

The Space Pirates

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CHAPTER 1

The Flying Lesson

Rayk Hazen led an exciting life. He was a guide to the Near-Star Planets. No one knew this part of the cosmos better. He had explored these planets with his father. Now people asked him to lead them. Every day was a big adventure.

But today would be dull. He was giving a flying lesson. The Earth judge at the Near-Star Court had hired him. His daughter, Jan, wanted to learn to fly. Then she could get her Space Pilot License.

Rayk had tried to get out of this job. "You're the pilot who flew Earthlings to Planet Leem. That's why they elected you their judge. Why don't you teach her?" he had asked.

Judge Clair shook his head. "I just don't have the time," he had said.

Rayk knew the work at the Near-Star Court was important. So he had agreed to the boring job.

Now it was time for the lesson. Rayk and Jan sat in the cabin of the Sky Roamer. He pointed out the switches and the displays.

"Five computers handle our flying data. You need to learn their commands," Rayk said. He tried not to yawn.

Jan reached for the control stick. "I know all

that. It's in space flight manuals. Turn on the power. I'll take the Sky Roamer up," she said.

That shook Rayk out of his boredom. "Not my ship! Lift offs and landings are hard. First, I'm taking you out of Planet Nod's gravity belt. The weather can be choppy here. Space is much smoother. You can start there," he told her.

Jan frowned at him. "Stop treating me like a beginner. I know a lot about space flight," she snapped.

Rayk just wanted this lesson to be over. He pushed the power switch, and the Sky Roamer blasted off. Soon Planet Nod was far below.

Rayk and Jan rode in silence. Both of them stared straight ahead.

At last the Sky Roamer pitched out of Planet Nod's gravity. They bounced around for a few minutes. Then the ride was smooth. They were in space.

Rayk adjusted some switches. One sent the power to Jan's side. "O.K., let's see what you know about flying," he said.

Jan poked her nose in the air. "Do you think you can trust me?" she snapped.

"That's what we'll find out," Rayk snapped back.

Jan glared at him. But she grasped the control stick and started flying.

Jan was doing a good job. Rayk had to admit it. He leaned back. Maybe this lesson would turn

out all right after all.

Time went by. Rayk nodded off. Then he felt the Sky Roamer swerve. His head shot up. "Where are you going?" he demanded.

Jan pointed out the window. "I wanted a better look at that blue planet. What's its name?" she asked.

"That's Splaz. It's the only planet that's all covered with water. Humans live there. But they live under the water. They have gills like fish," Rayk told her.

"Oh, yes. I met Splaz's judge at the Court. He wore a water bubble," Jan said.

"That's right. We need air masks to go into the water. And they need water masks to come out into

the air," Rayk told her.

Suddenly Jan put the Sky Roamer into a dive. She headed straight toward Splaz.

"Pull up. We don't want to get too close," Rayk ordered.

"Why not? I want a better look at Splaz," Jan said.

"The King of Splaz can't control all of his people. There are space pirates living in those dark waters. They attack spacecraft that get too close," Rayk told her.

Jan glanced at him. "You're kidding me," she said.

"No, I'm not. Pull up!" Rayk ordered.

Jan frowned. "I'm trying. But the Sky Roamer

has no power. I think it's stalling out," she said.

"The Sky Roamer never stalls out. It's your flying," Rayk insisted.

"Oh, yeah, try it yourself," Jan told him.

Rayk glared at Jan and flipped back the power switch. He pulled on the control stick. Nothing happened. Where was the Sky Roamer's burst of speed?

"Look! Who's that?" gasped Jan. She pointed to the rear view monitor.

A spaceship hovered behind them. A skull and crossbones were painted on it.

Rayk groaned. "It's space pirates!" he said.

CHAPTER 2

Boarded by Pirates

“Space pirates! Are they after us?” gasped Jan.

Rayk gave her a grim look. “That’s right,” he told her.

“You’re the ace space pilot. Get us out of here,” Jan said.

“I’m trying. But it won’t be easy. The pirates have a magnet gun locked on us. It’s pulling us back,” Rayk said.

He scanned the displays. Maybe there was one chance. But it was dangerous.

“Hold on! This might work. Or we will crash straight into the pirate spacecraft,” Rayk said.

Jan nodded. “Go for it,” she said.

Rayk cut the power for a second. Then he pushed it back on at full force and moved to the left. That broke the magnet lock. They went into a spin.

“You’ve done it!” Jan called.

Rayk grinned and straightened up the Sky Roamer. That’s when he spotted two more ships above them.

“They’re diving down,” Jan shouted.

A blue blaze of light lit up the cabin. Rayk struggled with the controls. That shot had almost hit them. He tried to change course.

“Crash!” came an ear-splitting sound! Once again the cabin burst into a blue glare. This time the Sky Roamer began to shake.

Rayk knew they had been hit. He glanced at the displays. They showed what he already knew. The Sky Roamer’s power was gone.

Jan pointed to the rear monitor again. “The first ship is back,” she said.

Now Rayk could feel the magnet pull. He had no power to fight it. Slowly they were being forced back.

“What can we do?” Jan asked.

“Not much. The pirates will steal everything. Quick! Take off that necklace and ring. Hide them in my map box,” Rayk told her.

“Crunch,” came a new sound. Rayk knew that was the Sky Roamer bumping against the pirate craft. The other two ships closed in on each side.

The Sky Roamer’s tele-monitor flashed bright red. Rayk knew the pirates had control of it. Now the pirate captain flashed on the screen. He wore a black wet suit. It looked like a sea captain’s uniform with a skull and crossbones on his chest. A water bubble covered his face.

“Ahoy, there. This is Captain Urch. Open your hatch. My men are coming aboard,” he ordered. His voice gurgled as he spoke.

“What a weirdo! Do we have to do what he says?” Jan asked.

Rayk nodded and tripped the latch. “The

pirates have us surrounded,” he said.

Two pirates rushed into the cabin. One was tall and thin. He had a wooden leg. The other was short and fat. He held a computer in his hands. Both wore water bubbles, too. Their wet suits were painted like pirate costumes.

“I am Torf and this is Gomy. Stand aside,” the tall pirate ordered.

Rayk moved toward Jan. He took her hand and pulled her back.

Torf walked up to the front. He looked at the displays. “This is a Kordic Energy Plus One Spacecraft. It’s in good condition except for one hit,” he said.

Gomy pushed the keys on the computer. “One



Two pirates rushed into the cabin.

Kordic Energy Plus One Spacecraft discounted 15% for one hit. It's worth 6 million sarz," he said.

Torf called out names of the things in the cabin. Gomy punched the computer. They went to the cargo bay. Rayk had much more stored there.

"Another million sarz," Gomy said.

Torf came back to the cabin. He called into the tele-monitor. "The value is 7 million sarzs plus 2 humans," he said.

Captain Urch appeared on the monitor. His grin showed through his water bubble. "Good catch, mateys! We'll take it home," he called.

CHAPTER 3

The Trip to Splaz

Rayk watched Torf and Gomy leave. Then he rushed back to his seat and switched on his radio. "This is Sky Roamer calling Near-Star Air Patrol. We need help!" he called.

"Ho! Ho! Ho! We'll give you help. Wait until we get to the lair," a voice answered.

Rayk shook his head and looked up at Jan. "That was Captain Urch. The pirates have control of our air waves. We can't get a message out," he told her.

Jan dropped down into her seat. "What will happen now?" she asked.

"I don't know. The Sky Roamer has no power. So we can't try to escape. I might be able to go out and fix it. There are tools and a spacesuit in the cargo bay. But I can't do that with pirates all around," Rayk said.

Jan pointed to the rear view monitor. "Look, that spaceship is leaving," she said.

Rayk nodded. "That's the lead ship. I think Captain Urch is in it," he told her.

The spaceship circled around. Then it backed toward the Sky Roamer. It stopped just in front. Two pirates came out of the airlock. They wore spacesuits. Long cables floated behind them.

"What are they doing?" Jan asked.

The spacemen slowly made their way hand over hand. They clamped the cables to the Sky Roamer.

"The pirates are going to tow us," Rayk said.

The spacemen went back in. Now the pirates' spacecraft started up. There was a tug on the Sky Roamer. Then they were moving.

Planet Splaz got bigger and bigger. They headed straight toward it.

"You're getting your wish. This is a much better view of Splaz," Rayk said.

Jan looked sad. "I'm sorry, Rayk," she told him.

Rayk patted her hand. "It's O.K. I've been in

tight spots before. We have to think of a way to get out of this," he said.

Jan gave him a grateful look. She glanced down at the water planet. "Where are we going to land?" she asked.

"I don't know. There is no land. Dad and I were here once. We searched for the spaceship Lunta. It went down with the Jo Co jewels aboard. That was six years ago. Its flight path was over this planet. But we didn't find it. Our maps and gear are still here on the Sky Roamer," Rayk said.

"Where did you land?" Jan asked.

"The Splaz king has a landing area. It's built on floats. We took a boat from there," Rayk said.

Splaz was close now. They were headed

straight for the blue water. Then a strip of white appeared. It looked like a platform.

"Is that the king's landing area?" Jan asked.

Rayk shook his head. "The pirates wouldn't dare land there. This is much smaller," he said.

Captain Urch's spaceship slowed down. It landed on the platform. The Sky Roamer coasted in behind him. The other two pirate spaceships landed, too.

Rayk's tele-monitor clicked on. There was Captain Urch's face again. "We've landed. Prepare to go down."

There was the sound of machines. Now glass walls rolled up both sides of the platform. They met in the middle and clamped together.

“We’re in an air bubble. This platform is really a submarine. They’re taking us below,” Jan gasped.

Rayk nodded. He reached in his map box. His father’s old maps were inside. There was one of Splaz. He studied it. He could see this was one of the deepest parts of the Splaz ocean.

At first the water around the submarine was a pale blue. It was filled with beautiful fish. Then it turned darker. Big shark-like fish gnashed at the bubble.

The submarine went deeper. All light was gone now. Darkness surrounded them. Then a blaze of light came from below. Rayk knew this was the pirates’ lair.

CHAPTER 4

The Pirates’ Lair

Rayk peered down at the light. A huge glass bubble sat on the ocean floor. It looked the size of a city block with buildings inside.

“I see some humans swimming so there’s water inside. That bubble doesn’t hold air. Why do they need it?” Jan asked.

“It holds back the water pressure. The ocean is very deep here. The weight would crush a human. The glass bubble protects them,” Rayk told her.

“This is a good place for pirates to hide. The

king wouldn't find them here," Jan said.

Rayk nodded. He took a reading of their location and wrote it on the map. The king would like to have this. But they would have to escape first. Rayk didn't know if that was possible.

The sub that the Sky Roamer was in came to a stop beside the bubble. The hatches of the other spaceships flung open. The pirates rushed out. They circled the Sky Roamer. Captain Urch pushed past them. He shouted something to Torf.

Rayk heard the Sky Roamer's hatch open. Pirates rushed inside. They grabbed jackets, tools, compasses, and anything in the cabin.

"They only missed one thing. That's my map box," Rayk whispered to Jan.

Torf hobbled forward. He pointed a sword at them. "Come along. The captain wants you in the great hall," he said.

He handed them two wet suits, air masks, and oxygen tanks. "Get dressed," he ordered.

Rayk pulled on a wet suit. Then he took a quick look at the Sky Roamer. The hit didn't look bad. Rayk was sure he could fix it.

"Follow me," Torf ordered.

The pirate limped over to the side of the sub. There was a slide down into the watery lair. Torf slid down it. He pulled off his water mask on the way.

Rayk slid down after Torf. The cold water rushed up around him. But the wet suit kept him

warm. He paddled around and waited for Jan. She splashed down beside him. Then they followed Torf. He swam toward the biggest building in the bubble.

Singing and laughing came from inside. The pirates were celebrating. Rayk heard Captain Urch's voice. It was one of the loudest.

"We've sent for Trader Bert. He'll buy our catch," the captain shouted.

Torf waved Rayk and Jan inside. The room was filled with pirates. They all crowded around a big table. Rayk's things were on it.

It was easy to pick out Captain Urch because of his suit. But he looked different without his water mask. His eyes had a greedy gleam, and his



Jan glanced at Rayk. "Are they going to sell us?" she gasped.

mouth twisted into a grin.

“Ha! Here are our prisoners. Trader Bert will want to look you over, too. Swim up on the table,”

Captain Urch ordered.

The pirates laughed. They pounded the table.

“Money, money,” they chanted.

Jan glanced at Rayk. “Are they going to sell us?” she gasped.

Rayk nodded. “That’s right,” he answered.

CHAPTER 5

Bargaining with the Pirate

A man swam through the door. He wore an air mask, too. So he wasn’t from Splaz.

“Welcome, Trader. You saw the spaceship. This is the rest of the loot,” Captain Urch said.

Trader Bert swam up on the table. Rayk got a good look at him. This was Bert Valter. He owned stores on many planets. So he bought stolen objects. No wonder he could sell things cheaply.

“Well, what do you say?” the captain asked.

“I’ll take everything except the humans,”

Trader Bert told him.

“Are you sure? Both look very strong and healthy,” Captain Urch said.

Trader Bert shook his head. “No one buys humans these days,” he said.

Captain Urch grumbled and turned to Torf. “Take them to the fish bowl,” he ordered.

“Fish bowl! What’s that?” Rayk gasped.

Captain Urch pointed to an air-filled bowl. It hung from the ceiling. “We keep prisoners there. Visitors come here sometimes. Maybe one will buy you,” he said.

Rayk could see many people inside the bowl. They came from different Near-Star Planets.

“Don’t you dare put us in there!” Jan called.

“That’s right. You need us. My spaceship is damaged but I can fix it. Then you could get more money for it,” Rayk added.

Captain Urch’s eyes lit up. “That’s right. A repaired ship is worth more. Where are my mechanics? Can you fix that spaceship?” he asked.

A pirated floated forward. “No, that’s a Kordic Energy Plus One. We’ve never worked on one of those,” he called.

“The fixed ship would be worth much more. But where would you get the tools and parts?” Trader Bert asked Rayk.

“They’re in the cargo bay,” he answered.

“Then that settles it. Torf, take pilot boy back to the sub. He is going to fix his spaceship,”

Captain Urch ordered.

“Wait! Jan must come along. I need her help,”

Rayk insisted.

“O.K., bring the girl along, too,” Captain Urch added.

Torf led the way. Rayk and Jan followed. They swam side by side. Captain Urch and Trader Bert came along behind.

Rayk pulled himself back into the sub. He pulled off the air mask and oxygen tank. It was good to see the Sky Roamer again.

“I don’t know what will happen next. But it’s better than the fish bowl,” Rayk whispered.

Jan nodded. “We’ll think of something,” she said.

They went down into the cargo bay. Rayk handed tools to Jan. Captain Urch and Trapper Bert came along. They poked through everything.

“I’ll buy all of this,” Trader Bert said.

Captain Urch grinned. “Good. We caught them above Splaz. This was aboard. I wonder why,” he said.

Rayk looked up. The captain was pointing to diving gear. It was what he and his father had used six years ago.

A thought crossed Rayk’s mind. Maybe it would work. “We had planned to dive for the Jo Co treasure,” he said.

Captain Urch’s head shot up. “What do you know about the Jo Co treasure?” he demanded.

“Jan and I found some of it last month. We were going back for more. Two of the pieces are in the map box. Free us and we’ll take you to where the rest is,” Rayk said.

“Show us the two pieces!” the captain ordered.

Rayk brought down the map box. And Jan pulled out her ring and necklace. There were gems in both. They sparkled.

“It says JC on the back. That stands for Jo Co,” she told them.

Greed shone in Captain Urch’s eyes. “Hurry! Fix the ship, pilot boy. Then we’ll go get the Jo Co treasure,” he told them.

CHAPTER 6

Searching for Treasure

Rayk fixed the Sky Roamer. Then he went back to the cabin to check the displays. They looked good.

His eyes fell on the radio. Did the pirates still have control of it? Most of them were having a party. Rayk flipped it on. He gave his name and the location of the pirate lair. Then he added the place they would search for the Jo Co treasure.

“Hurry, pilot boy!” Captain Urch shouted.

Rayk snapped off the switch. Would anyone get his message? He doubted it.

A much smaller sub was waiting. Jan, Torf, Trader Bert, and the captain were inside. So were Rayk's gear and map box. Rayk climbed in. And they whizzed off.

Captain Urch studied Rayk's map. "This looks like the Rok Shelf. That's a shallow part of the ocean," he said.

"That's right. See that X. The shelf drops off into deep water. That's where the Lunta went down. It's in the deep water. But some of the treasure spilled on the shelf," Rayk told him.

They drove for hours. At last Captain Urch stopped the small sub. "We're at the edge of the shelf," he called.

Trader Bert peered out. "Maybe this is a

trick," he said.

Captain Urch's laugh sent chills down Rayk's back. "We'll soon see. I'm sending these two out. They had better bring back some treasure. Or we'll feed them to the sharks," he said.

"We'll bring some back. But you must keep your word. Jan and I go free," Rayk told him.

"Sure, pilot boy. We'll keep our word. Won't we, Trader?" Captain Urch asked. He winked at him.

Trader Bert grinned. "Sure," he said.

Rayk and Jan put on their air masks and dropped down to the sandy shelf. This water was warmer. They swam over to the edge. Now the water looked deep and dark. Tall spikes of rocks

jutted up.

"There are caves along the edge. Dad and I left a box of supplies in one. We had hoped to come back. But then Dad got sick. Maybe we can find the box. We can say it came from the Lunta. Maybe that will fool Captain Urch," Rayk said.

They started to search. There were many caves. At last Rayk found the box.

"I have something, too," Jan said. She pulled an ankle bracelet off her foot. It was gold with a small diamond. The letters JC were on it, too.

"Great! Let's go back to the sub," Rayk told her.

Captain Urch grunted at the sight of the box. But then he saw Jan's ankle bracelet. His eyes lit

up. "They really have found the Jo Co treasure. Come on, Torf. Let's go find the rest!" he exclaimed.

Torf searched around. He found a folded net and followed.

"I'll wait here," Trader Bert said.

Captain Urch splashed down beside Rayk and Jan. "Where did you find that bracelet?" he demanded.

Rayk swam along the edge. He pointed to a cave. "It was in there," he said.

Captain Urch rushed inside. He thrashed around. "Torf, bring a water torch. It's dark in here," he shouted.

Torf dropped the net and swam back to the

boat. Rayk grabbed the net and hid it behind him. Soon Torf returned with the torch and paddled to the cave.

Rayk handed one end of the net to Jan. He took the other end and pulled it across the cave door.

“We’ve found the treasure,” he called.

Captain Urch and Torf rushed out. They swam right into the net.

“We’ve got them,” Jan yelled.

“No you don’t,” a voice called. There stood Trader Bert. A gun was in his hands.

CHAPTER 7

The Rescue

Now everyone was back in the sub. Only Rayk and Jan sat in the net now. And their air masks were off.

Trader Bert still held the gun. “I thought I had seen this kid before. You were hunting for treasure. So I turned on the radio. It’s a good thing I did. They were reporting a missing spaceship. It belongs to Rayk Hazen,” he said.

Captain Urch pointed at Rayk. “Is that the pilot boy’s name?” he asked.

Trader Bert nodded. “He is a guide for the

Near-Star Planets. And he had a passenger in the spaceship. The girl's name was Jan Clair. Get it? Her initials are J.C.," he said.

Captain Urch stared at them for a minute. Then his eyes clouded with anger. "That wasn't the Jo Co jewelry. It belonged to her," he growled.

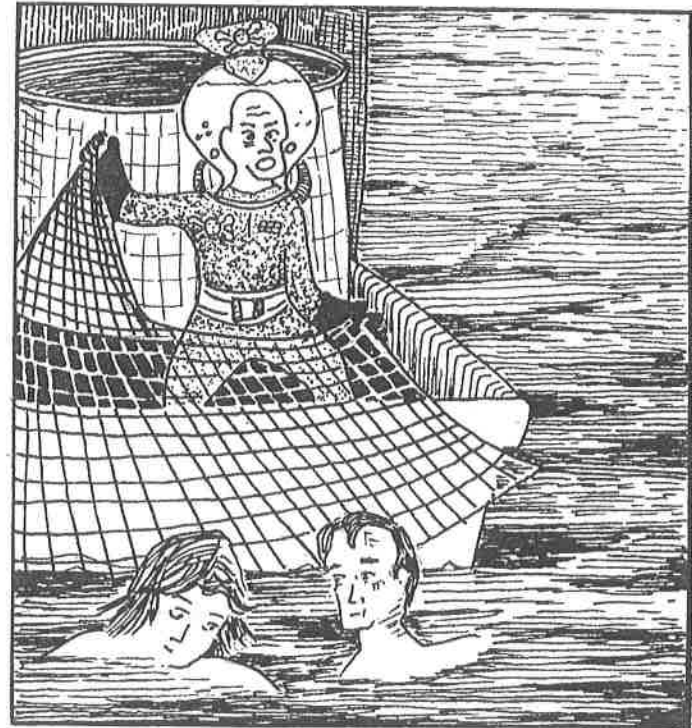
"They nearly fooled us," Trader Bert said.

Captain Urch jumped up. He grabbed the net and shook Rayk and Jan out into the water. "Go feed the sharks!" he shouted.

"You shouldn't have done that. The girl's father is a judge at the Near-Star Court. He'd pay big money for them," Trader Bert said.

"Then I'll go after them," the captain said.

Rayk and Jan scrambled upward. They



Captain Urch grabbed the net and shook Rayk and Jan out into the water. "Go feed the sharks!" he shouted.

splashed out of the water and gasped the air.

A rumbling sound came from below. Then the sub crashed out of the water beside them. The captain poked his head out of the door and grinned. "Get in," he ordered.

Rayk thought he saw a boat off in the distance. Maybe it would come to help them. "Swim back and forth. We can turn tighter corners than they can," Rayk said.

Jan nodded. She took a deep breath and plunged forward.

Captain Urch shook his fist at them. "Come back here. You can't outrun my sub," he roared.

They swam away. Captain Urch's sub chased after them. They went back and forth. Rayk could

tell Jan was tiring. He was, too. His throat felt raw and there was a roaring in his ears. It got louder. Was Captain Urch's sub coming down on him?

"Look!" Jan shouted.

Rayk glanced up. The sky was filled with planes. One headed toward them. Rayk saw it was a pontoon plane. The others roared after Captain Urch's sub.

The pontoon plane landed beside them. A man stepped out on the pontoon. He wore a water mask. Rayk knew the uniform. This man was from the king's navy.

"Are you Rayk Hazen?" he asked.

Rayk nodded. He and Jan clung to the pontoon and gasped for air.

“We got your message. Our navy found the pirates’ lair. We captured them. And we’ll get Captain Urch, too. The Sky Rover is waiting on the king’s landing area. The king is there, too. He wants to thank you,” the sailor said.

Later that night Rayk and Jan were in the Sky Roamer again. They headed home.

Jan turned to Rayk. A twinkle was in her eyes. “I never did get my lesson,” she said.

Rayk smiled at her. “I’d give you another lesson. But let’s make it less exciting next time,” he said.

