

Deadly Double

Milian France

High Noon Books
Novato, California

CHAPTER 1

Professor Loraz

Chandler's little silver space ship, the Orion, circled slowly down and landed on the Moon spaceport. The spaceport was just outside the MAC, the giant Moon Administration Center. An older man rode out on a cart full of luggage to meet Chandler. He was holding a large metal box tightly on his lap. He seemed calm and wise, as if he had lots to think about.

Chandler took off her helmet. She held out her hand. "Hello, Professor Loraz. I'm

Chandler, your pilot.”

“Oh, yes. How do you do?” he said.

She said, “I’m going to fly you to New Mensa. I’ve been there many times.”

“Good. Let’s get started,” said Professor Loraz.

Some workmen began to put his luggage into the Orion’s cargo hold. One of them reached for the metal box.

“No, no, not this one. I must keep this with me,” said the professor. He held the box tightly.

“That must be an important box,” said Chandler.

“It is. I’ve been working on this job for more than ten years. In two weeks, when you

come back to New Mensa to pick me up, it will be *done!*”

“Good. For now, I’ll tie the box right next to your seat where it will be nice and safe,” she said.

“Thank you,” he said as he looked out the window.

Chandler stayed by his seat. “I’m hoping to get to see my friend Marie Aria in New Mensa. She’s doing a show there.”

The professor looked surprised. “Maria Aria, the famous singer? I’m a great fan of hers. But I heard she was sick and had to stop her tour. Some day I hope to meet her.”

Chandler looked surprised. “I hadn’t heard

she was ill.”

One of the men outside said, “We’re finished. You can take off now, Chandler.”

“Thank you. Fasten your seatbelt, Professor. We’re going to blast off,” she called.

Professor Loraz didn’t answer. He was frowning at something out the window.

“Is something wrong?” asked Chandler.

The professor looked a bit puzzled. “I thought one of those workers looked like someone I’ve seen before. But, no. It’s nothing.”

Chandler turned on the controls. Everything looked good. She checked the dials for fuel, oil, water, and air. “Everything is AOK. It will be a bit bumpy until we go into

warp drive. Then it will be an easy trip.”

The tower gave her the countdown.

“Ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one, blast off!”

The ship quickly shot up high into the deep black sky. On board, it was a little bumpy.

“How are you doing, Professor?” Chandler called.

“I’m fine, just fine,” he said.

“Good. Brace yourself. We’re going into warp drive now,” said Chandler.

Suddenly there was a loud noise. The ship gave a sudden jerk. Smoke and sparks shot from the controls.

With a loud blast, the cargo door broke

loose. It went flying into space. Chandler fought to control the ship.

"What was that?" asked the professor.

"An explosion. It knocked off my cargo door. We lost all of our luggage." She worked to gain control of the Orion.

"I was afraid something like this might happen. That's why I kept my box in here," the professor said.

"*Mayday! Mayday!*" cried Chandler to the tower. Smoke poured into the cabin. The professor began to cough and choke.

"*Mayday!* Help, tower, this is Chandler in the Orion! Can you hear me? I have to come back and land. My automatic controls are



Another explosion rocked the ship. Chandler got it under control. "Are you all right, Professor?" she cried.

broken and useless.”

“Roger. You are cleared to land. Emergency crews will be there to meet you,” came a voice from the tower.

Another explosion rocked the ship. Chandler fought to get it under control. “Are you all right, Professor?” she cried.

“Just a bump on my arm,” he said.

“Just stay where you are. We’re coming in.” Chandler stayed calm. Her hands were tight on the controls as she landed her ship safely.

She closed her eyes for a moment and said, “It’s O.K., Professor. You and that box of yours are safe!”

CHAPTER 2

Close Call

Chandler’s ship was badly damaged. Another ship was called to take Professor Loraz to New Mensa.

Chandler was waiting at the spaceport to find out how long it would take to fix the Orion when Jones, Morga, and Gold walked in.

“Hi, Chandler,” said Jones.

“Oh, Jones!” she said. “I don’t understand what happened.”

“Don’t worry. Your ship will be O.K.,” Morga said to her.

"I'm not worried about my ship. I'm worried about Professor Loraz," said Chandler.

"Why? He can get another ride to New Mensa," said Jones.

"I'm sure someone damaged my ship to stop him," Chandler cried.

"You mean it was done on purpose?" asked Morga.

Chandler nodded yes. "The professor wouldn't let them put one box in the cargo hold. He kept looking out the window. He saw someone in the cargo hold he thought he knew."

"So what?" asked Jones.

"Jones, the explosions came from the cargo hold. If that box had been in there, it would be

gone!" Chandler said.

"But why! What was in the box?" asked Morga.

"His work. Ten years of work, and he had nearly finished it. I'm to go pick him up in two weeks so he can bring it back to the scientists at the MAC," said Chandler.

A man with "Repair" printed on his shirt came in. "Hi, Chandler. I'm Tom from Repair. Your ship needs a lot of new parts. You are lucky there was enough of it to land!"

"Wow!" said Morga.

"Your ship will be fixed in a week," Tom said.

When Tom was gone, Chandler said. "A week! I can't wait a week, I have work to do!"

"You can come with us," said Jones.

"Yeah! We're going to the Mermaid Lounge to see the greatest singer in the galaxy!" cried Morga.

"You don't mean Maria Eria," said Chandler.

"I thought she had to quit her tour. I heard she was sick."

"Well, she must be better. She's doing one show only, and Gold got us tickets," said Jones.

Gold showed Chandler the tickets and smiled.

"What can I say? I have friends."

"I can't believe it. Maria Eria! She's my favorite! The best singer who ever lived," cried Chandler.

"Let's go," said Jones. "It will take your mind off your troubles."

CHAPTER 3

Maria Eria

Through the years the Mermaid Lounge had put on a lot of shows. But it had never had an act as big as Maria Eria. The place was packed.

Jones, Chandler, Morga, and Gold were taken to seats at a table right in front of the stage. Even Gold was surprised.

The lights came on and the show began. By the time the show was over, the crowd was on its feet clapping.

"She is the greatest mermaid I've ever seen!"

cried Morga.

“Look, she’s signing autographs. You could stand in line,” said Jones.

“What a great idea! Wait for me, I’ll be back.”
Morga jumped up and ran into the crowd.

Chandler seemed a bit quiet. Then she said,
“Did you notice anything different about Maria tonight?”

“Different? How?” asked Jones.

“Her voice seemed a bit off,” said Chandler.
“A little tinny. Look, there’s Morga.”

Not one of them could believe it when Morga brought Maria Eria to sit at their table.

“Maria Eria, I’d like you to meet my partners, Jones and Gold.”

“It’s an honor to meet you,” said Jones.

“Your show was great,” said Gold.

“And this is our friend Chandler,” said Morga.

Maria took Chandler’s hand. “Aren’t you that pilot whose ship exploded?”

Chandler was surprised. “Why, yes. How did you know that?”

“Oh, I read about it somewhere.”

“Why, thank you. I really enjoyed your show. You’re my favorite singer. I’m so glad you are better,” said Chandler.

“Thank you. So am I. Say, I’m thinking of doing a concert on Neptune’s moon in two weeks. You are all invited to be my special guests.”

“Sorry, but I can’t,” said Chandler.



"I'm thinking of doing a concert on Neptune's moon in two weeks. You are all invited to be my special guests," the great singer said.

"Why not? What's wrong?" asked Jones.

"Nothing's wrong. I just have to work," she said.

"Work! Can't you change it?" asked Gold.

"I have to pick up Professor Loraz on New Mensa and take him to the scientists at the MAC."

"He can get another ride!" said Morga.

"Or wait another day," said Gold.

"Chandler, you can't miss a chance like this," said Jones.

Chandler felt bad. "I'm sorry. You'll have to go without me."

"I have a wonderful idea," said Maria Eria.

"What is it?" asked Morga. They were all looking at Maria.

"I have always wanted to meet Professor Loraz. Why don't I go with you to New Mensa to pick him up? Then you and I can go straight to Neptune's moon in time for the concert," she said.

"Great idea," said Gold.

"What do you think, Chandler?" asked Jones.

Chandler looked at all their eager faces. She wasn't sure it was a good idea. But she wanted to please her friends. "O.K. I'm sure Professor Loraz wouldn't mind."

Maria turned to Morga. "Would you mind walking me to my hotel? A lady shouldn't travel around an asteroid belt alone."

Morga nearly stumbled, he stood up so fast. "Mind! Heavens, I'd be honored! I'll take you

anywhere you want to go!"

Maria Eria stood up. Chandler thought she looked as grand as a queen, or else a big, sleek cat. And yet what was different about her?

Maria looked at each of them and said, "I'm so glad I got to meet you. It's great to have new friends."

She turned to Chandler. "I thank you, too. I look forward to our trip to meet Professor Loraz."

Then Maria Eria, the great singer, took Morga by the arm and walked off with him through the crowd.

"Can you believe that?" said Gold.

"I can't believe any of it," said Chandler. She was frowning.

CHAPTER 4

All Fixed

It took twelve days for the Orion to be fixed. Tom and the repair team did a good job. The little ship was as good as new in time for the concert.

Maria Eria came on board to go with Chandler to pick up Professor Loraz.

"Fasten your seatbelt," said Chandler, putting on her helmet.

"Aye, aye, Captain," said Maria, smiling. She seemed to be quite excited.

But, then, why shouldn't she be, thought

Chandler. Professor Loraz had said he was a fan of the famous singer. Why couldn't a singer be a fan of the famous scientist? After all, Professor Loraz had found the cure for many dread diseases.

"Oh, Chandler. Did you do as I asked and keep my little trip with you a secret?" asked Maria.

"Yes. Only Jones, Morga, Gold, and Professor Loraz know you are coming with me."

Maria Eria smiled. "Thank you. You have no idea what a relief it is not to be followed around every second by people from the news."

No, Chandler did not know what it was like to be followed by reporters. But she knew how good it felt to be her own boss. She loved to fly around in space by herself among the stars and planets .

Back at the spaceport, Jones, Morga, and Gold watched the Orion take off on its journey across space to New Mensa.

"It worked. There isn't one reporter around," said Jones.

"No one has a clue that the great Maria Eria is on her way to New Mensa with our friend Chandler," said Gold.

"If they did, there would be ten or twenty thousand people in this spaceport with us," said Jones.

"You're awfully quiet, Morga. What do you want to do now? Watch a flexball game?" asked Gold.

"No, I don't feel too well. I want to go and

rest," said Morga.

"I'm not surprised. After two weeks of taking Maria Eria all around the belt," said Gold.

"Aw, she was more excited about going to see Professor Loraz than she was about me," said Morga.

"Well, she's a big star. Big stars aren't like us plain people," said Gold.

Morga groaned. "I've got to go lie down. I feel dizzy. I'll see you two later."

"O.K. Take it easy, Morga," said Gold.

Morga was shaking. He walked a few feet, then stopped. He fell to the ground and didn't move.

A crowd started to gather.

"Call an ambulance," a woman shouted.

"I already did," said a man.

Jones and Gold ran and kneeled beside Morga.

"He's ice cold," said Jones.

"But he's burning up with fever!" said Gold.

An ambulance pulled up. Four medics went to work on Morga.

"Oh, no. This is bad," said the first medic.

"What's bad? What's wrong with our friend?" cried Jones.

"It looks like the same deadly new virus that killed the ambassador of Dorak last month," said the second medic.

"It happened right after a big show where Maria Eria was singing," said a third medic.

"Maria Eria! But Morga has been taking her around for two weeks!" cried Gold.

"We have to warn Chandler! Morga is so sick he may die. If Chandler is with Maria Eria, she could be next!" said Gold.

"That's impossible. She couldn't be with Maria Eria," said the medic.

"Why not?" asked Gold.

"Because Maria Eria, the singer, is at her home world right now. She's sick with this same virus," said the medic.

Jones looked stunned. He ran to the window and looked into space.

"Then who is that with Chandler?" he cried.

CHAPTER 5

Fun Flying

"I had no idea flying could be so much fun," said Maria Eria.

"But you fly all the time," said Chandler.

"Oh, I go places, but on big ships with no windows. It's not anything like this, so free, so close to the stars."

"Yes, I feel that way, too. That's why I'm a pilot," said Chandler.

A buzzer on the control panel sounded.

Chandler turned a dial. "This is Chandler in

the Orion."

A man's voice shouted over loud static. "Chandler, come back. There's a terrible . . ."

"Wait a minute. Jones? Is that you?" Chandler turned the dials so she could hear him better.

Maria Eria darted out of her seat and stood beside Chandler at the control panel.

"Chandler, can you hear me? Return to the spaceport. Morga is sick. We just found out that . . ."

He never finished. With a bang, sparks suddenly flew off the control panel.

Chandler quickly pushed some buttons. "Jones? Hello? This is Chandler. Can you read me? Oh, no! The communication system has gone dead."

"Oh my! What are we going to do?" asked

Maria. She reached over as if she were going to turn a dial.

But Chandler stopped her. "No, please. Just take your seat."

"But something is wrong," said Maria.

"Yes! All our communication to the spaceport and to New Mensa has gone dead."

"Does that mean we are not going to see Professor Loraz?" Something about the quiet way Maria spoke sent a chill up Chandler's back.

"No. It's O.K., I can fly without it. And when we land, it can be fixed. But I can't talk to New Mensa. I can't let Professor Loraz know when we will get there."

"Oh, I'm sure Professor Loraz is a man who

can take a few surprises," said Maria, smiling.

Chandler looked straight at Maria. Another chill crawled up her back. Something was not quite right but she didn't know what it was.

Chandler had no trouble landing. She brought the little spaceship down exactly in the right place at the tiny spaceport on New Mensa.

Guards came out to meet them.

"Why did you not tell us you were coming in?" one demanded.

"My communication system blew out halfway here. I'm Chandler. This is the famous singer Maria Eria. Professor Loraz is expecting us."

The guards made Chandler and Maria wait while they looked over the ship. Then they called

Professor Loraz. He wasn't ready to leave. "Please bring my guests to the laboratory," he said.

The guards put Chandler and Maria in a cart and headed for the mountains. The cart rode on a layer of air above the road and was very fast.

They went for miles. Soon they came to a gate. There was only empty space around it.

"Where is the lab? I don't see any buildings," said Maria.

"It's probably underground," said Chandler.

She was right. The gate opened, and they went another mile. Then the road dipped down. The cart stopped before a big black door in the side of a hill.

"You may go on in. The professor will meet you," said the guard. Chandler and Maria got out of

the cart and walked inside.

They found themselves in a big room. It had many interesting things on the shelves and tables.

Professor Loraz came in smiling. "Chandler! I was so pleased when the guard called and said you were here. And Maria Eria, too. You are welcome to my lab!"

"I'm so honored to meet you, Professor. I greatly admire your work," Maria said. She held out her hand. Her hands were lovely. Her nails were long and painted.

Then a loud whistle filled the air.

"Oops! There goes the teapot! I thought you might enjoy a warm drink," he exclaimed, and dashed out of the room.

CHAPTER 6

Deadly Double

Back on New City, Jones and Gold sat in Morga's room at the hospital.

They watched poor Morga asleep on the bed.

A man in a dark suit came in with two officers in uniform.

"Mr. Jones? Mr. Gold? I am Chief Surelock of the AP's. These are Officers Nine and Ten. We are here to test for robots."

"Not the Authentic Police," moaned Gold.

"Our friend is sick and may be dying. Do you



"Our friend is sick and may be dying. Do you have to test for robots now?" said Jones.

have to test for robots now?" asked Jones.

"This is no random reality test. I am from InterGal," said Chief Surelock. He showed them a badge.

Jones and Gold were impressed. They knew InterGal was the inter-galactic branch of the AP's. It was the most secret police force there was.

"What can we do for you, Chief?" asked Jones.

Chief Surelock looked around the room. "Let's go someplace where we can talk."

They went upstairs to a doctor's private office. Once inside Chief Surelock said, "We are on the trail of a robot killer who is a copy of a famous singer. We understand you were the last people to

see her."

"You mean Maria Eria? She's a robot?" Jones and Gold were in shock.

"The real Maria Eria is not a robot. We think the robot Maria made the real Maria sick to take her place," said Surelock. This deadly virus your friend has is her weapon. It comes out of her fingernails. If she can scratch you, you are dead. If she only touches you, you get sick. She scratched the ambassador of Dorak at a party and killed the president of Mere by shaking hands."

"But why? Does she want to get rid of all the world's leaders?" asked Gold.

"Yes, we think that is her plan," said Surelock.

"Then she and her people can take over the world

and all its galaxies.”

Gold was frowning. “Jones, I remember I didn’t have seats at the front table at the concert. The robot Maria must have fixed the tickets. And out of all the fans in the crowd, she picked Morga. Then she sat with us! We were set up!” he cried.

“You’re right! Then she asked Morga to take her around and she gave him the virus! But why? Morga isn’t a world leader! We’re simple miners!” cried Jones.

Chief Surelock looked at him hard. “It wasn’t you or Morga she wanted to meet.”

“Then who?” asked Gold.

Jones turned white. “Now it is all beginning to make sense. It was Chandler. But why?”

Surelock nodded. “I thought about this a lot. I think it’s because Chandler would take her to Professor Loraz.”

“But he’s not a world leader,” said Gold.

“No, but Professor Loraz has found a cure to robot Maria’s deadly virus. If he delivers it to the scientists at the MAC, she is useless. She has to kill Professor Loraz and destroy his cure.”

Gold shook his head. “But her voice was so good! I really thought we were hearing Maria Eria.”

“She’s a perfect copy,” said Nine.

“Not quite,” said Jones. “Remember – Chandler wasn’t quite sure about her.”

“There’s a simple answer to this problem. All

we have to do is tell your friend Chandler to alert the guards on New Mensa. They will take it from there," said the Chief.

Gold shook his head. "Not so simple, Surelock. All communication from Chandler's ship stopped halfway to New Mensa," he said.

"Then we will just call New Mensa and tell them ourselves," said Surelock.

"New Mensa doesn't answer either," said Gold.

Jones grew pale. "Chandler! We've got to save Chandler! She's up there with that robot all alone!"

Gold turned to Surelock. "We've got to get to New Mensa fast! Come on, let's move!"

CHAPTER 7

Anyone for Tea?

Back at New Mensa Professor Loraz came out carrying a tray. "Anyone for tea?" he said.

"You sound very cheerful," said Chandler.

"I am! My work has been completed! I can take my results to the MAC as soon as we are finished with our tea!"

Professor Loraz set the tray on the table and handed each of them a cup."

Chandler took a big sip. "Mmmm, this is good!"

"Thank you. It's my special blend," Professor

Loraz said. He drank some, too.

Maria took a small sip. She looked at the Professor's suitcases. They were all packed, waiting by the door. His metal box was right on top.

"What exactly have you finished?" Maria asked.

"A wonderful cure for a terrible disease," said Professor Loraz.

"How exciting," said Chandler. "Is that what you have in the box?" She pointed at it.

"Yes! Oh, my. I forgot to pack my notes. Please excuse me, I have to find them." The professor went through a door.

Maria stood up and went to the same door.

Chandler leaped to her feet. "I'll go with you."

Maria looked at her. Chandler looked at Maria.

"So. You know. Well, don't try to get help. No one knows I'm here. You can't stop me," Maria said.

Chandler did not know what Maria was talking about. But she pretended she did. She moved toward the same door.

Maria raised her hand. Chandler saw a drop of yellow liquid form at the tip of each fingernail. "What a pity. I sort of liked you," Maria said.

She flicked a drop of fluid at Chandler. Chandler ducked. The two women circled around each other.

"Professor Loraz, you're in danger! Go for help," called Chandler. There was no answer.

Maria frowned. She darted to the door and kicked it open. She looked inside. "He's gone!"

Chandler laughed. "Maybe he's not as stupid as you think. In fact, I think he has known about you all along!"

Maria leaped and slashed at Chandler with her claws. Chandler quickly stepped to one side. She grabbed Maria's arm and twisted it hard.

Maria only smiled. "Haven't you figured it out yet? You can't hurt me. I'm a robot!"

"A robot! But you could sing!" said Chandler.

Maria laughed. "Of course, I could sing. We robots can do anything we want."

Then she lashed out and scratched Chandler. "Now you've got the deadly virus. You are going to

die, Chandler."

For the first time Chandler felt a wave of fear. When would the virus start to work?

Just then the door opened, and Professor Loraz came in. The robot Maria slashed at him.

"Don't bother," he said. "Your virus no longer works. That sip of green tea cancelled its strength. Don't worry, Chandler, you're O.K."

The robot stared at him. "How did you know?"

"Young woman, you forget I am a scientist. I worked on robots many years ago. I know one when I see one. At the moment you are powerless."

The door burst open. Jones, Gold, the AP's, and Chief Surelock rushed in.

The robot Maria was lying flat on its back.

There was a little pile of fingernails scattered around her. Chandler and the professor were having a cup of tea.

“What’s going on?” shouted Jones.

“Everything is under control,” said Chandler.

“And Professor Loraz knew what was going on all the time. That robot is finished and so are the evil ones who programmed her. Now everyone sit down and let’s have another cup of that delicious tea! And then let’s get in the Orion and visit our good friend Maria.”

She looked at Professor Loraz. “Want to come along and meet the real Maria, Professor?”

Now the Professor had a twinkle in his eye.

“Full speed ahead, Chandler!”

