

A Wind Is Rising

Robert Sheckley

Outside, a wind was rising. But within the station, the two men had other things on their minds. Clayton turned the handle of the water faucet again and waited. Nothing happened.

“Try hitting it,” said Nerishev.

Clayton pounded the faucet with his fist. Two drops of water came out.

A third drop trembled on the spigot's lip, swayed and fell. That was all.

“That does it,” Clayton said bitterly. “That damned water pipe is blocked again. How much water we got in storage?”

“Four gallons-assuming the tank hasn't sprung another leak,” said Nerishev. He stared at the faucet, tapping it with long, nervous fingers.

He was a big, pale man with a sparse beard, fragile-looking in spite of his size. He didn't look like the type to operate an observation station on a remote and alien planet. But the Advance Exploration Corps had discovered, to its regret, that there was no type to operate a station.

Nerishev was a competent biologist and botanist. Although chronically nervous, he had surprising reserves of calm. He was the sort of man who needs an occasion to rise to. This, if anything, made him suitable to pioneer a planet like Carella I.

“I suppose somebody should go out and unblock the water pipe,” said Nerishev, not looking at Clayton.

“I suppose so,” Clayton said, pounding the faucet again. “But it's going to be murder out there. Listen to it!”

Clayton was a short man, bull-necked, red-faced, powerfully constructed. This was his third tour of duty as a planetary observer.

He had tried other jobs in the Advance Exploration Corps, but none suited him. PEP-Primary Extraterrestrial Penetration-faced him with too many unpleasant surprises. It was work for daredevils and madmen.

But Base Operations was much too tame and restricting.

Helike the work of a planetary observer, though. His job was to sit tight on a planet newly opened by the PEP boys and checked out by a drone camera crew. All he had to do on this planet was stoically endure discomfort and skillfully keep himself alive. After a year of this, the relief ship would remove him and note his report. On the basis of the report, further action would or would not be taken.

Before each tour of duty, Clayton dutifully promised his wife that this would be the last. After this tour, he was going to stay on Earth and work on the little farm he owned. He promised...

But at the end of each rest leave, Clayton journeyed out again, to do the thing for which he was best suited: staying alive through skill and endurance.

But this time, he had had it. He and Nerishev had been eight months on Carella. The relief ship was due in another four months. If he came through alive, he was going to quit for good.

“Just listen to that wind,” Nerishev said.

Muffled, distant, it sighed and murmured around the steel hull of the station like a zephyr, a summer breeze.

That was how it sounded to them inside the station, separated from the wind by three inches of steel plus a soundproofing layer.

“It's rising,” Clayton said. He walked over to the windspeed indicator.

According to the dial, the gentle-sounding wind was blowing at a steady 82 miles an hour.

A light breeze on Carella.

“Man, oh man!” Clayton said. “I don't want to go out there. Nothing's worth going out there.”

“It's your turn,” Nerishev pointed out.

“I know. Let me complain a little first, will you? Comeon, let's get a forecast from Smanik.”

They walked the length of the station, their heels echoing on the steel floor, past compartments filled with food, air supplies, instruments, extra equipment. At the far end of the station was the heavy metal door of the receiving shed. The men slipped on air masks and adjusted the flow.

“Ready?” Clayton asked.

“Ready.”

They braced themselves, gripping handholds beside the door. Clayton touched the stud. The door slid away and a gust of wind shrieked in.

The men lowered their heads and butted into the wind, entering the receiving shed.

The shed was an extension of the station, some thirty feet long by fifteen feet wide. It was not sealed, like the rest of the structure. The walls were built of open-work steel, with baffles set in. The wind could pass through this arrangement, but slowed down, controlled. A gauge told them it was blowing 34 miles an hour within the shed.

It was a damned nuisance, Clayton thought, having to confer with the natives of Carella in a 34-mile gale. But there was no other way. The Carellans, raised on a planet where the wind never blew less than 70 miles an hour, couldn't stand the “dead air” within the station. Even with the oxygen content cut down to the Carellan norm, the natives couldn't make the adjustment. Within the station, they grew dizzy and

apprehensive. Soon they began strangling, like a man in a vacuum.

Thirty-four miles an hour of wind was a fair compromise point for human and Carellan to meet.

Clayton and Nerishev walked down the shed. In one corner lay what looked like a tangle of dried-out octopi. The tangle stirred and waved two tentacles ceremoniously.

“Good day,” said Smanik.

“Good day,” Clayton said. “What do you think of the weather?”

“Excellent,” said Smanik.

Nerishev tugged at Clayton's sleeve. “What did he say?” he asked, and nodded thoughtfully when Clayton translated it for him. Nerishev lacked Clayton's gift for language. Even after eight months, the Carellan tongue was still an undecipherable series of clicks and whistles to him.

Several more Carellans came up to join the conversation. They all looked like spiders or octopi, with their small centralized bodies and long, flexible tentacles. This was the optimum survival shape on Carella, and Clayton frequently envied it. He was forced to rely absolutely on the shelter of the station; but the Carellans lived directly in their environment.

Often he had seen a native walking against a tornado-force wind, seven or eight limbs hooked into the ground and pulling, other tentacles reaching out for further grips. He had seen them rolling down the wind like tumbleweed, their tentacles curled around them, wickerwork— basket fashion. He thought of the gay and audacious way they handled their land ships, scudding merrily along on the wind...

Well, he thought, they'd look damned silly on Earth.

“What is the weather going to be like?” he asked Smanik.

The Carellan pondered the question for a while, sniffed the wind and rubbed two tentacles together.

“The wind mayrise a shade more,” he said finally. “But it will be nothing serious.”

Clayton wondered. Nothing serious for a Carellan could mean disaster for an Earthman. Still, it sounded fairly promising.

He and Nerishev left the receiving shed and closed the door.

“Look,” said Nerishev, “if you'd like to wait-”

“Might as well get it over with,” Clayton said.

Here, lighted by a single dim overhead bulb, was the smooth, glittering bulk of the Brute. That was the nickname they had given to the vehicle specially constructed for transportation on Carella.

The Brute was armored like a tank and streamlined like a spheric section. It had vision slits of shatterproof glass, thick enough to match the strength of its steel plating. Its center of gravity was low;

most of its twelve tons were centered near the ground. The Brute was sealed. Its heavy diesel engine, as well as all necessary openings, were fitted with special dustproof covers. The Brute rested on its six fat tires, looking, in its immovable bulk, like some prehistoric monster.

Clayton got in, put on crash helmet and goggles, and strapped himself into the padded seat. He revved up the engine, listened to it critically, then nodded.

“Okay,” he said, “the Brute's ready. Get upstairs and open the garage door.”

“Good luck,” said Nerishev. He left.

Clayton went over the instrument panel, making sure that all the Brute's special gadgets were in working order. In a moment, he heard Nerishev's voice coming in over the radio.

“I'm opening the door.”

“Right.”

The heavy door slid back and Clayton drove the Brute outside.

The station had been set up on a wide, empty plain. Mountains would have offered some protection from the wind, but the mountains on Carella were in a constant restless state of building up and breaking down. The plain presented dangers of its own, however. To avert the worst of those dangers, a field of stout steel posts had been planted around the station. The closely packed posts pointed outward, like ancient tank traps, and served the same purpose.

Clayton drove the Brute down one of the narrow, winding channels that led through the field of posts. He emerged, located the pipeline, and started along it. On a small screen above his head, a white line flashed into view. The line would show any break or obstruction in the pipeline.

A wide, rocky, monotonous desert stretched before him. An occasional low bush came into sight. The wind was directly behind him, blanketed by the sound of the diesel.

He glanced at the windspeed indicator. The wind of Carella was blowing at 92 miles an hour.

He drove steadily along, humming to himself under his breath. From time to time, he heard a crash. Pebbles, propelled by the hurricane wind, were cannonading against the Brute. They shattered harmlessly against the thick armor.

“Everything all right?” Nerishev asked over the radio.

“Fine,” Clayton said.

In the distance, he saw a Carellan land ship. It was about forty feet long, he judged, and narrow in the beam, skimming rapidly on crude wooden rollers. The ship's sails were made from one of the few leaf-bearing shrubs on the planet.

The Carellans waved their tentacles as they went past. They seemed to be heading toward the station.

Clayton turned his attention back to the pipeline. He was beginning to hear the wind now, above the roar of the diesel. The windspeed indicator showed that the wind had risen to 97 miles an hour.

Somberly he stared through the sand-pocked slit-window. In the far distance were jagged cliffs, seen dimly through the dust-blown air.

More pebbles ricocheted off his hull and the sound rang hollowly through his vehicle. He glimpsed another Carellan land ship, then three more. They were tacking stubbornly into the wind.

It struck Clayton that a lot of Carellans were moving toward the station.

He signaled to Nerishev on the radio.

“How are you doing?” Nerishev asked.

“I’m close to the spring and no break yet,” Clayton reported. “Looks like a lot of Carellans heading your way.”

“I know. Six ships are moored in the lee of the shed and more are coming.”

“We’ve never had any trouble with the natives before,” Clayton said slowly. “What does this look like?”

“They’ve brought food with them. It might be a celebration.”

“Maybe. Watch yourself.”

“Don’t worry. You take care and hurry...”

“I’ve found the break! Speak to you later.”

The break showed on the screen, glowing white. Peering out the port, Clayton saw where a boulder had rolled across the pipeline, crushing it, and rolled on.

He brought the truck to a stop on the windward side of the pipe. It was blowing 113 miles an hour. Clayton slid out of the truck, carrying several lengths of pipe, some patches, a blowtorch and a bag of tools.

They were all tied to him and he was secured to the Brute by a strong nylon rope.

Outside, the wind was deafening. It thundered and roared like breaking surf. He adjusted his mask for more oxygen and went to work.

Two hours later, he had completed a fifteen-minute repair job. His clothing was shredded and his air extractor was completely clogged with dust.

He climbed back into the Brute, sealed the port and lay on the floor, resting. The truck was starting to tremble in the wind gusts. Clayton ignored it.

“Hello? Hello?” Nerishev called over the radio.

Wearily, Clayton climbed back into the driver’s seat and acknowledged.

“Hurry back now, Clayton!no time to rest! The wind's up to 138! I think a storm is coming!”

A storm on Carella was something Clayton didn't even want to think about. They had experienced only one in eight months. During it, the winds had gone over 160 miles an hour.

He nosed the truck around and started back, driving directly into the wind. At full throttle, he found he was making very little progress.

Three miles an hour was all the heavy diesel would do against the pressure of a 138-mile wind.

He stared ahead through the slit-window. The wind, outlined by long streamers of dust and sand, seemed to be coming straight at him, funneled out of an infinitely wide sky to the tiny point of his window.

Windborne rocks sailed at him, grew large, immense, and shattered against his window. He couldn't stop himself from ducking each time one came.

The heavy engine was beginning to labor and miss.

“Oh, baby,” Clayton breathed, “don't quit now. Not now. Get Papa home. Then quit. Please!”

He figured he was about ten miles from the station, which lay directly upwind.

He heard a sound like an avalanche plummeting down a mountainside.

It was made by a boulder the size of a house. Too big for the wind to lift, it was rolling at him from windward, digging a furrow in the rocky ground as it came.

Clayton twisted the steering wheel. The engine labored, and with infinite slowness the truck crept out of the boulder's path. Shaking, Clayton watched the boulder bearing down. With one hand, he pounded on the instrument panel.

“Move, baby, move!”

Booming hollowly, the boulder rolled past at a good thirty miles an hour.

“Too close,” Clayton said to himself. He tried to turn the Brute back into the wind, toward the station. The Brute wouldn't do it.

The diesel labored and whined, trying to turn the big truck into the wind. And the wind, like a solid gray wall, pushed the truck away.

The windspeed indicator stood at 159 miles an hour.

“How are you doing?” Nerishev asked over the radio.

“Just great!Leave me alone, I'm busy.”

Clayton set his brakes, unstrapped and raced back to the engine. He adjusted timing and mixture, and hurried back to the controls.

“Hey, Nerishev! That engine's going to conk out!”

It was a full second before Nerishev answered. Then, very calmly, he asked, “What's wrong with it?”

“Sand!” Clayton said. “Particles driven at 159 miles an hour—sand's in the bearings, injectors, everything. I'm going to make all the distance I can.”

“And then?”

“Then I'll try to sail her back,” Clayton said. “I just hope the mast will take it.”

He turned his attention to the controls. At windspeeds like this, the truck had to be handled like a ship at sea. Clayton picked up speed with the wind on his quarter, then came about and slammed into the wind.

The Brute made it this time and crossed over onto the other tack.

It was the best he could do, Clayton decided. His windward distance would have to be made by tacking. He edged toward the eye of the wind. But at full throttle, the diesel couldn't bring him much closer than forty degrees.

For an hour, the Brute forged ahead, tacking back and forth across the wind, covering three miles in order to make two. Miraculously, the engine kept on running. Clayton blessed the manufacturer and begged the diesel to hold out a little while longer.

Through a blinding screen of sand, he saw another Carellan land ship.

It was reefed down and heeled precariously over. But it forged steadily to windward and soon outdistanced him.

Lucky natives, Clayton thought—165 miles of wind was a sailing breeze to them!

The station, a gray half-sphere, came into sight ahead.

“I'm going to make it!” Clayton shouted. “Break out the rum, Nerishev, old man! Papa's getting drunk tonight!”

The diesel chose that moment to break down for good.

Clayton swore violently as he set the brakes. What lousy luck! If the wind were behind him, he could roll in. But, of course, it had to be in front.

“What are you going to do now?” Nerishev asked.

“I'm going to sit here,” Clayton said. “When the wind calms down to a hurricane, I'm going to walk home.”

The Brute's twelve-ton mass was shaking and rattling in the wind blasts.

“You know,” Clayton said, “I'm going to retire after this tour.”

“That so? You really mean it?”

“Absolutely. I own a farm in Maryland, with frontage on Chesapeake Bay. You know what I'm going to do?”

“What?”

“I'm going to raise oysters. You see, the oyster-hold it.”

The station seemed to be drifting slowly upwind, away from him.

Clayton rubbed his eyes, wondering if he were going crazy. Then he realized that, in spite of its brakes, in spite of its streamlining, the truck was being pushed downwind, away from the station.

Angrily he shoved a button on his switchboard, releasing the port and starboard anchors. He heard the solid clunk of the anchors hitting the ground, heard the steel cables scrape and rattle. He let out a hundred and seventy feet of steel line, then set the winch brakes. The truck was holding again.

“I dropped the anchors,” Clayton said.

“Are they holding?”

“So far.” Clayton lighted a cigarette and leaned back in his padded chair. Every muscle in his body ached from tension. His eyelids were twitching from watching the wind-lines converging on him. He closed his eyes and tried to relax.

The sound of the wind cut through the truck's steel plating. The wind howled and moaned, tugging at the truck, trying to find a hold on the smooth surface. At 169 miles an hour, the ventilator baffles blew out.

He would be blinded, Clayton thought, if he weren't wearing sealed goggles, choked if he weren't breathing canned air. Dust swirled, thick and electric, within the Brute's cabin.

Pebbles, flung with the velocity of rifle bullets, splattered against the hull. They were striking harder now. He wondered how much more force they'd need before they started piercing the armor plating.

At times like this, Clayton found it hard to maintain a common sense attitude. He was painfully aware of the vulnerability of human flesh, appalled at the possibilities for violence in the Universe. What was he doing out here? Man's place was in the calm, still air of Earth. If he ever got back...

“Are you all right?” Nerishev asked.

“Making out just great,” Clayton said wearily. “How are things at the station?”

“Not so good. The whole structure's starting sympathetic vibration.

Enough wind for long enough and the foundations could shatter.”

“And they want to put a fuel station here!” Clayton said.

“Well, you know the problem. This is the only solid planet between Angarsa III and the South Ridge Belt. All the rest are gas giants.”

“They better build their station in space.”

“The cost...”

“Hell, man, it'll cost less to build another planet than to try to maintain a fuel base on this one!” Clayton spat out a mouthful of dust. “I just want to get on that relief ship. How many natives at the station now?”

“About fifteen, in the shed.”

“Any sign of violence?”

“No, but they're acting funny.”

“How so?”

“I don't know,” said Nerishev. “I just don't like it.”

“Stay out of the shed, huh? You can't speak the language, anyhow, and I want you in one piece when I come back.” He hesitated. “If I come back.”

“You'll be fine,” Nerishev said.

“Sure I will. I-oh, Lord!”

“What's it? What's wrong?”

“Boulder coming down! Talk to you later!”

Clayton turned his attention to the boulder, a rapidly growing black speck to windward. It was heading directly toward his anchored and immobilized truck. He glanced at the windspeed indicator. Impossible—174 miles an hour! And yet, he reminded himself, winds in the stratospheric jet stream on Earth blow at 200 miles an hour.

The boulder, large as a house, still growing as it approached, was rolling directly his way.

“Swerve! Turn!” Clayton bellowed at the boulder, pounding the instrument panel with his fist.

The boulder was coming at him, straight as a ruler line, rolling right down the wind.

With a yell of agony, Clayton touched a button, releasing both anchors at the cable end. There was no time to winch them in, even assuming the winch could take the strain. Still the boulder grew.

Clayton released the brakes.

The Brute, shoved by a wind of 178 miles an hour, began to pick up speed. Within seconds, he was traveling at 38 miles an hour, staring through his rear-vision mirror at the boulder overtaking him.

As the boulder rolled up, Clayton twisted the steering wheel hard to the left. The truck tilted over precariously, swerved, fishtailed on the hard ground, and tried to turn itself over. He fought the wheel, trying to bring the Brute back to equilibrium. He thought: I'm probably the first man who ever jibed a twelve-ton truck!

The boulder, looking like a whole city block, roared past. The heavy truck teetered for a moment, then came to rest on its six wheels.

“Clayton! What happened? Are you all right?”

“Fine,” Clayton gasped. “But I had to slip the cables. I’m running downwind.”

“Can you turn?”

“Almost knocked her over, trying to.”

“How far can you run?”

Clayton stared ahead. In the distance, he could make out the dramatic black cliffs that rimmed the plain.

“I got about fifteen miles to go before I pile into the cliffs. Not much time, at the speed I’m traveling.” He locked his brakes. The tires began to scream and the brake linings smoked furiously. But the wind, at 183 miles an hour, didn’t even notice the difference. His speed over the ground had picked up to 44 miles an hour.

“Try sailing her out!” Nerishev said.

“She won’t take it.”

“Try, man! What else can you do? The wind’s hit 185 here. The whole station’s shaking! Boulders are tearing up the whole post defense. I’m afraid some boulders are going to get through and flatten-”

“Stow it,” Clayton said. “I got troubles of my own.”

“I don’t know if the station will stand! Clayton, listen to me. Try the-”

The radio suddenly and dismayingly went dead.

Clayton banged it a few times, then gave up. His speed over the ground reached 49 miles an hour. The cliffs were already looming large before him.

“So all right,” Clayton said. “Here we go.” He released his last anchor, a small emergency job. At its full length of 250 feet of steel cable, it slowed him to 30 miles an hour. The anchor was breaking and ripping through the ground like a jet-propelled plow.

Clayton then turned on the sail mechanism. This had been installed by the Earth engineers upon much the same theory that has small ocean—going motor boats carry a small mast and auxiliary sail. The sails are insurance, in case the engine fails. On Carella, a man could never walk home from a stranded vehicle. He had to come in under power.

The mast, a short, powerful steel pillar, extruded itself through a gasketed hole in the roof. Magnetic shrouds and stays snapped into place, supporting it. From the mast fluttered a sail made of link-woven metal. For a mainsheet, Clayton had a three-part flexible-steel cable, working through a winch.

The sail was only a few square feet in area. It could drive a twelve-ton monster with its brakes locked

and an anchor out on 250 feet of line.

Easily-with the wind blowing 185 miles an hour.

Clayton winched in the mainsheet and turned, taking the wind on the quarter. But a quartering course wasn't good enough. He winched the sail in still more and turned further into the wind.

With the super-hurricane on his beam, the ponderous truck heeled over, lifting one entire side into the air. Quickly Clayton released a few feet of mainsheet. The metal-link sail screamed and chattered as the wind whipped it.

Driving now with just the sail's leading edge, Clayton was able to keep the truck on its feet and make good a course to the windward.

Through the rear-vision mirror, he could see the black, jagged cliffs behind him. They were his lee shore, his coast of wrecks. But he was sailing out of the trap. Foot by foot, he was pulling away.

“That's my baby!” Clayton shouted to the battling Brute.

His sense of victory snapped almost at once, for he heard an ear— splitting clang and something whizzed past his head. At 187 miles an hour, pebbles were piercing his armor plating. He was undergoing the Carellan equivalent of a machine-gun barrage. The wind shrieked through the holes, trying to batter him out of his seat.

Desperately he clung to the steering wheel. He could hear the sail wrenching. It was made out of the toughest flexible alloys available, but it wasn't going to hold up for long. The short, thick mast, supported by six heavy cables, was whipping like a fishing rod.

His brake linings were worn out, and his speed over the ground came up to 57 miles an hour.

He was too tired to think. He steered, his hands locked to the wheel, his slitted eyes glaring ahead into the storm.

The sail ripped with a scream. The tatters flogged for a moment, then brought the mast down. Wind gusts were approaching 190 miles an hour.

The wind now was driving him back toward the cliffs. At 192 miles an hour of wind, the Brute was lifted bodily, thrown for a dozen yards, slammed back on its wheels. A front tire blew under the pressure, then two rear ones. Clayton put his head on his arms and waited for the end.

Suddenly, the Brute stopped short. Clayton was flung forward. His safety belt checked him for a moment, then snapped. He banged against the instrument panel and fell back, dazed and bleeding.

He lay on the floor, half conscious, trying to figure out what had happened. Slowly he pulled himself back into the seat, foggily aware that he hadn't broken any limbs. His stomach was one great bruise. His mouth was bleeding.

At last, looking through the rear-vision mirror, he saw what had happened. The emergency anchor, trailing at 250 feet of steel cable, had caught in a deep outcropping of rock. A fouled anchor had brought him up short, less than half a mile from the cliffs. He was saved.

For the moment, at least.

But the wind hadn't given up yet. The 193-mile-an-hour wind bellowed, lifted the truck bodily, slammed it down, lifted it again, slammed it down. The steel cable hummed like a guitar string. Clayton wrapped his arms and legs around the seat. He couldn't hold on much longer. And if he let go, the madly leaping Brute would smear him over the walls like toothpaste.

If the cable didn't part first and send him hurtling into the cliffs.

He held on. At the top of one swing, he caught a glimpse of the windspeed indicator. The sight of it sickened him. He was through, finished, done for. How would he be expected to hold on through the force of a 187-mile-an-hour wind? It was too much.

It was-187 miles an hour? That meant that the wind was dropping!

He could hardly believe it at first. But slowly, steadily, the dial hand crept down. At 160 miles an hour, the truck stopped slamming and lay passively at the end of its anchor line. At 153, the wind veered-a sure sign that the blow was nearly over.

When it had dropped to 142 miles an hour, Clayton allowed himself the luxury of passing out.

Carellan natives came out for him later in the day. Skillfully they maneuvered two big land ships up to the Brute, fastened on their long vines-which tested out stronger than steel-and towed the derelict truck back to the station.

They brought him into the receiving shed and Nerishev carried him into the station's dead air.

"You didn't break anything except a couple of teeth," said Nerishev.

"But there isn't an unbruised inch on you."

"We came through it," Clayton said.

"Just. Our boulder defense is completely flattened. The station took two direct hits from boulders and barely contained them. I've checked the foundations; they're badly strained. Another blow like that..."

"...and we'd make out somehow. Us Earth lads, we come through! That was the worst in eight months. Four months more and the relief ship comes! Buck up, Nerishev. Come with me."

"Where are we going?"

"I want to talk to that damned Smanik!"

They came into the shed. It was filled to overflowing with Carellans.

Outside, in the lee of the station, several dozen land ships were moored.

"Smanik!" Clayton called. "What's going on here?"

“It is the Festival of Summer,” Smanik said. “Our great yearly holiday.”

“Hm. What about that blow? What did you think of it?”

“I would classify it as a moderate gale,” said Smanik. “Nothing dangerous, but somewhat unpleasant for sailing.”

“Unpleasant! I hope you get your forecasts a little more accurate in the future.”

“One cannot always outguess the weather,” Smanik said. “It is regrettable that my last forecast should be wrong.”

“Your last? How come? What's the matter?”

“These people,” Smanik said, gesturing around him, “are my entire tribe, the Seremai. We have celebrated the Festival of Summer. Now summer is ended and we must go away.”

“Where to?”

“To the caverns in the far west. They are two weeks' sail from here. We will go into the caverns and live there for three months. In that way, we will find safety.”

Clayton had a sudden sinking feeling in his stomach. “Safety from what, Smanik?”

“I told you. Summer is over. We need safety now from the winds—the powerful storm winds of winter.”

“What is it?” Nerishev said.

“In a moment.” Clayton thought very quickly of the super-hurricane he had just passed through, which Smanik had classified as a moderate and harmless gale. He thought of their immobility, the ruined Brute, the strained foundations of the station, the wrecked boulder barrier, the relief ship four months away.

“We could go with you in the land ships, Smanik, and take refuge in the caverns with you—be protected—”

“Of course,” said Smanik hospitably.

“No, we couldn't,” Clayton answered himself, his sinking feeling even lower than during the storm. “We'd need extra oxygen, our own food, a water supply—”

“What is it?” Nerishev repeated impatiently. “What the devil did he say to make you look like that?”

“He says the really big winds are just coming,” Clayton replied.

The two men stared at each other.

Outside, a wind was rising.