

**Duct Bugs**

**Milian France**

**High Noon Books**  
Novato, California

**ESL DEPT.**

**Cover Design and Interior Illustrations:** Milian France

Copyright ©1998, by High Noon Books, 20 Commercial Blvd.,  
Novato, CA 94949-6191. All rights reserved. Printed in the  
United States of America. No part of this publication may be  
reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any  
form or by any means, electronic, mechanical photocopying,  
recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of  
the publisher.

International Standard Book Number: 1-57128-088-X

7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0 9 8  
0 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

You'll enjoy all the High Noon Books. Write for  
a free full list of titles.

## Contents

1	An Ancient Box.....	1
2	Gold and Sand .....	7
3	Warning! .....	12
4	Panic .....	17
5	Double Meanings.....	22
6	Blue Things .....	28
7	Wise Ones.....	34
8	A Touch of Pink.....	38

## CHAPTER 1

### An Ancient Box

#### Setting the Scene

Jones, Morga, and Gold are partners in a flex mine on a satellite. Flex is a material that always keeps its shape, cannot be destroyed, and is used in the popular sport *flexball*. Their friend Chandler flies cargo and passengers in her space ship Orion to and from various satellites and a base on the moon. For fun they often go to New City, an entertainment center on a flashy satellite.

Morga, Jones, and Gold were hard at work with big rocks on Asteroid 7. In space, even a rock bigger than a miner did not weigh anything at all. The miners did not have to lift them. But they did have to shove and push them around. They had to herd the rocks into carts and machines. And they had to make sure no strays floated out that could get lost in space.

Morga talked to the big rocks while he worked. "Whoa, Nellie," he said. "Get along,

little dogie.”

This made Jones and Gold laugh.

“Morga, you’re just like a cowboy,” said Jones.

“*I’m an old cowhand from the Rio Grande,*” said Morga. He laughed.

Gold winked at Jones. “Morga has been sleeping under this black sky with these great big stars too long.”

Morga began to sing. He sang an old Earth cowboy song. “*Yippie ty, yi, yo, git along little dogies, I know that Wyoming will be your new home . . .*”

“Now see what you’ve done!” cried Jones. He pushed a big rock at Gold. Gold laughed and

pushed it back at Jones. Jones pushed a bigger rock at Gold. The big rocks floated into each other and broke.

The miners laughed. They rounded up all the rocks and put them back inside the cart.

“Hey, look at this,” cried Gold. He pointed to one of the pieces of broken rock.

Jones and Morga leaned down to look. There was a hole in it. The hole was square.

“How strange. That hole is too square to be in a piece of broken asteroid,” said Jones.

“Something must have been inside it that isn’t there now,” said Gold.

“Yeah, one end of a long cigar box,” said Morga.

---

Jones said, "But how could a cigar box get inside a rock on an asteroid out in space?"

They all looked at the square hole again.

"Let's find the other half of this rock," said Gold. They went to the rocks and started looking.

"Here it is! There's something square sticking out of this one," cried Morga. He turned the rock so the others could see it.

Jones said, "It looks like a cigar box made out of very rough metal."

"I bet there's something inside it," said Gold.

Jones cried, "No way. This rock has been floating in space for a billion years!"

"Let's break it open and see," said Morga.

Gold looked around. "Where's my crowbar?"

"Hold it. This could be dangerous," said Jones.

Morga handed Gold a miner's pick. "Here, use this to chop it loose." Morga held the rock steady while Gold chopped the rock with the pick. Suddenly, the square metal box shot out and spun away.

"Quick! Grab it!" cried Gold. He and Morga reached for it. But they bumped into each other, and the box floated further into space.

"I'll get it! I was not a flexball player for

---

nothing!" said Jones. He leaped high into the black sky and twisted in mid-air. He caught the floating box and came back down.

"Good job, Jones! Three points!" said Morga.

"Let's pack up for the day and take this box in the camp house. I want to see what's in it," said Gold.

They put all their tools away and took the box to their camp house.

## CHAPTER 2

### Gold and Sand

Their camp house was built deep down into the rock. It was like two very nice tents inside a big cave. The first tent was the place where the miners put all their equipment. The second room was big and warm and light. It had Earth air so they could breathe without mining suits. They took their mining suits off and hung them on the wall. Then they set the box on the table.

"I have a power drill," said Morga.

"I have a power saw," said Gold.



*"That one picture looks like a bug," said Morga.*

"How about a screw driver?" asked Jones. He put his screw driver into a small hole and turned it. The box popped open.

"Wow! Look at that!" said Morga.

The miners could not believe their eyes.

"This box is made of solid gold," said Jones.

"Look! There's something in it," said Gold.

He picked up a small roll of paper tied with ribbon. It was so old, some of it had turned into dust.

"There's writing on it!" said Morga.

"Can you read it?" asked Jones.

"No. But look! There's something else," said Gold. He picked up a flat block of metal. It fit in his hand. It was heavy and had two carved shapes on

the back.

“That looks like gold, too,” said Jones.

Morga pointed to one of the shapes. “That looks like a bug,” he said.

“I’ll bet it’s an old, old language,” said Gold.

“We should take all of this to the headquarters library at New City. They can read every language there is,” said Jones.

Morga looked inside the box again. “What’s that little pile of stuff in the corner?”

“It looks like dust. No, it’s sand,” said Gold.

“Pretty strange sand,” said Morga.

Jones said, “Let’s put everything back in the box and take it to New City. Someone at the library there will know what it is.”

“O.K. I’ll call Chandler and see if she can take us to New City now,” said Morga.

Gold held the box up and looked inside again. A little bit of the strange sand rolled out and fell on the floor. But Gold did not see it. He just put everything else back inside and closed the lid.

“Chandler’s coming. Ready?” asked Jones.

“Yep. Let’s go,” said Gold. They took the box, turned out the lights, and left.



## CHAPTER 3

### Warning!

Chandler's space ship, Orion, came right away.

Chandler, the pretty, red-haired pilot, opened the door. Jones stood there with a smile.

"Hi, Jones," said Chandler.

"Hi, Chandler," said Jones.

"Where to?" asked Chandler.

"The library at New City," said Jones.

"Get in and fasten your seat belts," said Chandler.

The miners got in. Chandler put Orion in gear

and took off so fast, the box fell on the floor.

"Take it easy," said Jones. He picked up the box and closed the lid. He did not see that a little bit of the strange sand had fallen on the floor.

From Orion's windows, the miners could soon see the bright Earth's moon. The closer they got, the bigger it got.

Then they were close enough to see New City. It looked like a flat city that covered half the moon and made it shine like a carpet of diamonds.

"That sure is beautiful," said Morga.

"Yeah. I love working in space," said Chandler.

"Look, there's the Earth!" said Jones.

"Wow!" said Morga.

That was all anyone could say. The sight of the beautiful blue Earth hanging in the black sky always made them stop talking.

Chandler flew Orion around in circles and came in for a landing. Morga, Jones, Gold, and Chandler got permits and went to a big building that said, "Main Library."

They went inside and were sent to a worker named Joe. Joe had to talk to Chandler and the miners from a TV screen.

"Hello. We found this box inside a rock on our mine on Asteroid 7," said Jones.

They pushed the box through a little door to Joe. They watched as he looked it over. He opened the lid and said, "Hmmm. This is from a very old

world. That's all I can tell right now."

"Can you read it? Is that a bug?" said Morga. He pointed to the picture in the square of gold.

Joe said, "Yes, it looks like a bug. But the language is very old. I have to look it up before I can tell you what it means."

Joe told them he would call them as soon as he found out. They thanked him and went outside.

"I'm hungry," said Chandler.

"Let's go to a good New City cafe and eat!" said Gold.

Just then Joe came back on the TV screen. "Excuse me. I can read one word."

The miners smiled. "Good. What is it?"

"It's here, on the roll of paper. It's a very clear

word repeated many times. I'm afraid it says,

'Warning.'

"Oh, dear," said Chandler.

"Warning? About what?" asked Jones.

"I don't know. I have to look it up. I'll call you when I know," said Joe.

"O.K. We're going to find some food," said Jones.

When the miners left, Joe took one last look in the box. "Hmmm," he said. Then he took it to show his boss, Bill. He did not see that a few grains of the strange sand fell on the desk.

## CHAPTER 4

### Panic

They decided to go to the Mermaid Club for lunch.

"I don't think a warning about bugs in such an old box is much to worry about," said Gold.

"It's probably about an old computer system on another world," said Chandler.

"Right. Please pass the salt," said Morga.

"Yeah. There haven't been any bugs in computers for forty or fifty years," said Gold.

"Can you think of how bad bugs in a big computer system would be?" asked Chandler.

“Bugs on a whole computer satellite like New City would be horrible,” said Gold.

“Sure would be! Please pass the pepper,” said Morga.

A lady near them turned to another lady and said, “Did you hear that man? He said there were *bugs* right here on New City!”

Ten more people heard that and said, “What? *Bugs in New City!*”

“Quick! Run!” the people shouted. They began to run in all directions.

“Where’s everybody going?” asked Morga.

“We all have to leave, quick! Didn’t you hear? There are *bugs* on New City!” said a man.

“Wait a minute! What kind of bugs? Where?”



*"Did you hear that man? He said there were BUGS right here on New City!"*

cried Morga.

“There are microphones in the casino!” said another man.

“That means the crime bosses are listening to everything we say!” cried a frightened man.

Everybody was afraid. People started running.

“Are there microphones in the Mermaid Lounge?” asked Morga.

Gold stood up. “There are no microphones!”

A man appeared on the big TV screen. He said in a booming voice, “Everybody calm down. There is no need to panic. This is only a hoax.”

The two men in suits came up to Gold. “Are you the one who said there were bugs on New City?” asked one of the men.

“No, we were just talking about computers,” said Gold.

The men looked at him, frowning.

Another man appeared on the big TV screen. “We now have an official report. There are *no bugs* on New City! Everybody can relax! Go back to your games and fun!”

“Wow! That was a close call,” said Morga.

“You. Come with us,” said the two men. They grabbed Gold.

“Wait a minute, he’s with us,” said Jones.

“Oh, yeah? Then we’ll take you, too.” Two more men came and grabbed Jones and Morga.

One reached for Chandler. “Try it and you’ll be sorry,” she said.

## CHAPTER 5

### Double Meanings

After two hours, Gold paid the casino boss a big fine for causing a panic. He also paid another big fine to get Chandler out of jail.

"That really *bugs* me," said Morga.

"It bugs me, too," said Jones.

"Hey, it bugs me that I'm the one who always pays all of the fines!" cried Gold.

"How could everybody think a simple word like *bug* could mean so many other things?" said Jones.

"Yeah. A bug is a bug!" said Morga.

"Except when it's a bug," said Gold. He felt grumpy.

Just then, Jones heard his wrist phone ring. He answered, "Hello, this is Jones."

It was Joe from the library. He said, "Hi, Jones, I showed the language to my boss."

"Good. We thought since the words were so old, they may mean bugs in computers," said Jones.

Joe replied, "No, that's not it. We checked. My boss says the word after *bug* is *duct*."

"Duct? You mean, as in, pipes?" asked Jones.

"We think so," said Joe.

"So, it is a warning about bugs in a duct?"

"We think so."

"What pipes?" asked Jones.

"We don't know. We will run some tests and call you back," said Joe.

"All right. Thanks," Jones hung up.

"Duct bugs? Try and say *that* three times!" said Chandler.

"That, that, that . . . Not hard," said Morga.

"Not *that*. *Duct bugs!*" said Chandler.

"Ohhh, that!" Morga tried, but could not do it.

"What kinds of bugs are in ducts?" asked Gold.

"A duct is an air pipe," said Jones.

"Or a heat pipe. Or a pipe full of wires. There are ducts all over," said Morga.

"I know! It means *germs!*" cried Chandler.

"That could be very bad," cried Gold.

"Everybody would get sick! That would be a big disaster!" cried Morga.

Jones heard his wrist phone ring again. "Hello, this is Jones."

"Hi, this is Joe again. My boss wants to talk to you. His name is Bill."

"All right," said Jones.

A new deep voice came on the phone. "Hello, Jones. This is Bill. I think we have a problem."

"So do we. The duct bugs might be germs!"

"We think so, too. The warning on the piece of gold is very clear. It says, *duct bugs*. But we cannot read the roll of paper. The words are too old for our

library. Can you help us?" Bill sounded very worried.

"What can we do?" asked Jones.

Bill said, "We know which world the old language is from. We need someone to go there right away. They must try to find someone who can read the old words."

Chandler said, "We'll leave right away. Where do you want us to go?"

Bill gave her the location of the old world. She found it on her star map.

"O.K. Who do we look for?" asked Jones.

"You must find the Wise One," said Bill.

"The Wise what?" asked Morga.

"The Wise One is a person who is wise beyond words. Only the Wise One can read this language. I cannot tell you any more except . . ."

"Except what?" asked Jones.

"Be careful," said Bill.

"Why is that?" asked Jones.

"This world is so old we don't know if anyone is left alive. Our last records show their world was in terrible danger. No one knows what happened."

"From what?" asked Jones.

"They had a problem."

"Tell me," said Jones.

Bill's voice was very quiet. "They had . . . duct bugs!"



## CHAPTER 6

### Blue Things

“Great! Fly to a strange world and ask for a Wise One if we can find anyone alive,” said Morga. He shook his head and frowned.

“We have to find out what duct bugs are,” said Chandler. She steered Orion out beyond the belt where the little ship could go into warp drive.

“This is a strange, spooky part of space. It gives me a bad feeling. I don’t like it,” said Morga.

“Those giant dark clouds are where new stars are being born,” said Chandler.

Soon they came to the old world. Chandler flew the little ship around it two times. They saw only one city. Only one high mountain peak could be seen above a thick bed of clouds.

“I don’t know about you, but if I were a Wise One who lived through a duct bug danger, I would live on that mountain,” said Jones.

“Is that a hunch, Jones?” asked Chandler.

“Just common sense,” said Jones.

“All right, I’ll try it.” Chandler flew the little ship in circles above the giant mountain.

“Look. That looks like the mouth of a big cave,” said Jones.

“You don’t need to go into a cave to find a Wise One,” grumbled Morga.

"How do you know that?" asked Gold.

Morga thought for a moment. Then he said,  
"It's strange. It's as if someone just said it to me."

"I didn't hear anything," said Gold.

"I didn't either," said Jones.

"Do you feel all right, Morga?" asked  
Chandler.

"Oh, I'm all right. Maybe those star spots just  
mixed up something in my mind," said Morga.

"Chandler, look. I think you can land on that  
flat place a few miles below the cave," said Jones.

"All right. Hang onto your socks, guys!"  
Chandler put the little ship down right on that spot  
without a bump.

"Good job, Chandler," the miners cried. Then

they put on their space suits and went outside.

The old world was very strange. The mountain  
was covered with thick beds of snow. Yet it was not  
cold. The sky was pink. Thin blue things floated  
like curls of smoke above their heads.

"Do you think these blue things are all that's  
left of the people?" asked Jones.

"Why don't you ask them?" asked Chandler.

Morga smiled. "I think they're nice." He  
started to play with them. He held out his arms and  
herded them around the same way he herded the  
rocks on Asteroid 7.

"Don't make them mad," said Gold.

"They like it," said Morga.

More of the blue things came to be pushed



*"Look, they're taking me for a ride," Morga said,  
laughing with pure joy.*

along by Morga. Soon he was covered by a giant cloud of soft floating blue things. He started to laugh. "Look at this. They like to play with me!"

Morga's laugh boomed across the warm snow and bounced around the mountain.

Suddenly the thin blue things grew so thick around Morga, they lifted him up into the air.

"Look, they're taking me for a ride," he cried. He was laughing with pure joy.

"Morga! Come down!" yelled Jones.

But it was too late. Morga floated off with the blue things and vanished into the clouds. In another second, all that was left of the big happy miner was the sound of his laugh. Soon that, too, was gone.

"Morga!" cried Jones.

## CHAPTER 7

### Wise Ones

Jones, Chandler, and Gold saw a blue light coming from the mouth of the cave high above them.

“Look! Blue light! Maybe they took Morga to the cave,” cried Gold.

“Let’s go,” said Jones.

They climbed the mountain of warm snow to the mouth of the cave. There was more blue light inside. They could hear a sound of laughter.

“That’s Morga! He’s in this cave,” said Jones. He started running. Chandler and Gold ran to catch

up with him.

“Jones, wait! Don’t go in alone,” called Chandler.

“The light is just around the corner,” said Jones. He ran around the corner. The light was now just around another corner. Jones ran around that corner. Now the light was just around the next corner. Jones ran and ran. Soon he was too tired and had to stop. The others ran up to him.

“You have to stop running, Jones. That light is always just around another corner,” said Gold.

“But I have to find Morga,” said Jones. They saw the blue light again.

“Don’t follow it, Jones,” said Chandler.

Then they heard singing. “*Yippie ti yi yo, git*

*along little dogies . . .*” The singing got louder. Soon they saw Morga and a huge cloud of happy blue things. They were floating toward them, singing.

“Run, Morga! We’ll take you back to the ship,” called Jones.

“It’s O.K., Jones! These are the Wise Ones,” said Morga.

“These floating blue things?” asked Gold.

“Yes! You just have to sing to talk to them. That’s how they talk. They say they know all about the duct bugs, and they can help us,” said Morga.

“Can we trust them?” asked Gold.

“We don’t have a choice,” said Jones.

Chandler started singing. *“In a cavern, in a*

*canyon, on an asteroid in a mine . . .* “

Jones and Gold sang, too. *“Lived a miner, forty-niner, and his daughter, Clementine . . .* “

## CHAPTER 9

### A Touch of Pink

Suddenly, Jones, Morga, Chandler, and Gold found themselves back in the ship. They were flying high above the cloud bed headed into the mountain.

“What happened?” asked Jones.

“We’re in the ship. And I’m flying!” said Chandler. She grabbed the controls. Orion made a big circle and flew out into space. Chandler shoved the ship into gear and sent it into warp drive.

“But what about the Wise Ones? What about the duct bugs? We have to go back!” cried Jones.

“I don’t think so. Look,” said Morga with a big smile. He pointed to the table. There was a solid gold box just like the one they had found in the rock. But this one seemed to glow.

“It’s from the Wise Ones. They told me it’s the cure for duct bugs,” said Morga.

They looked inside it. To their surprise, all they saw was a pile of round pink eggs. They were confused.

“Eggs? Pink eggs?” asked Gold.

“Do we eat them for breakfast or wait for them to hatch?” asked Jones.

Jones heard his wrist phone ring. “Hello, this is Jones.”

It was Joe from the library at Big City. “Jones,

you have to come home, fast. There are duct bugs hatching everywhere.”

“Don’t worry, Joe. We have the cure for duct bugs. We’ll be right there.”

But Joe’s voice shouted, “Jones? I can’t hear you. It’s worse than we thought!” The wrist phone went dead.

Suddenly, Chandler screamed. There were big blue bugs with white spots crawling across the floor.

“What will you bet that’s a duct bug?” said Gold.

“Get it off my ship,” cried Chandler.

Jones picked up the box of eggs. “Are there any directions for these things, Morga?”

Morga put on his glasses and read a note.

“Sure. It says, ‘*A duct bug never flies at night.*’”

“What does that mean?” asked Gold.

The TV screen came on. A man from New City was afraid. He started yelling. “Hello, Gold? If you can hear me, we need help. Everyone is leaving! Civilization is about to end! There are blue and white bugs all over New City and Asteroid 7! Some dumb miner put some duct bug eggs up there!”

“Oops,” said Morga.

“This is terrible,” cried Chandler.

“What are we going to do? We’ll end up being nothing but floating blue things like those poor people on that old world,” said Gold.

"I don't think so," said Morga. He was still reading the directions. He had a twinkle in his eye.

"If you know something, tell us fast," said Jones.

Morga said, "It's hard to read this writing. It doesn't say *duct* at all. It says, *duck*."

Just then, the blue bugs started flying.

"They grew wings," cried Chandler.

"Duck!" cried Gold. The blue bugs flew all around the ship. The miners ducked for cover.

"No, not that kind of duck! *Duck*," said Morga.

The blue bugs were very thick. They were covering up the windows. Chandler could not see to fly.

"What other kind of duck is there?" cried Gold. No one answered. The poor miners were buried in bugs.

But suddenly, there was a new sound. It sounded like snipping and snapping. Then there was a chomp. Soon the pile of bugs was gone. Instead, the space ship was covered with a wild whirl of pink.

The poor miners looked around. Jones reached out and grabbed one of the flying furry pink things.

"What are these things?" asked Gold.

"It's a *bug duck*," cried Morga. "That's what the writing says. *bug ducks*, not duct bugs!"

"Of course! Look! They are hatching from the pink eggs," said Chandler.



“Look at those things hatch! Each egg must have a zillion ducks,” cried Gold.

“And look at them eat! All the duct bugs are gone,” cried Morga.

“All we have to do is take some of these ducks to headquarters in New City and to our mine! We can save everyone,” cried Jones.

“Hang on to your socks, guys! First stop, New City. We have to tell Joe,” said Chandler. She steered the little ship toward the moon.

“When we’re done, I’m throwing a party for those Wise Ones,” said Gold.

Morga started singing. *Yippie ti yi yo, git along little duckies, I know that our asteroids will be your new home . . .*”

