatened to if we tried to escape. Now that they've got our voices on the ransom tape, they probably figure they don't need us any more."

He reached back and patted her hand where it lay lightly on his shoulder. "It's all right, pumpkin. With old Sam here protecting you, you haven't got a thing to worry about."

"Is—is that really his name."

"It sure is. Sam Triceratops, Esquire. Sam, this is Marcy. You take good care of her and her brother—do you hear me?" He turned his head and looked into the girl's wide blue eyes. "He says he will. I'll bet you haven't got anybody like him on Mars, have you?"

She shook her head — as standard a Martian gesture, apparently, as it was a terrestrial—and for a moment he thought that a tremulous smile was going to break up on her lips. It didn't, though — not

quite. "Indeed we haven't, Mr. Carpenter."

He squinted up through the nacelle at the circling pteranodons (he still thought of them as pteranodons, even though he knew they were not). "Where's this spaceship of their's, Marcy? Is it far from here?"

She pointed to the left. "Over there. You come to a river, and then a swamp. Skip and I escaped this morning when Fritad, who was guarding the lock, fell asleep. They're a bunch of sleepyheads, always falling asleep when it's their turn to stand guard. Eventually the Greater Martian Space Police will track the ship here; we thought we could hide out until they got here. We crept through the swamp and floated across the river on a log. It — it was awful, with big snakes on legs chasing us, and — and —"

His shoulder informed him that she was trembling again. "Look, I'll tell you what, pumpkin," he said. "You go back to the cabin and fix yourself and Skip something to eat. I don't know what kind of food you're accustomed to, but it can't be too different from what Sam's got in stock. You'll find some square, vacuum-containers in the cupboard—they contain sandwiches. On the refrigerator-shelf just above, you'll find some tall bottles with circlets of little stars — they contain pop. Open some of each, and dig in. Come to think of it, I'm hungry myself, so while you're at it, fix me something, too."

Again, she almost smiled. "All right, Mr. Carpenter. I'll fix you something special."

Alone in the driver's compartment, he surveyed the Cretaceous landscape through the front, lateral and rear viewsopes. A range of young mountains showed far to the left. To the right was the distant line of cliffs. The rear viewscope framed scattered stands of willows, fan palms and dwarf magnolias, beyond which the forested uplands, wherein lay his entry area, began. Far ahead, volcanos smoked with Mesozoic abandon.

79,061,889 years from now, this territory would be part of the state of Montana. 79,062,156 years from now, a group of paleontologists digging somewhere in the vastly changed terrain would unearth the fossil of a modern man who had died 79,062,156 years before his disinterment.

Would the fossil turn out to be his own?

Carpenter grinned, and looked up at the sky to where the two pteranodons still circle. It *could* have been the fossil of a Martian.

He turned the triceratank around and started off in the opposite direction. "Come on, Sam," he said. "Let's see if we can't find a good hiding place where we can lay over for the night. Maybe by morning I'll be able to figure out what to do. Who'd ever have thought we'd wind up playing rescue-team to a couple of kids?"

Sam grunted deep in his gear box and made tracks for the forested uplands.

The trouble with going back in time to investigate anachronisms was that frequently you found yourself the author of the anachronism in question. Take the classic instance of Professor Archibald Quigley.

Whether the story was true or not, no one could say for certain, but, true or not, it pointed up the irony of time travel as nothing else could.

A stanch Coleridge admirer, Professor Quigley had been curious for years — or so the story went — as to the identity of the visitor who had called at the farmhouse in Nether Stowey in the county of Somersetshire, England in the year 1797 and interrupted Coleridge while the poet was writing down a poem which he had just composed in his sleep. The visitor had hung around for an hour, and afterward Coleridge hadn't been able to remember the rest of the poem. As a result, *Kubla Khan* was never finished. Eventually, Professor Quigley's curiosity grew to such proportions that he could no longer endure it, and he applied at the Bureau of Time Travel for permission to return to the place-time in order that he might set his mind at ease. His request was granted, whereupon he handed over half his life-savings without a qualm in exchange for a trip back to the morning in question. Emerging near the farmhouse, he hid in a clump of bushes, watching the front door; then, growing impatient when no one showed up, he went to the door himself, and knocked. Coleridge answered the knock personally, and even though he asked the professor in, the dark look that he gave his visitor was something which the

professor never forgot to the end of his days.

Recalling the story, Carpenter chuckled. It wasn't really anything for him to be chuckling about, though, because what had happened to the professor could very well happen to him. Whether he liked it or not, there was a good chance that the fossil which the North American Paleontological Society had sent him back to the Mesozoic Era to investigate might turn out to be his own.

Nevertheless, he refused to let the possibility bother him. For one thing, the minute he found himself in a jam, all he had to do was to contact his two assistants, Miss Sands and Peter Detritus, and they would come flying-to his aid in Edith the therapod or one of the other reptivehicles which NAPS kept on hand. For another, he had already learned that outside forces were at work in the Cretaceous Period. He wasn't the only candidate for fossil-dom. Anyway, worrying about such matters was a waste of time: what was going to happen had already happened, and that was all there was to it.

Skip crawled out of the cabin and leaned over the back of the driver's seat. "Marcy sent you up a sandwich and a bottle of pop, Mr. Carpenter," he said, handing over both items. And then, "Can I sit beside you, sir?"

"Sure thing," Carpenter said, moving over.

The boy climbed over the backrest and slid down into the seat. No sooner had he done so than another buttercup-colored head appeared. "Would — would it be all right, Mr. Carpenter, if — if —"

"Move over and make room for her in the middle, Skip."

Sam's head was a good five feet wide, hence the driver's compartment was by no means a small one.

But the seat itself was only three feet wide, and accommodating two half-grown kids and a man the size of Carpenter was no small accomplishment, especially in view of the fact that all three of them were eating sandwiches and drinking pop. Carpenter felt like an indulgent parent taking his offspring on an excursion through a zoo.

And such a zoo! They were in the forest now, and around them Cretaceous oaks and laurels stood; there were willows, too, and screw pines and ginkgos galore, and now and then they passed through incongruous stands of fan palms. Through the undergrowth they glimpsed a huge and lumbering creature that looked like a horse in front and a kangaroo in back. Carpenter identified it as an anatosaurus. In a clearing they came upon a struthiomimus and startled the ostrich-like creature half out of its wits. A spike-backed ankylosaurus glowered at them from behind a clump of sedges, but discreetly refrained from questioning Sam's right of way. Glancing into a treetop, Carpenter saw him first archaeopteryx. Rising his eyes still higher, he saw the circling pteranodons.

He had hoped to lose them after entering the forest, and to this end he held Sam on an erratic course. Obviously, however, they were equipped with matter detectors. A more sophisticated subterfuge would be necessary. There was a chance that he might bring them down with a barrage of stun-charges, but it was a slim one and he decided not to try it in any event. The kidnapers undoubtedly deserved to die for what they had done, but he was not their judge. He would kill them if he had to, but he refused to do it as long as he had an ace up his sleeve.

Turning toward the two children, he saw that they had lost interest in their sandwiches and were looking apprehensively upward. Catching their eye, he winked. "I think it's high time we gave them the slip, don't you?"

"But how, Mr. Carpenter?" Skip asked. "They're locked right on us with their detector-beams. We're just lucky ordinary Martians like them can't buy super Martian weapons. They've got melters, which are a form of iridescers: but if they had real iridescers; we'd be goners."

"We can shake them easy, merely by jumping a little ways back in time. Come on, you two — finish your sandwiches and stop worrying."

Their apprehension vanished, and excitement took its place. Let's jump back six days," Marcy said. "They'll never find us then because we won't be here yet."

"Can't do it, pumpkin — it would take too much starch out of Sam. Time-jumping requires a

tremendous amount of power. In order for a part-time time-machine like Sam to jump any great distance, its power has to be supplemented by the power of a regular time station. The station propels the reptivehicle back to a pre-established entry area, and the time-traveler drives out of the area and goes about his business. The only way he can get back to the present is by driving back into the area, contacting the station and tapping its power-supply again, or by sending back a distress signal and having someone come to get him in another reptivehicle. At the most, Sam could make about a four-day round trip under his own power but it would burn him out. Once that happened, even the station couldn't pull him back. I think we'd better settle for an hour."

Ironically, the smaller the temporal distance you had to deal with, the more figuring you had to do. After directing the triceratank via the liaison-ring on his right index finger to continue on its present erratic course. Carpenter got busy with pad and pencil, and presently he began punching out arithmetical brain-twisters on the compact computer that was built into the control panel.

Marcy leaned forward, watching him intently. "If it will expedite matters, Mr. Carpenter," she said, "I can do simple sums, such as those you're writing down, in my head. For instance, 828,464,280 times 4,692,438,921 equals 3,887,518,032,130,241,880."

"It may very well at that, pumpkin, but I think we'd better check and make sure, don't you?" He punched out the first two sets of numerals on the calculator, and depressed the multiplication button. 3,887,518,032,130,241,880 the answer panel said. He nearly dropped the pencil.

"She's a mathematical genius," Skip said. "I'm a mechanical genius myself. That's how come we were kidnaped. Our government values geniuses highly. They'll pay a lot of money to get us back."

"Your government? I thought kidnapers preyed on parents, not governments."

"Oh, but out parents aren't responsible for us any more," Marcy explained. "In fact, they've probably forgotten all about us. After the age of six, children become the property of the state. Modern Martian parents are desentimentalized, you see, and don't in the least mind getting rid of — giving up their children."

Carpenter regarded the two solemn faces for some time. "Yes," he said, "I do see at that."

With Marcy's help, he completed the rest of his calculations; then he fed the final set of figures into Sam's frontal ganglion. "Here we go, you two!" he said, and threw the jumpback switch. There was a brief shimmering effect and an almost imperceptible jar. So smoothly did the transition take place that Sam did not even pause in his lumbering walk.

Carpenter turned his wristwatch back from 4:16 P.M. to 3:16 P.M. "Take a look at the sky now, kids. See any more pteranodons?"

They peered up through the foliage. "Not a one, Mr. Carpenter," Marcy said, her eyes warm with admiration. "Not a single one!"

"Say, you've got our scientists beat forty different ways from Sunday!" Skip said. "They think they're pretty smart, but I'll bet they've never even thought of trying to travel in time . . . How far can you jump into the future Mr. Carpenter—in a regular time-machine, I mean?"

"Given sufficient power, to the end of time — if time does have an end. But traveling beyond one's own present is forbidden by law. The powers-that-be in 2156 consider it bad for a race of people to find out what's going to happen to them before it actually happens, and for once I'm inclined to think that the powers-that-be are right."

He discontinued liaison control, took over manually and set Sam on a course at right angles to their present direction. At length they broke free from the forest onto the plain. In the distance the line of cliffs that he had noticed earlier showed whitely against the blue and hazy sky. "How'd you kids like to camp out for the night?" he asked.

Skip's eyes went round. "Camp out, Mr. Carpenter?"

"Sure. We'll build a fire, cook our food over it, spread our blankets on the ground—regular American Indian style. Maybe we can even find a cave in the cliffs. Think you'd like that?"

Both pairs of eyes were round now. "What's 'American Indian style,' Mr. Carpenter?" Marcy asked.

He told them about the Arapahoes and the Cheyennes and the Crows and the Apaches, and about the buffalo and the great plains and Custer's last stand, and the Conestogas and the frontiersmen (the old ones, not the "new"), and about Geronimo and Sitting Bull and Cochise, and all the while he talked their eyes remained fastened on his face as though it were the sun and they had never before seen day. When he finished telling them about the settling of the west, he told them about the Civil War and Abraham Lincoln and Generals Grant and Lee and the Gettysburg Address and the Battle of Bull Run and the surrender at Appomattox.

He had never talked so much in all his life. He wondered what had come over him, why he felt so carefree and gay all of a sudden and why nothing seemed to matter except the haze-ridden Cretaceous afternoon and the two round-eyed children sitting beside him. But he did not waste much time wondering. He went on to tell them about the signing of the Declaration of Independence and the American Revolution and George Washington and Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin and John Adams, and about what a wonderful dream the founding fathers had had and about how much better it would have turned out if opportunistic men had not used it to further their own selfish end and about how relatively wonderful it had turned out anyway, despite the many crimes that had been committed in its name. By the time he finished, evening was on hand. The white cliffs rose up before them, shouldering the darkening sky.

At the base of the cliffs they found a jim-dandy of an untenanted cave, large enough to accommodate both Sam and themselves and with enough room left over to build a campfire. Carpenter drove the reptivehicle inside and parked it in the rear; then he extended the shield-field till it included the cave, the side of the cliff and a large semi-circular area at the base of the cliff. After checking the "front yard" and finding that it contained no reptiles except several small and harmless lizards, he put the two children to work gathering firewood. Meanwhile, he generated a one-way illusion-field just within the shield field so that the forthcoming campfire would not be visible from without.

There was plenty of firewood available in the form of dead laurel and dogwood branches. Soon a respectable pile of fuel reposed just within the mouth of the cave. By this time Skip, at least, had shed his reserve. "Can I help build the fire, Mr. Carpenter?" he cried jumping up and down. "Can I—can I— can I?"

"Skip!" Marcy said.

"It's all right, pumpkin," Carpenter told her. "You can help, too, if you like."

The walls of the cave turned red, then rosy, as young flames grew into full-fledged ones.

Carpenter opened three packages of frankfurters and three packages of rolls and showed his charges how to spear the frankfurters on the end of pointed sticks and roast them over the fire. Afterward he demonstrated how to place a frankfurter in a roll and smother it with mustard, pickle relish, and chopped onions. It was as though he had flung wide magic casements opening on enchanted lands that the two children had not dreamed existed. The last vestiges of solemnity departed from their faces, and during the next half hour they created and consumed six hot dogs apiece. Skip got so excited that he nearly fell into the fire, and the smile that had been trying all afternoon to break upon Marcy's lips at last came through, teaching the flames to burn bright.

Carpenter had made a pot of cocoa in Sam's kitchenette, and nothing more was needed to round out the cookout except marshmallows. Was it remotely possible, he wondered, that his efficient chief assistant had included such nostalgic delicacies among the various supplies in Sam's tail-compartment? It was doubtful at best, but he took a look anyway. To his delight, he found a whole box of them.

Again, he performed a demonstration, while the two children looked on in open-mouthed awe. When the two marshmallows which he had speared on his stick turned golden brown he thought for a moment that Skip's eyes were going to fall out of his head. As for Marcy, she just stood there and stared as though Carpenter had said, "Let there be light!" and the first day had come into being.

Laughing, he removed the marshmallows and handed one to each of them. "Skip!" Marcy said when

the boy popped his into his mouth and dispatched it with a single gulp; "where are your manners?" She ate her's daintily.

After the marshmallow roast, he went outside and cut enough laurel and dogwood branches for three mattresses. He showed the children how to arrange the branches on the cavern floor and how to cover them with the blankets which he took out of Sam's tail-compartment. Skip needed no further invitation to turn in: exhausted from his enthusiastic activities and becalmed by his full stomach, he collapsed upon his blanket as soon as he had it in place. Carpenter got three more blankets, covered him with one of them and turned to Marcey, "You look tired, too, pumpkin."

"Oh, but I'm not, Mr Carpenter. Not in the least bit. I'm two years older than Skip, you know. He's just a kid."

He folded the remaining two blankets into impromptu pillows and placed them a few feet from the fire. He sat down on one of them; she sat down on the other. All evening, grunts and growls and groans had been coming sporadically from beyond the shield-field; now they were supplanted by an awesome noise that brought to mind a gigantic road-repair machine breaking up old pavement. The cavern floor trembled, and the firelight flickered wildly on the wall. "Sounds like old tyrannosaurus," Carpenter said. "Probably out looking for a midnight snack in the form of a struthiomimus or two."

"Tyrannosaurus,' Mr. Carpenter?"

He described the ferocious theropod for her. She nodded after he had finished, and a shudder shook her. "Yes," she said, "Skip and I saw one. It was a little while after we crossed the river. We — we hid in a clump of bushes till he passed. What terrible creatures you have here on. Earth, Mr. Carpenter!"

"They no longer exist in my day and age," Carpenter said. "We have terrible 'creatures' of another order — 'creatures' that would send old tyrannosaurus high-tailing it for the hills like a flushed rabbit. I shouldn't be complaining, though. Our technological debauchery left us with a cold-war hangover — sure; but it paid off in quite a number of things. Time travel, for one. Interplanetary travel, for another." At this point, the road-repair machine struck a bad stretch of pavement, and, judging from the ungodly series of sound that ensued, blew a rod to boot. The girl moved closer to him. "Take it easy pumpkin. There's nothing to worry about. An army of theropods couldn't break through that shield-field."

"Why do you call me 'pumpkin', Mr. Carpenter? On Mars, a pumpkin is an unpleasant squashy vegetable that grows in swamps and midden-marshes."

He laughed. The sounds from beyond the shield-field diminished, then faded away, as the theropod thundered off in another direction. "On Earth, a pumpkin is quite a nice vegetable—or maybe it's a fruit. Whichever, it's quite respectable. But that's beside the point. 'Pumpkin' is what a man calls a girl when he likes her."

There was a silence. Then, "Do you have a real girl, Mr. Carpenter?"

"Not actually, Marcy. You might say that figuratively speaking I worship one from afar."

"That doesn't sound like very much fun. Who is she?"

"She's my chief assistant at the North American Paleontological Society where I work — Miss Sands. Her first name is 'Elaine', but I never call her by it. She sees to it that I don't forget anything when I retro-travel, and she cases the place-times over a time-scope before I start out. Then she and my other assistant, Peter Detritus, stand by, ready to come to the rescue if I should send back a can of chicken soup. You see, a can of chicken soup is our distress signal. It's about as big an object as a paleontologivehicle can handle in most cases, and the word 'chicken' in our language cannotes fear."

"But why do you worship her from afar, Mr. Carpenter?"

"Well you see," Carpenter said, "Miss Sands isn't just an ordinary run-of-the-mill girl. She's the cool, aloof type — a goddess, if you know what I mean. Although I don't see how you possibly could. Anyway, you simply don't treat goddesses the way you treat mere girls—you keep your distance and worship them from afar and humbly wait for them to bestow favors upon you. I — I worship her so much, in fact, that every time I'm near her I get so flustrated that I can hardly say anything. Maybe after I get to know her better it'll be different. So far, I've known her three months."

He fell silent. Marcy's hearrings twinkled in the firelight as she turned and looked gently up into his face. "What's the matter, Mr. Carpenter — cat got your tongue?"

"I was just thinking," Carpenter said. "Three months is quite a long time at that—long enough for a man to tell whether a girl is ever going to like him or not. And Miss Sands isn't ever going to like me—I can see that now. Why, she doesn't even look at me unless she absolutely has to, and she won't say two words to me if she can possibly avoid it. So you see, even if I did stop worshipping her from afar and got up enough nerve to tell her that I love her, she would probably only be annoyed and tell me to get lost."

Marcy was indignant. "She must be out of her mind, Mr. Carpenter — just plain out of her mind. She should be ashamed of herself!"

"No, Marcy — you've got her all wrong. You can't expect a girl as beautiful as she is to go for a good-for-nothing time-bum like me."

"A good-for-nothing time-bum indeed! You know, Mr. Carpenter, I don't think you understand women very well. Why, I'll bet if you told her you love her, she'd throw herself into your arms!"

"You're a romantic, Marcy. In real life, such things don't happen." He stood up "Well, young lady, I don't know about you, but I'm tired. Shall we call it a day?"

"If you wish to, Mr Carpenter."

She was asleep by the time he pulled her blanket up to her chin. As he stood there looking down at her, she turned on her side, and the firelight caught the buttercup-hue fuzz on the back of her neck, where her hair had been cut too short, and tinted it red-gold. All he could think of were buttercup-clad meadows in spring, and the warm clean sun rising and ushering in the dew-jeweled day . . .

After checking to see if Skip was all right, he went over and stood in the cave mouth and stared out into the darkness. With tyrannosaurus' departure, the lesser Cretaceous creatures had come out of their hiding places and were making their presence known again. He glimpsed the grotesque shapes of several ornithopods; he saw an ankylosaurus standing immobile by a coppice of fan palms; he heard lizards scurrying both inside and outside the shield-field. A moon subtly different from the one he was most accustomed to was climbing into the prehistoric heavens. The difference lay in the number of meteorite craters. There were far fewer of them now than there would be 79,062,156 years in the future.

He realized presently that although he was still looking at the moon he was no longer seeing it. He was seeing the campfire instead, and the girl and the boy enthusiastically roasting marshmallows. Why hadn't he gotten married and had children? he wondered suddenly. Why had he passed up all the pretty girls he had ever known, only to fall hopelessly in love at the age of thirty-two with a beautiful goddess who preferred not to know he was alive? What had given him the notion that the thrill derived from adventure was somehow superior to the contentment derived from loving and being loved? —that getting the bugs out of historical and pre-historical times was more important than getting the bugs out of his own life? That a lonely room in a boarding house was a man's castle and that drinks drunk in dim-lit bars with fun-girls he could no longer remember the next day spelled "freedom?"

What treasure had he expected to find in the past that could equal the treasures he had passed up in the future?

The night had grown chill. Before lying down to sleep he added more wood to the fire. He listened to the flames crackle and watched their pale flickerings on the cavern walls. A lizard regarded him with golden eyes out of prehistoric shadows. In the distance, an ornithopod went Waroompf! Beside him in the Mesozoic night the two children breathed softly in their green-bough beds. Presently he slept.

III

The next morning, Carpenter wasted no time in getting the show on the road

Marcy and Skip were all for remaining in the cave indefinitely, but he explained to them that, were they to stay in one place, the kidnapers would find them that much sooner, and that therefore it would be better if they kept on the move. Thus far, everything he had told them had rung a bell in their language just

as everything they had told him had rung a bell in his, but this time, for some reason, he had a hard time getting through to them. Either that, or they just plain didn't want to leave the cave. Leave it they did however—after ablutions performed in Sam's compact lavatory and a breakfast of bacon and eggs cooked in Sam's kitchenette—when he made it clear to them that he was still the boss.

He hadn't as yet decided on a definite plan of action. While trying to make up his mind, he let the triceratank pick its own course over the plain — a feat for which its hypersensitive terrainometer more than qualified.

Actually, he had only two choices: (1)—continue to play big brother to the two children and elude the kidnapers until they gave up or until the cavalry, in the form of the Greater Martian Space Police, arrived on the scene, or (2)—return to the entry-area and signal Miss Sands and Peter Detritus to bring the triceratank back to the present. The second choice was by far the safer course of action. He would have settled for it without hesitation if it had not been for two things:

(a) Marcy and Skip, while they undoubtedly would be able to adapt to a civilization as similar to their own as twenty-second century terrestrial civilization was, might never feel completely at home in it, and

(b) sooner or later, they would come face to face with the demoralizing information that their own civilization of 79,062,156 years ago, had long since turned to dust and that the technological dreams which they had been taught to regard as gospel had come to nothing. A possible third choice lay in taking them back to Earth Present, keeping them there until such time as the kidnapers gave up and left or until the Space Police showed up, and then returning them to Earth Past; but such a procedure would involve several round trips to the Cretaceous Period. Carpenter knew without having to ask that, owing to the fantastic expense involved, NAPS' budget couldn't support even one such non-paleontological round trip, to say nothing of several.

Pondering the problem, he became aware that someone was tugging on his sleeve. It was Skip, who had come forward and climbed into the driver's seat. "Can I steer him, Mr. Carpenter? Can I?"

Carpenter surveyed the plain through the front, lateral, and rear viewsopes; then he raised Sam's head and took a long look at the sky through the nacelle. A dark speck hovered high above the line of cliffs they had left less than an hour ago. As he watched, it was joined by two others. "Later on, Skip. Right now, I think we've got company."

Skip's eyes had found the specks, too. "The pteranodons again, Mr. Carpenter?"

"I'm afraid so."

The specks grew rapidly larger, resolved into winged shapes with narrow, pointed heads. Marcy had come forward, and her gaze, too, was directed at the sky. This time, she didn't seem to be in the least bit frightened, and neither did Skip. "Are we going to jump back in time again, Mr. Carpenter?" she asked.

"We'll see, pumpkin," he said. The pteranodons were clearly visible now. There was no question but what they were interested in Sam. Whether they would try attacking him again was another matter. In any event, Carpenter decided that, even though the triceratank's shield-field was in operation, his best bet would be to head for the nearest stand of trees. It was a stand of palmettos, and about half a mile distant. He threw Sam into high, and took over the controls again. "Come on, Sam," he said, to keep the kids morale from faltering, "show Marcy and Skip what you can do!"

Sam took off like a twentieth-century locomotive, his flexible steel legs moving rhythmically, his alloy-hoofs pounding the ground in thunderous cadence. Nevertheless, he was no match for the pteranodons, and they overtook him easily. The foremost one swooped down a hundred yards ahead, released what looked like a big metal egg and soared skyward.

The metal egg turned out to be a bomb. The crater that it created was so wide that it took all of Carpenter's skill to guide Sam around it without rolling the reptivehicle over. Instantly he revved up the engine and shifted into second. "They're not going to get us that way, are they, old timer?" he said.

"URRRRRRRR!" Sam grunted.

Carpenter glanced at the sky. All of the pteranodons were directly overhead now. Circling. One, two, three, he counted. Three . . . yesterday there had been only two. "Marcy," he said, suddenly excited, "how many kidnapers did you say there were?"

"Three, Mr. Carpenter. Roul and Fritad and Holmer."

"Then they're all up there. That means the ship is unguarded — unless there's a crew."

"No, Mr. Carpenter — there's no crew. They did the piloting themselves."

He lowered his gaze from the circling pteranodons. "Do you kids think you could get inside?"

"Easy," Skip said. "It's a military-surplus flyabout-carrier with standard locks, and standard locks are simple for someone with a little mechanical ability to disengage. That's how come Marcy and I were able to escape in the first place. You just leave everything to me, Mr. Carpenter."

"Good," Carpenter said. "We'll be there waiting for them when they come back."

With Marcy doing the figuring, retro co-ordinate calculus was a breeze. Sam was ready for jump-back in a matter of seconds.

Carpenter waited till they were in the stand of palmettos, then he threw the switch. Again, there was a shimmering effect and a slight jar, and daylight gave way to pre-dawn darkness. Behind them in a cave at the base of the cliffs, another triceratank stood, and another Carpenter and another Marcy and Skip still slept soundly in their green-bough beds.

"How far did we jump back this time, Mr. Carpenter?" Skip asked. Carpenter turned on Sam's headlights and began guiding him out of the stand of palmettos. "Four hours. That should give us plenty of time to reach the ship and get set before our friends return. We may even reach it before they start out — assuming of course that they haven't been searching for us round the clock."

"But suppose they spot us in this time-phase?" Marcy objected. "Won't we be in the same pickle we just got out of?"

"It's a possibility, pumpkin. But the odds have it overwhelmingly that they didn't spot us. Otherwise they wouldn't have gone on searching for us —right?"

She gazed at him admiringly. "You know something, Mr. Carpenter? You're pretty smart."

Coming from someone who could multiply 4,692,438,921 by 828,464,280 in her head, it was quite a compliment. However, Carpenter managed to take it in his stride. "I hope you kids can find the ship now," he said.

"We're already on the right course," Skip said. "I know, because I've got a perfect sense of direction. It's camouflaged as a big tree."

For the second time that morning, the sun came up. As had been the case yesterday, Sam's size and mien cowed the various Cretaceous creatures they met although whether tyrannosaurus would have been similarly cowed had they come upon him was a moot question at best. In any case, they didn't come upon him. By eight o'clock they were moving over the same terrain that Carpenter had come to not long after leaving the forested uplands the day before. "Look!" Marcy exclaimed presently. "There's the tree we climbed when the humpbacked monster chased us!"

"It sure is," Skip said. "Boy, were we scared!"

Carpenter grinned. "He probably thought you were some species of flora he hadn't tried yet. Good thing for his digestive system that I happened along when I did."

They looked at him blankly for a moment, and at first he thought that the barriers of two different languages and two different thought worlds had been too high for his little joke to surmount. Such, however, did not prove to be the case. First Marcy burst out laughing, and then Skip. "Mr. Carpenter, if you aren't the darndest!" Marcy cried.

They went on. The landscape grew more and more open, with coppices of palmettos and clusters of fan palms constituting most of the major plant-life. Far to the right, smoking volcanos added their discolored breath to the hazy atmosphere. In the distances ahead, mountains showed, their heads lost in the Mesozoic smog. The humidity was so high that large globules of moisture kept condensing on Sam's

nacelle and rolling down like raindrops. Tortoises, lizards, and snakes abounded, and once a real pteranodon glided swiftly by overhead.

At length they came to the river which Marcy had mentioned and which the increasing softness of the ground had been heralding for some time. Looking downstream, Carpenter saw his first brontosaurus.

He pointed it out to the kids, and they stared at it bug-eyed. It was wallowing in the middle of the sluggish stream. Only its small head, its long neck, and the upper part of its back were visible. The neck brought to mind a lofty rubbery tower, but the illusion was marred by the frequency with which the head kept dipping down to the ferns and horse tails that lined the river bank. The poor creature was so enormous that it virtually had to keep eating day and night in order to stay alive.

Carpenter found a shallows and guided Sam across the stream to the opposite bank. The ground was somewhat firmer here, but the firmness was deceiving, for the reptivehicle's terrainometer registered an even higher frequency of bogs. (Lord! Carpenter thought. Suppose the two kids had blundered into one!) Ferns grew in abundance, and there were thick carpets of sassafras and sedges. Palmettos and fan palms were still the rule, but there were occasional ginkgos scattered here and there. One of them was a veritable giant of a tree, towering to a height of over one hundred and fifty feet.

Carpenter stared at it. Cretaceous Period ginkgos generally grew on high ground, not low, but a ginkgo the size of this one had no business growing in the Cretaceous Period at all. Moreover, the huge tree was incongruous in other respects. Its trunk was far too thick, for one thing. For another, the lower part of it up to a height of about twenty feet consisted of three slender sub-trunks, forming a sort of tripod on which the rest of the tree rested.

At this point, Carpenter became aware that his two charges were pointing excitedly at the object of his curiosity "That's *it!*" Skip exclaimed. "That's the *ship!*"

"Well, no wonder it caught my eye," Carpenter said. "They didn't do a very good job of camouflaging it. I can even see one of the flyabout-bays."

Marcy said, "They weren't particularly concerned about how it looks from the ground. It's how it looks from above that counts. Of course, if the Space Police get here in time they'll pick it up sooner or later on their detector-beams, but it will fool them for a while at least."

"You talk as though you don't expect them to get here in time."

"I don't. Oh, they'll get here eventually, Mr. Carpenter, but not for weeks, and maybe even months. It takes a long time for their radar-intelligence department to track a ship, besides which it's a sure bet that they don't even know we've been kidnaped yet. In all previous cases where Institute children have been abducted, the government has paid the ransom first and then notified the Space Police. Of course, even after the ransom has been paid and the children have been returned, the Space Police still launch a search for the kidnapers, and eventually they find their hideout; but naturally the kidnapers are long gone by then.

"I think," Carpenter said, "that it's high time a precedent was established, don't you?"

After parking Sam out of sight in a nearly coppice of palmettos and deactivating the shield-field, he reached in under the driver's seat and pulled out the only hand weapon the triceratank contained—a lightweight but powerful stun-rifle specially designed by NAPS for the protection of time-travel personnel. Slinging it on his shoulder, he threw open the nacelle, stepped out onto Sam's snout and helped the two children down to the ground. The trio approached the ship.

Skip shinned up one of the landing jacks, climbed some distance up the trunk and had the locks open in a matter of seconds. He lowered an aluminum ladder. "Everything's all set, Mr. Carpenter."

Marcy glanced over her shoulder at the palmetto coppice. "Will—will Sam be all right do you think?"

"Of course he will, pumpkin," Carpenter said. "Up with you now."

The ship's air-conditioned interior had a temperature that paralleled Sam's, the lighting was cool, subdued. Beyond the inner lock, a brief corridor led to a spiral steel stairway that gave access to the decks above and to the engine rooms below. Glancing at his watch, which he had set four hours back,

Carpenter saw that the time was 8:24. In a few minutes, the pteranodons would be closing in on the Sam and Carpenter and Marcy and Skip of the "previous" time-phase. Even assuming that the three kidnapers headed straight for the ship afterward, there was still time to spare—time enough, certainly, to send a certain message before laying the trap he had in mind. True, he could send the message after Roul and Fritad and Holmer were safely locked in their cabins, but in the event that something went wrong he might not be able to send it at all, so it was better to send it right now. "Okay, you kids," he said, "close the locks and then lead the way to the communications-room."

They obeyed the first order with alacrity, but hedged on the second. Marcy lingered in the corridor, Skip just behind her.

"Why do you want to go to the communications-room, Mr. Carpenter?" she asked.

"So you kids can radio our position to the Space Police and tell them to get here in a hurry. You do know how, I hope."

Skip looked at Marcy. Marcy looked at Skip. After a moment, both of them shook their heads. "Now see here," Carpenter said, annoyed, "you know perfectly well you know how. Why are you pretending you don't?"

Skip looked at the deck. "We—we don't want to go home. Mr. Carpenter."

Carpenter regarded first one solemn face and then the other. "But you've got to be home! Where *else* can you go?"

Neither of them answered. Neither of them looked at him. "It boils down to this," he proceeded presently. "If we succeed in capturing Roul and Fritad and Holmer, fine and dandy. We'll sit tight, and when the Space Police get here we'll turn them over. But if something goes wrong and we don't capture them, we'll at least have an ace up our sleeve in the form of the message you're going to send. Now I'm familiar with the length of time it takes to get from Mars to Earth in the spaceships of my day, but I don't of course know how long your spaceships take. So maybe you two can give me some idea of the length of time that will elapse between the Space Police's receipt of our message and their arrival here on Earth," he asked.

"With the two planets in their present positions, just over four days," Marcy said. "If you like, Mr. Carpenter, I can figure it out for you right down to a fraction of a—"

"That's close enough, pumpkin. Now, up the stairs with you, and you too, Skip. Time's a-wasting!"

They complied glumly. The communications-room was on the second deck. Some of the equipment was vaguely familiar to Carpenter, but most of it was Greek. A wide, deck-to-ceiling viewport looked out over the Cretaceous plain, and, glancing down through the ersatz foliage, he found that he could see the palmetto coppice in which Sam was hidden. He scanned the sky for signs of the returning pteranodons. The sky was empty. Turning away from the view-port, he noticed that a fourth party had entered the room. He unslung his stun-rifle and managed to get it halfway to his shoulder; then, *ZZZZ ZZTTT!* a metal tube in the fourth party's hand went, and the stun-rifle was no more.

He looked incredulously down at his hand.

IV

The fourth party was a tall, muscular man clad in clothing similar to Marcy's and Skip's, but of a much richer material. The expression on his narrow face contained about as much feeling as a dried fig, and the metal tube in his hand was now directed at the center of Carpenter's forehead. Carpenter didn't need to be told that if he moved so much as one iota he would suffer a fate similar to that suffered by his rifle, but the man vouchsafed the information anyway. "If you move, you melt," he said.

"No Holmer!" Marcy cried. "Don't you dare harm him. He only helped us because he felt sorry for us."

"I thought you said there were only three of them, pumpkin," Carpenter said, not taking his eyes from Holmer's face.

"That *is* all there are, Mr. Carpenter. Honest! The third pteranodon must have been a drone. They

tricked us!"

Holmer should have grinned, but he didn't. There should have been triumph in his tone of voice when he addressed Carpenter, but there wasn't.

"You had to be from the future, friend," he said. "Me and my buddies cased this place some time ago, and we knew you couldn't be from now. That being so, it wasn't hard for us to figure out that when that tank of your's disappeared yesterday you either jumped ahead in time or jumped back in it, and the odds were two to one that you jumped back. So we gambled on it, figured you'd try the same thing again if you were forced into it, and rigged up a little trap for you, which we figured you'd be smart enough to fall for. You were. The only reason I don't melt you right now is because Roul and Fritad aren't back yet. I want them to get a look at you first. I'll melt you then but good. And the brats, too. We don't need them any more."

Carpenter recoiled. The dictates of pure logic had much in common with the dictates of pure vindictiveness. Probably the pteranodons had been trying to "melt" Marcy, Skip, Sam, and himself almost from the beginning, and if it hadn't been for Sam's shield-field, they undoubtedly would have succeeded. Oh well, Carpenter thought, logic was a two-edged blade, and two could wield it as well as one. "How soon will your buddies be back, Holmer?"

The Martian regarded him blankly. Carpenter tumbled to the fact that the man wasn't wearing hearrings then.

He said to Marcy: "Tell me, pumpkin, if this ship were to fall on its side, would either the change in its position or its impact with the ground be liable to set off an explosion? Answer me with a 'yes' or a 'no' so that our friend here won't know what we're talking about."

"No, Mr. Carpenter."

"And is the structure of the ship sturdy enough to prevent the bulkheads from caving in on us?"

"Yes, Mr. Carpenter."

"How about the equipment in this room. Is it bolted down securely enough to prevent its being torn loose?"

"Yes, Mr. Carpenter."

"Good. Now, as surreptitiously as you can, you and Skip start sidling over to that steel supporting pillar in the center of the deck. When the ship starts to topple, you hold on for dear life."

"What's he saying to you, kid?" Holmer demanded.

Marcy stuck her tongue out at him. "Wouldn't you like to know!" she retorted.

Obviously, the ability to make calm, cool decisions strictly in keeping with pure logic did not demand a concomitant ability to think fast, for it was not until that moment, that the desentimentalized Martian realized that he alone of the four persons present was not wearing hearrings.

Reaching into the small pouch that hung at his side, he withdrew a pair. Then, keeping his melter directed at Carpenter's forehead with one hand, he began attaching them to his ears with the other. Meanwhile, Carpenter ran his right thumb over the tiny, graduated nodules of the liaison-ring on his right index finger, and when he found the ones he wanted, he pressed them in their proper sequence. On the plain below, Sam stuck his snout out of the palmetto coppice.

Carpenter concentrated, his thoughts riding the tele-circuit that now connected his mind with Sam's sacral ganglion: *Retract your horn-howitzers and raise your nacelle- shield, Sam.* Sam did so. *Now, back off, get a good run, charge the landing-jack on your right, and knock it out. Then get the hell out of the way!*

Sam came out of the coppice, turned and trotted a hundred yards out on the plain. There he turned again, aligning himself for the forthcoming encounter. He started out slowly, geared himself into second. The sound of his hoofbeats climbed into a thunderous crescendo and penetrated the bulkhead of the communications-room, and Holmer, who had finally gotten his hearrings into place, gave a start and stepped over to the viewport.

By this time Sam was streaking toward the ship like an ornithischian battering-ram. No one with an IQ in excess of 75 could have failed to foresee what was shortly going to happen.

Holmer had an IQ considerably in excess of 75, but sometimes having a few brains is just as dangerous as having a little knowledge. It was so now. Forgetting Carpenter completely, the Martian threw a small lever to the right of the viewscope, causing the thick, unbreakable glass to retract into the bulkhead; then he leaned out through the resultant aperture and directed his melter toward the ground. Simultaneously, Sam made contact with the landing-jack, and Holmer went flying through the aperture like a jet-propelled Darius Green.

The two kids were already clinging to the supporting pillar. With a leap, Carpenter joined them. "Hang on, you two!" he shouted, and proceeded to practice what he preached. The downward journey was slow at first, but it rapidly picked up momentum. Somebody should have yelled. "TIMBER!" Nobody did, but that didn't dissuade the ginkgo from fulfilling its destiny. Lizards scampered, tortoises scabbled and sauropods gaped for miles around. KRRRRRRUUUUUMMMP! The impact tore both Carpenter and the children from the pillar, but he managed to grab them and cushion their fall with his body. His back struck the bulkhead, and his breath blasted from his lungs. Somebody turned out the lights.

At length, somebody turned them back on again. He saw Marcy's face hovering like a small pale moon above his own. Her eyes were like autumn asters after the first frost.

She has loosened his collar and she was patting his cheeks and she was crying. He grinned up at her, got gingerly to his feet and looked around. The communications-room hadn't changed any, but it looked different. That was because he was standing on the bulkhead instead of on the deck. It was also because he was still dazed.

Marcy, tears running down her cheeks, wailed, "I was afraid you were dead, Mr Carpenter!"

He rumbled her buttercup-colored hair. "Fooled you, didn't I?"

At this point, Skip entered the room through the now horizontal doorway, a small container clutched in his hand. His face lit up when he saw Carpenter. "I went after some recuperative gas, but I guess you don't need it after all. Gee, I'm glad you're all right, Mr. Carpenter!"

"I take it you kids are, too," Carpenter said.

He was relieved when both of them said they were. Still somewhat dazed, he clambered up the concave bulkhead to the viewport and looked out. Sam was nowhere to be seen. Remembering that he was still in telecircuit contact, he ordered the triceratank to home in, after which he climbed through the viewport, lowered himself to the ground and began looking for Holmer's body. When he failed to find it he thought at first that the man had survived the fall and had made off into the surrounding scenery.

Then he came to one of the bogs with which the area was infested, and saw its roiled surface. He shuddered. Well, anyway, he knew who the fossil was.

Or rather, who the fossil had been.

Sam came trotting up, circumventing the bog in response to the tertainometer's stimuli. Carpenter patted the reptivehicle's head, which was not in the least damaged from its recent collision with the landing jack; then he broke off liaison and returned to the ship. Marcy and Skip were standing in the viewport, staring at the sky. Turning, Carpenter stared at the sky, too. There were three specks in it.

His mind cleared completely then, and he lifted the two children down to the ground. "Run for Sam!" he said. "Hurry!"

He set out after them. They easily outmatched his longer but far-slower strides, gaining the reptivehicle and clambering into the driver's compartment before he had covered half the distance. The pteranodons were close now, and he could see their shadows rushing toward him across the ground. Unfortunately, however, he failed to see the small tortoise that was trying frantically to get out of his way. He tripped over it and went sprawling on his face.

Glancing up, he saw that Marcy and Skip had closed Sam's nacelle. A moment later, to his

consternation the triceratank disappeared.

Suddenly another shadow crept across the land, a shadow so vast that it swallowed those cast by the pteranodons.

Turning on his side, Carpenter saw the ship. It was settling down on the plain like an extraterrestrial Empire State Building, and, as he watched, three rainbow-beams of light shot forth from its upper section and the three pteranodons went PFFFFFFTTT! PFFFFFFTTT! PFFFFFFTTT! and were no more.

The Empire State Building came solidly to rest, opened its street doors and extended a gangplank the width of a Fifth Avenue sidewalk. Through the doors and, down the sidewalk came the cavalry. Looking in the other direction, Carpenter saw that Sam had reappeared in exactly the same spot from which he had vanished. His nacelle had reopened, and Marcy and Skip were climbing out of the driver's compartment in the midst of a cloud of bluish smoke. Carpenter understood what had happened then, and he kissed the twenty-second century good-by.

The two kids came running up just as the commander of the cavalry stepped to the forefront of his troops. Actually, the troops were six tall Martians wearing deep-purple togas and stern expressions and carrying melters, while the commander was an even taller Martian wearing an even purpler toga and an even sterner expression and carrying what looked like a fairy godmother's wand. The dirty look which he accorded Carpenter was duplicated a moment later by the dirty look which he accorded the two children.

They were helping Carpenter to his feet. Not that he needed help in a physical sense. It was just that he was so overwhelmed by the rapid turn of events that he couldn't quite get his bearings back. Marcy was sobbing.

"We didn't want to burn Sam out, Mr. Carpenter," she said, all in a rush, "but jumping back four days, two hours, sixteen minutes and three and three-quarter seconds and sneaking on board the kidnaper's ship and sending a message to space Police Headquarters was the only way we could get them here in time to save your life. I told them what a pickle you'd be in, and to have their iridescers ready. Then, just as we were about to come back to the present Sam's time-travel unit broke down and Skip had to fix it, and then Sam went and burned out anyway, and oh, Mr. Carpenter, I'm so sorry! Now, you'll never be able to go back to the year 79,062,156 again and see Miss Sands, and —" Carpenter patted her on the shoulder. "It's all right, pumpkin. It's all right. You did the right thing, and I'm proud of you for it." He shook his head in admiration. "You sure computed it to a T, didn't you?"

A smile broke through the rain of tears, and the rain went away. "I'm — I'm pretty good at computations, Mr. Carpenter."

"But *I* threw the switch," Skip said. "And *I* fixed Sam's time-travel unit when it broke down."

Carpenter grinned. "I know you did, Skip. I think the two of you are just wonderful." He faced the tall Martian with the fairy-godmother wand, noted that the man already had a pair of harrings attached to his ears. "I guess I'm almost as beholden to you as I am to Marcy and Skip," Carpenter said, "and I'm duly grateful. And now I'm afraid I'm going to impose on your good will still further and ask you to take me to Mars with you. My reptivehicle's burned out and can't possibly be repaired by anyone except a group of technological specialists working in an ultra-modern machine shop with all the trimmings, which means I have no way either of contacting the era from which I came, or of getting back to it."

"My name is Hautor," the tall Martian said. He turned to Marcy. "Recount to me with the maximum degree of conciseness of which you are capable, the events beginning with your arrival on this planet and leading up to the present moment."

Marcy did so. "So you see, sir," she concluded, "in helping Skip and me, Mr. Carpenter has got himself in quite a pickle. He can't return to his own era, and he can't survive in this one. We simply have to take him, back to Mars with us, and that's all there is to it!"

Hautor made no comment. Almost casually, he raised his fairy godmother wand, pointed it toward the kidnaper's prostrate ship and did something to the handle that caused the wand proper to glow in

brilliant greens and blues. Presently a rainbow beam of light flashed forth from the Empire State Building, struck the kidnapers' ship and relegated it to the same fate as that suffered by the three pteranodons. Turning, Hautor faced two of his men.

"Put the children on board the police cruiser and see to it that they are suitably cared for." Finally, he turned back to Carpenter. "The government of Greater Mars is grateful for the services you have rendered it in the preserving of the lives of two of its most valuable citizens-to-be. I thank you in its behalf. And now, Mr. Carpenter, good-by."

Hautor started to turn away. Instantly Marcy and Skip ran to his side. "You can't leave him here!" Marcy cried. "He'll die!"

Hautor signaled to the two Martians whom he had spoken to a moment ago. They leaped forward, seized the two children and began dragging them toward the Empire State Building. "Look," Carpenter said, somewhat staggered by the new turn of events, but still on his feet, "I'm not begging for my life, but I can do you people some good if you'll make room for me in your society. I can give you time travel, for one thing. For another —"

"Mr. Carpenter, if we had wanted time travel, we would have devised it long ago. Time travel is the pursuit of fools. The pattern of the past is set, and cannot be changed; and in it that has not already been done, why try? And as for the future, who but an imbecile would want to know what tomorrow will bring?"

"All right," Carpenter said. "I won't invent time travel then, I keep my mouth shut and settle down and be good solid citizen."

"You wouldn't and you know it, Mr. Carpenter—unless we desentimentalized you. And I can tell from the expression on your face that you would never voluntarily submit to such a solution. You would rather remain here in your prehistoric past and die."

"Now that you mentioned it, I would at that," Carpenter said. "Compared to you people, *Tyrannosaurus rex* as a Salvation Army worker, and all the other dinosaurs, saurischians and ornithischians alike, have hearts of purest gold. But it seems to me that there is one simple thing which you could do in my behalf without severely affecting your desentimentalized equilibrium. You could give me a weapon to replace the one that Holmer disintegrated."

Hautor shook his head. "That is one thing I cannot do, Mr. Carpenter, because a weapon could conceivably become a fossil, and thereby make me responsible for an anachronism. I am already potentially responsible for one in the form of Holmer's irretrievable body, and I refuse to risk being responsible for any more. Why do you think I iridesced the kidnapers' ship?"

"Mr. Carpenter," Skip called from the gangplank, up which the two Martians were dragging him and his sister, "maybe Sam's not completely burned out. Maybe you can rev up enough juice to at least send back can of chicken soup."

"I'm afraid no, Skip," Carpenter called back. "But it's all right, you kids," he went on. "Don't you worry about me — I'll get along okay. Animals have always liked me, so why shouldn't reptiles! They're animals, too."

"Oh, Mr. Carpenter!" Marcy cried. "I'm so sorry this happened! Why didn't you take us back to 79,062,156 with you. We wanted you to all along, but we afraid to say so."

"I wish I had, pumpkin — I wish I had." Suddenly, he couldn't see very well, and he turned away. When he looked back, the two Martians were dragging Marcy and Skip through the locks. He waved. "Good-by, you kids," he called. "I'll never forget you."

Marcy made a last desperate effort to free herself. She almost, but not quite, succeeded. The autumn asters of her eyes were twinkling with tears like morning dew. "I love you, Mr. Carpenter!" she cried, just before she and Skip were dragged out of sight. "I'll love you for the rest of my life!"

With two deft movements, Hautor flicked the hearrings from Carpenter's ears; then he and the rest of the cavalry climbed the gangplank and entered the ship. Some cavalry! Carpenter thought. He watched the street doors close, saw the Empire State Building quiver.

Presently it lifted and hovered majestically, stabbed into the sky just above the ground on a wash of blinding light. It rose, effortlessly, and became a star. It wasn't a falling star, but he wished upon it

anyway. "I wish both of you happiness," he said "and I wish that they never take your hearts away, because your hearts are one of the nicest things about you."

The star faded then, and winked out. He stood all alone on the vast plain.

The ground trembled. Turning, he caught a great dark movement to the right of a trio of fan palms. A moment later, he made out the huge head and the massive, upright body. He recoiled as two rows of saber-like teeth glittered in the sun.

Tyrannosaurus!

V

A burned-out reptivehicle was better than no reptivehicle at all. Carpenter made tracks for Sam.

In the driver's compartment, with the nacelle tightly closed, he watched the theropod's approach. There was no question but what it had seen him, and no question but what it was headed straight for Sam. Marcy and Skip had retracted the nacelle-shield, which left Carpenter pretty much of a sitting duck; however, he didn't retreat to Sam's cabin just yet, for they had also re-projected the horn-howitzers.

Although the howitzers were no longer maneuverable, they were still operable. If the tyrannosaurus came within their fixed range it could be put temporarily out of action with a volley of stun-charges. Right now, it was approaching Sam at right angles to the direction in which the howitzers were pointing, but there was a chance that it might pass in front of them before closing in. Carpenter considered it a chance worth taking.

He crouched low in the driver's seat, his right hand within easy reaching distance of the trio of triggers. With the air-conditioning unit no longer functioning, the interior of the triceratank was hot and stuffy. To add to his discomfort, the air was permeated with the acrid smell of burnt wiring. He shut his mind to both annoyances, and concentrated on the task at hand.

The theropod was so close now that he could see its atrophied forelegs. They dangled down from the neck-width shoulders like the wizened legs of a creature one tenth its size. Over them, a full twenty-five feet above the ground and attached to a neck the girth of a tree trunk, loomed the huge head; below them, the grotesque torso swelled out and down to the hind legs. The mighty tail dragged over the landscape, adding the cracking and splitting noises of crushed shrubbery to the thunder thrown forth each time the enormous bird-claw feet came into contact with the terrain. Carpenter should have been terrified. He was at a loss to understand why he wasn't.

Several yards from the triceratank, the tyrannosaurus came to a halt and its partially opened jaws began opening wider.

The foot-and-a-half-high teeth with which they were equipped could grind through Sam's nacelle as though it was made of tissue paper, and from all indications, that was just what they were going to do. Carpenter prepared himself for a hasty retreat into Sam's cabin; then just when things looked blackest, the theropod, as though dissatisfied with its present angle of attack, moved around in front of the reptivehicle, providing him with the opportunity he had been hoping for. His fingers leaped to the first of the trio of triggers, touched, but did not squeeze it. Why wasn't he afraid?

He looked up through the nacelle at the horrendous head. The huge jaws had continued to part, and now the whole top of the skull was raising into a vertical position. As he stared, a pretty head of quite another nature appeared over the lower row of teeth and two bright blue eyes peered down at him.

"Miss Sands!" he gasped, and nearly fell out of the drivers seat.

Recovering himself, he threw open the nacelle, stepped out on Sam's snout and gave the tyrannosaurus an affectionate pat on the stomach. "Edith," he said. "Edith, you doll, you!"

"Are you all right, Mr Carpenter?" Miss Sands called down.

"Just fine," Carpenter said. "Am I glad to see *you*, Miss Sands!"

Another head appeared beside Miss Sands. The familiar chestnut haired head of Peter Detritus. "Are

you glad to see me too, Mr. Carpenter?"

"Well, I guess, Pete old buddy!"

Miss Sands lowered. Edith's lips ladder, and the two of them climbed down. Peter Detritus was carrying a tow cable, and presently he proceed to affix it to Sam's snout and Edith tail respectively. Carpenter lent a hand. "How'd you know I was in a pickle?" he asked. "I didn't send back any soup."

"We had a hunch," Peter Detritus said. He turned to Miss Sands. "There, she's all set, Sandy."

"Well let's be on our way then," Miss Sands said. She looked at Carpenter, then looked quickly away, "If, of course, your mission is completed, Mr. Carpenter."

Now that the excitement was over he was finding her presence just as disconcerting as he usually found it. "It's completed all right, Miss Sands," he said to the left pocket of her field blouse. "You'll never believe how it turned out, either."

"Oh, I wouldn't say that. Sometimes the most unbelievable things of all turn out to be the most believable one. I'll fix you something to eat, Mr. Carpenter."

She climbed agilely up the ladder. Carpenter followed, and Peter Detritus brought up the rear. "I'll take the controls, Mr. Carpenter," the latter said, pulling in the ladder. "You look bushed."

"I am," Carpenter said.

In Edith's cabin, he collapsed on the bunk. Miss Sands went over to the kitchenette and put water on to boil for coffee and took a boiled ham down from the refrigerator-shelf. Up in the driver's compartment, Peter Detritus closed the nacelle and threw Edith into gear.

He was a good driver, Peter Detritus was, and he would rather drive than eat. Not only that, he could take a paleontologivehicle apart and put it back together again blindfolded. Funny, why he and Miss Sands had never gone for each other. They were both so attractive, you'd have thought they would have fallen in love long ago. Carpenter was glad that they hadn't of course — not that it was ever going to do him any good.

He wondered why they had made no mention of the Space Police ship. Surely, they must have seen it when it blasted off . . .

Edith was moving over the plain in the direction of the uplands now, and through the cabin view-port he could see Sam shambling along behind on motion-provoked legs. In the kitchenette, Miss Sands was slicing ham. Carpenter concentrated on her, trying to drive away the sadness he felt over his parting with Marcy and Skip. His eyes touched her slender shapely legs, her slender waist, rose to her cupreous head, lingering for a moment on the silken fuzz that grew charmingly on the back of her neck where her hair had been cut too short. Strange, how people's hair got darker when they grew older—

Carpenter lay motionlessly on the bunk. "Miss Sands," he said suddenly, "how much is 499,999,991 times 8,003,432,111?"

"400,171,598,369,111,001," Miss Sands answered.

Abruptly she gave a start. Then she went on slicing ham.

Slowly, Carpenter sat up. He lowered his feet to the floor. A tightness took over in his chest and he could barely breathe.

Take a pair of lonely kids. One of them a mathematical genius, the other a mechanical genius. A pair of lonely kids who have never known what it is like to be loved in all their lonely lives. Now, transport them to another planet and put them in a reptivehicle that for all its practicability is still a huge and delightful toy, and treat them to an impromptu Cretaceous camping trip, and show them the first affection they have ever known. Finally, take these things away from them and simultaneously provide them with a supreme motivation for getting them back — the need to have a human life — and include in that motivation the inbuilt possibility that by saving that life they can — in another but no less real sense save their own.

But 79,062,156 years! 49,000,000 miles! It *couldn't* be!

Why couldn't it?"

They could have built the machine in secret at the preparatory school, all the while pretending to go

along with the "pre-desentimentalization process"; then, just before they were scheduled to begin receiving doses of the desentimentalization drug, they could have entered the machine and time-jumped far into the future.

Granted, such a time-jump would have required a vast amount of power. And granted, the Martian landscape they would have emerged on would have given them the shock of their lives. But they were resourceful kids, easily resourceful enough to have tapped the nearest major power source, and certainly resourceful enough to have endured the climate and the atmosphere of Mars Present until they located one of the Martian oxygen caves. The Martians would have taken care of them and have taught them all they needed to know to pass themselves off as terrestrials in one of the domed colonies. As for the colonists, they wouldn't have asked too many questions because they would have been overjoyed to add two newcomers to their underpopulated community. After that, it would merely have been a matter of the two children's biding their time till they grew old enough to work and earn their passage to Earth. Once on earth, it would merely have been a matter of acquiring the necessary education to equip them for paleontological work.

Sure, it would have taken them years to accomplish such a mission, but they would have anticipated that, and have time-jumped to a point in time far enough in advance of the year 2156 A.D. to have enabled them to do what they had to do. They had played it pretty close at that, though. Miss Sands had only been with NAPS for three months, and as for Peter Detritus, he had been hired a month later. On Miss Sands' recommendation, of course.

They had simply come the long way around—that was all. Traveled 49,000,000 miles to Mars Past, 79,062,100 years to Mars Present, 49,000,000 miles to Earth Present, and 79,062,156 years to Earth Past.

Carpenter sat there, stunned.

Had they known they were going to turn out to be Miss Sands and Peter Detritus? he wondered. They must have— or, if not, they must have gambled on it and taken the names when they joined the colonist. All of which created something of a paradox. But it was a minor one at best, not worth worrying about. In any event, the names certainly fitted them.

But why had they passed themselves off as strangers?

Well, they had been strangers, hadn't they? And if they had told him the truth, would he have believed them?

Of course he wouldn't have.

None of which explained why Miss Sands disliked him.

But *did* she dislike him? Maybe her reaction to him resulted from the same cause that was responsible for his reaction to her. Maybe *she* worshipped *him* as much as he worshipped her, and became as tongue-tied in his presence as he did in hers. Maybe the reason she had never looked at him any longer than was absolutely necessary was that she had been afraid of betraying the way she felt before he learned the truth about her.

He found it suddenly hard to see.

The smooth purring of Edith's battery-powered motor filled the cabin. For quite sometime now there had been no other sound.

"What's the matter?" Miss Sands said suddenly out of clear blue sky. "Cat got your tongue, Mr. Carpenter?"

He stood up then. She had turned, and was facing him. Her eyes were misted, and she was looking at him gently, adoringly . . . the way she had looked at him last night, in one sense, and 79,062,156 years ago in another, by a Mesozoic campfire in an upper Cretaceous cave. *Why I'll bet if you told her you loved her, she'd throw herself into your arms!*

"I love you, pumpkin," Carpenter said.

And Miss Sands did.

END