

ESL DEPT.

**The Bird People
of Planet Ejie**

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CHAPTER 1

Prof's Project

The Sky Roamer blasted upward. And Rayk Hazen sat at the controls. His passengers were Judge Clair and his daughter, Jan. They wanted to visit an old friend who lived in space. His name was Prof Quill.

Rayk had heard of him. Prof was from Earth. He had bought a used space station and had it towed to space above the Near-Star Planets. No one knew what he was working on. But he had been there for five years.

"Prof called this week. He wanted us to come

up to look at his project. He used to study lost tribes. But who knows what he's studying now," Judge Clair wondered.

Jan's eyes twinkled. "His projects are always fun. We had a great adventure once on Earth. Prof had us climb down in a cave. We found the remains of an old tribe," she said.

Rayk studied Jan's face. It was filled with excitement. He liked her smile and the way she liked to try new things.

The Sky Roamer zoomed on. They docked at the sky lab a few hours later.

Prof Quill was waiting. His smile showed how glad he was to see them.

Judge Clair turned to Rayk. "Prof, I want you

to meet Rayk Hazen," he said.

Prof held out his hand. "I knew your father. He was the Earth pilot who discovered Near-Star. No one knew these planets better. Did you ever explore with him?" he asked.

Rayk nodded. "All the time," he said.

"Did you explore Piyer Ridge on Planet Ejie?" Prof asked.

"We went to Ejie many times. But no one has ever gone to Piyer Ridge. It's a 300 mile line of straight up and down peaks. There's no spot big enough to land a plane. And it can't be reached by land. The garvi have taken care of that," Rayk said.

"What's the garvi?" Jan asked.

"They are the most dangerous animals in the

universe. They have the size and tusks of the dinosaur and the speed and claws of a tiger. They roam the middle slopes of Piyer Ridge. No one has ever gotten past them," Rayk told her.

Prof cut in. "What about the bird people? Have you heard of them?" he asked.

Rayk nodded. "People from Ejie tell stories of people with wings. They are supposed to live on the top of Piyer Ridge. But there has never been any proof," he said.

Prof's eyes gleamed behind his glasses. "Follow me, everyone. I have something to show you," he told them.

They went with him into a room. One side was a glass window. A huge telescope pointed out of it.

Tables sat on both sides. They were covered with photos.

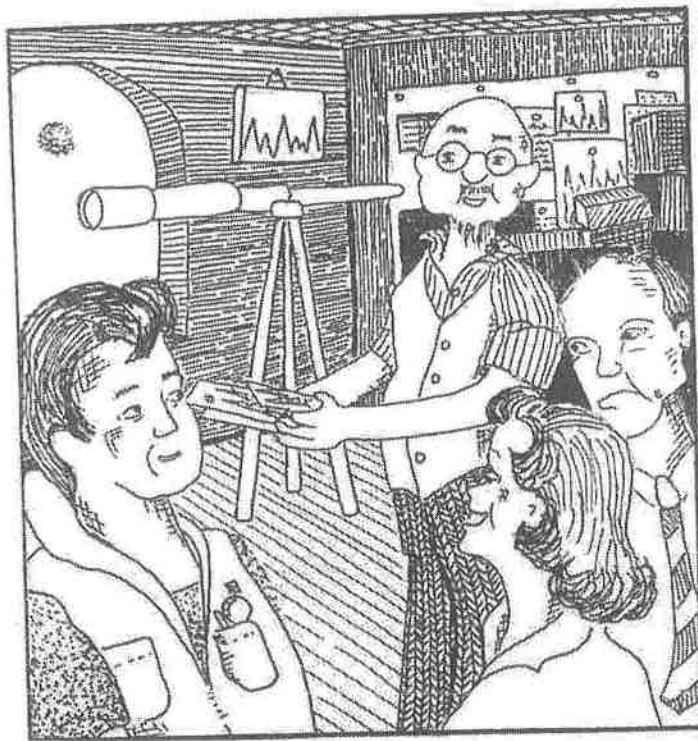
Prof pushed a picture in front of Rayk. "It took five years. But I found them," he said.

Rayk stared at it. The picture showed the tops of jagged mountains. Thin rock towers sat on the top of each peak. Towers like this had to have been built by people.

"Here is a blow-up of the birds flying near there. Take a good look. You'll see they are humans with wings," Prof told them.

Rayk was surprised. "Then the bird people of Ejie really do exist!" he exclaimed.

Prof nodded. "I intend to explore their world. Do you want to go along?" he asked.



Prof nodded. "I intend to explore their world. Do you want to come along?" he asked.

"You must be joking. Piyer Ridge can't be reached. Rayk has just told you why," Judge Clair told him.

Prof gave a pleading look. "I've spent five years. Isn't there some way that I can get there?" he asked.

Jan grabbed Rayk's arm. "You can help him. Can't you, Rayk?" she asked.

"Stop begging, Jan. Rayk knows what is possible," Judge Clair told her.

Rayk had no desire to explore Piyer Ridge. It was too dangerous. Still he felt sorry for Prof. And he wanted to be a hero to Jan.

"Let's look at all of your pictures. Maybe we can find a way," he said.

They studied the pictures. One showed a much higher tower. A shelf came out from the door at its bottom. Rayk thought it might be a patio.

“That’s not big enough to land a plane. But a copter could drop us there. And I know a pilot. He lives in Ejie City,” Rayk said.

Now everyone was smiling. Prof shook Rayk’s hand. Even Judge Clair looked excited about the trip.

Jan gave Rayk a special look. It made him feel great. But Rayk knew she would be mad soon. He was going to tell her she’d have to stay home. This trip was just too dangerous.

CHAPTER 2

Going to Piyer Ridge

Rayk landed at the Ejie City sky base. The Clairs and Prof stayed in the Sky Roamer. And he went in search of his father’s old friend, Slim.

Flying was the man’s love. He was never far from his copter. That’s where Rayk found him now. Slim was tinkering on the motor.

“Hi, Slim, what are you doing?” Rayk called.

Slim raised his head. His eyes lit up. “Why, it’s Rayk Hazen. It sure is good to see you,” he said.

Rayk was surprised to see how much Slim had aged. But then, he must be near seventy.

“It’s good to see you, too. Are you keeping busy?” Rayk asked.

Slim’s smile faded. “I don’t get much work these days. Everyone’s afraid to trust an old pilot,” he said.

“I have a job. How would you like to lower my group onto Piyer Ridge?” Rayk asked.

“Piyer Ridge! Are you crazy?” Slim gasped.

“Maybe I am. But we’ve got to do it,” Rayk said. He told Slim about Prof’s project.

Sam listened quietly. “So the stories are true. The bird people do exist,” he said.

Rayk nodded. “Yes, they do. I’ve seen Prof’s

pictures,” he told him.

It was clear that Slim was interested. “What a wonderful world they must have! Sure, I’ll take you. I’d like to see where they live,” he said.

Rayk hurried back to the Sky Roamer. He took Prof, Judge Clair, and Jan to meet Slim.

“Rayk said you were a copter pilot. But this is a plane,” Jan said to Slim.

He grinned. “It’s both. I invented this craft for two jobs. It starts out as a plane. But the wings can fold in. And a rotating blade pops out,” he said.

“Can it do that in the air?” Jan asked.

Slim nodded. “Are you going on the trip to Piyer Ridge, too?” he asked her.

“No, she isn’t. It’s too dangerous,” Rayk said

with a frown.

Jan tossed her head. "May I look inside your plane, Slim?" she asked.

"Sure," he said.

They made plans for the trip to Piyer Ridge. This took hours. And they were all tired. But that night it was hard for everyone to sleep. What might lie ahead of them on Planet Ejie?

The next morning Rayk, Judge Clair, and Prof met at the plane.

"Where's Jan?" Rayk asked. He thought she would see them off.

"She went shopping," the judge said.

Rayk tried to hide his disappointment. "Hey, Slim, we're ready," he called.

The plane's door was ajar. But Slim wasn't inside. Rayk looked around. Then he spotted the pilot. Slim was across the field. Now he hurried toward them.

"Sorry, I'm late. I got a call. Someone wanted to meet me at the office. But that person never came. So let's go," he said.

Soon they were in the air. The land around Ejie City was flat. But then it got rougher. They saw mountains in the distance.

"That's Piyer Ridge," Slim called. He headed that way.

Now they were above the mountains. Rayk stared down at the sharp rocky peaks. They looked like needles sticking high into the sky.

Slim flew on. He used Prof's map. The tallest peaks were below them now.

Prof watched through his field glasses. "There are the houses," he shouted.

Rayk had been watching through his glasses, too. He spotted the tall tower with the patio. "This is it," he told Slim.

Slim slowed the plane. Then he pulled on a lever. A big blade popped out above them. It began to rotate. The craft's wings folded in at the same time. Now they were in a copter.

"That's amazing," the judge said.

Prof still held the glasses to his eyes. He was so excited that his hands shook. "Look, the bird people are here to welcome us," he said.

Rayk pulled up his glasses again. Prof was right. Bird people sat on top of their houses. They were watching. One stood on the patio. His feathers were the brightest of all. And a gold band sat on his head. Maybe he was the leader.

"Listen, everyone. Here is the plan. We can't tell if they're friendly. So Slim will lower me down to talk to the birdman on the patio. I have a radio. I can tell you if it's safe. Then you can come down. If it isn't, Slim is to fly out in a hurry. I'll dangle below until he can pull me up," Rayk told them.

"Good luck, Rayk," Judge Clair said.

"Thanks," Rayk said. He needed all the luck he could get.

CHAPTER 3

The Landing

Most copters had closed plastic lowering chairs. But Slim's didn't. It was an old open harness.

Rayk buckled himself in and swung out. He glanced down. The tall peak jutted up toward him. And around it was the blue haze of a deep bottomless cavern.

His heart started pounding. And dizziness flooded over him. Rayk clung to the harness. "Calm down," he told himself.

The dizziness passed. And Rayk could see that

Slim had lowered him several feet. He was dropping down beside the tall peak. Yes, there was a rock structure built on top. Stones from the mountain formed a round tower.

Rayk went lower and lower. He was nearing the patio. The birdman still stood there. He wore a leather suit. And his feathers glistened in the light. Rayk couldn't see anyone else.

"I hope he's friendly," Rayk said to himself.

Now Rayk's feet touched the patio. It felt good to stand on something solid. Still, he knew this was the most dangerous time. What if the birdman was unfriendly? Rayk pulled the radio close to his mouth just in case.

The birdman stood very still. He stared at

Rayk. Then he moved forward. His wings hung at his side, and he didn't smile.

Rayk caught his breath. He started to talk in the Ejie language.

The birdman cut in. "What's your name?" he demanded.

Rayk couldn't believe his ears. "You speak my language," he gasped.

The birdman stopped a few feet away. "Yes, I do. My name is Ozen. What is yours? Why have you come to Birdland?" he asked.

Rayk told his name. Then he explained about Prof's project. "May we stay and visit for a week?" he asked.

Ozen looked up at the copter. "How many are

in your party?" he asked.

"There are three," Rayk told him.

"What about your pilot?" Ozen asked.

"Slim will go back to the sky base at Ejie City. He will pick us up in a week," Rayk told him.

At last Ozen smiled. "My people and I welcome you," he said.

Rayk sighed in relief. He stepped out of the harness and clicked on his radio. "It's O.K. to come down," he told them.

The first one to come down was Prof. His eyes darted all around. He started taking notes right away.

Judge Clair landed next. His face was pale. He walked around the patio to steady himself.

Ozen pointed up in the air. "You said three were in your party. But I see four," he said.

Rayk glanced up. The harness hung below the copter. And Jan was in it. She must have stowed away in the plane this morning.

"Slim get her back inside," Rayk called into the radio.

"She won't come in. I can't fly back to the base with her down there," Slim answered.

"It's dangerous. But we'll have to let her come down," Judge Clair said.

Rayk nodded and took a deep breath. "Lower her slowly. And be careful," he told Slim.

Soon Jan stood beside them. She was grinning. Rayk glared at her. He was angry. And yet he was

glad to see her, too.

"How did you get on the plane?" he asked.

"It was simple. I sent a message to Slim. It said someone wanted to see him. I slipped in the plane while he was gone," she told him.

Up above, the copter changed back into a plane. Slim dipped his wings and roared away.

Rayk saw something else in the sky. It was two birdmen with spotted wings. They left their houses and flew in the same direction.

Another person saw the birdmen, too. It was Ozen. He leaned against the tower and watched them go. A smile was on his lips.

CHAPTER 4

A Meeting

Ozen turned and spread his feathers. He walked around the patio. Rayk got a better look at his wings. They weren't part of his body. Instead, they were special sleeves that fit over his arms.

The birdman's movements must have been a signal. Others began flying. Soon the sky was filled with bird people. They landed in groups of two's or three's. There were men, women, and children. Each dropped a feather at the feet of Rayk's group and went into the tower.

"My people come to welcome you. Those feathers are gifts," Ozen told them.

Jan waited until Ozen had turned away. Then she leaned over to Rayk. "Maybe they're going to make us some wings," she whispered.

Rayk thought of the cavern. He hoped not.

Ozen spoke again. "All of my flock are inside. It is now time for us to enter," he said.

Rayk wasn't sure that was true. The birdmen with the spotted wings hadn't landed yet. He glanced up at the sky. No one was up there. Maybe they would come later.

The tower was narrow and very tall. The roof must have been ten stories high. It was made of some kind of skin that let light streak in.

The room was buzzing with voices as they walked in. Rayk looked up. The bird people were above them. They sat on shelves that circled the walls. There must have been hundreds of them.

Ozen led Rayk and his party to the middle of the floor. A hush filled the tower. And the bird people peered down on them.

This was a strange moment. Rayk saw Jan shiver. He understood. A cold chill ran down his backbone, too.

Ozen addressed the bird people. "Our people have lived on Piyer Ridge for a thousand years. These are our first visitors. We expected this might happen one day. Does everyone remember what to do to make them feel welcome?" he asked.



A hush filled the tower. And the bird people peered down at them.

"Yes!" voices called. The sound echoed against the walls. And it was deafening.

Ozen raised his arms for quiet. "One of our visitors has searched for us for five years. Let us hear his story," he said.

Prof told about hearing stories of the birdmen of Ejie. Then he described his lab and telescope. "At last I found you," he added.

"Did you work alone? Or was your work shared with others?" Ozen asked.

"I was just one man in a lab in the sky. My friends here are the only people who know," he said.

Slim knew, too, thought Rayk. But he didn't say anything.

Ozen spoke up again. "Tell us about your friends. Who are they?" he asked.

Prof introduced Judge Clair, Jan, and Rayk. He told a little about each of them.

Once more Ozen looked up at the bird people. "We are very lucky. Our visitors sound like good people. We can be glad that they're the ones who found us," he said.

"Yes," the bird people called again.

"We must make sure they like it here. That's important," Ozen went on. It almost sounded as if he were preaching.

Rayk couldn't believe Ozen was so serious. Why did he care that much? They were leaving in a week.

CHAPTER 5

Birdland

Jan had been right. Rayk and his group were being measured for wings.

“You’ll be flying in a day or two,” Ozen told them.

Rayk looked down into the deep cavern below them. “Flying can wait until next week. That’s when I get back to my ship,” he said.

Jan looked up at him and laughed. “Why, Rayk Hazen. Don’t tell me that a space pilot is afraid of heights,” she teased.

“I just like a strong space craft around me.”

Rayk told her.

“You’ll need wings here,” Ozen said.

“Why? Can’t we just stay at this tower?” Rayk asked.

Ozen shook his head. “This is our meeting place. No one sleeps here. I’m taking you to the roost. That’s where you’ll stay until you can fly,” he said.

Ozen led them to one side of the patio. It was connected to another tower by a rope. And a chair dangled from it. Rayk groaned. He knew the same deep cavern was below.

“So this is where we’ll live all week,” Jan said.

Ozen shook his head. "No, you'll live here two days. After that your new house will be ready," he told them.

He nodded toward one of the empty peaks. Birdmen gathered around it. Some flew in with rocks. Others began laying them in a circle on top.

"Don't build us a house. We'll only be here a week," Judge Clair told him.

"My people want to build it. You're our first guests in a thousand years. Now, get in, Rayk. You're the first to go across," Ozen said.

Rayk gritted his teeth and climbed in. His heart was thumping. But he didn't want anyone to know, most of all Jan.

A motor started and pulled him across. This

surprised Rayk. He had expected to do that by pulling hand over hand. These bird people were more advanced than he had thought.

Judge Clair was the last to come across. He still looked puzzled. "Building us a house doesn't make sense," he said.

Rayk nodded. He had to agree.

The roost was home to all who couldn't fly. That included the old, the sick, and the very young. So Prof had people to talk to.

That night Prof told them what he learned. "Garvi forced this tribe up in the mountains. Birds with special feathers lived here. The tribe used them to make wings of their own," he said.

"Now the bird people could fly to the peaks.

The garvi couldn't get them there. They've lived on the mountain tops ever since," Prof went on.

"These people have been cut off from the world. Now we have found them. I wonder what happens next?" Judge Clair said.

Jan spoke up. "I've been talking to a woman. She says they aren't cut off. Two birdmen with spotted wings often fly to Ejie City. They bring back the latest inventions. These people have computers and lots of modern things," she said.

Rayk listened closely. Now he knew who the birdmen with spotted wings were. But why did they leave so fast? And where were they going?

CHAPTER 6

A Home Forever

The wings were done the next day. Ozen helped Rayk put on his winged sleeves. Then he tied two ropes around Rayk's waist.

Ozen led him to the edge of the patio. "Jump and flap your wings. You may not fly the first time. But my men will catch you up," he said.

Rayk spotted the birdmen. They flew nearby. Each had a rope around his waist, too. They smiled. Rayk knew they were waiting for him to jump. So were Jan and the others behind him.

“Here I go!” Rayk shouted. He jumped off the patio and flapped his arms.

His body fell straight down. But he was dragged to safety by the birdmen.

The same thing happened to the rest of his group. They tried again and again. At last, they learned. Within three days, they could fly around without ropes. Rayk had to admit it was fun.

Ozen proudly took them to their new home. “The twigs are in the fireplace. And garvi steak is in the cooler. Later we will teach you where to search for greens and berries,” he said. Then the birdman flew off.

“This is great. But we’ll only be here for four more days,” Jan said.

Rayk nodded. That is what worried him. At times Ozen acted as if they weren’t leaving.

There was a frown on the judge’s face. Rayk walked over to him. “Are you thinking the same thing I am?” he asked.

“This is what I think. Ozen doesn’t intend to let us go. He’s afraid we’ll tell others how to get here,” Judge Clair said.

“That’s my thought, too. But I wonder what his plan is. He knows our plane will be back. Slim will call out a search crew if he doesn’t see us,” Rayk said.

Prof had gone back to his notes. And Jan looked around the house. Now she called them to the window. “Look!” she gasped.

Rayk raced over to the window. He peered out. The two birdmen with spotted sleeves were coming back. They carried something between them. Rayk pulled up his field glasses.

“It’s Slim! Ozen sent the flyers after him! Now we have no way out!” Rayk exclaimed.

“Maybe there’s another way. I saw a tunnel when I was flying today,” Jan said.

Rayk looked at the judge. “It’s worth a look. You and Prof stay here. Jan and I will explore it,” he said.

Jan and Rayk flew to the tunnel. It went down into the mountain. Holes appeared often. They let light in. Rayk saw footprints. So it was well traveled.



One garvi charged from the left. Another raced in from the right.

They walked for at least a mile. Then the tunnel opened into a meadow. It was filled with huge brown boulders and flowers.

Jan ran out. "It's beautiful here," she said.

Suddenly Rayk saw the boulders move. They whirled around. Rayk saw the huge tusks.

"It's the garvi!" he shouted to Jan.

One garvi charged from the left. Another raced in from the right. Rayk pulled Jan back into the cave just in time. They crawled backward to safety.

Someone was waiting there. It was Ozen. "So you've found our hunting tunnel and the garvi. That's good. Now you know there is no escape from Birdland," he said.

CHAPTER 7

The Escape

Rayk and Jan went back to the house. They found Slim waiting there. His cheeks were rosy. And his eyes shone.

Rayk rushed over to him. "Are you all right? I got you into this. I'm so sorry," he said.

"Don't be sorry. The ride was great fun," Slim said.

"Maybe you haven't heard. The bird people are afraid to let us go. They intend to keep us here forever," Rayk told him.

“So what? It’s beautiful here,” Slim said.

Prof waved his notebook at them. “I have to get back and write my book,” he said.

“Ozen doesn’t want us to leave. And that’s one of the reasons. A book would bring lots of people up here,” Rayk said.

Judge Clair put his arm around his friend. “You had the fun of finding the bird people. Can’t you forget about the book? It might be important to getting us out of here. We would promise Ozen never to tell,” he said.

Prof sat quietly for a moment. Then he handed over his notes. “Give them to Ozen. I do want to get back. After all, there are other lost tribes to find,” he said.

They set up a meeting with Ozen. Everyone promised not to talk about Birdland. Then Prof gave him the notes.

Ozen shook his head. “Who cares about notes? Our location is in your heads. I can’t trust you. My duty is to save this place for my people,” he told them.

Rayk watched him fly away. “I guess this is our home. There’s no escape,” he said.

“Sure there is. I flew in here. So you can fly out,” Slim said.

“You had the help of Birdland’s best flyers. We’ve just learned to fly,” Rayk pointed out.

“There’s something else, too. We don’t know the way,” Judge Clair said.

“Yes, I had their help. But the trip isn’t that hard. The air currents will be with you. I can make a map,” Slim said.

Rayk’s eyes lit up. “Maybe we can do it. You can lead the way,” he said.

Slim shook his head. “I won’t be along. You will need someone to get the bird people’s attention. Then you can slip away. Also, I want to stay here. No one wants an old pilot in the city. But I can fly here every day,” he said.

“Your plan is good. Everyone must fly and build up strength. We’ll never forget this, Slim,” Rayk told him.

“Just forget Birdland. I don’t want my new home filled with tourists,” Slim said.

At last the day came. Slim had become friends with the spotted winged flyers. The three of them flew high above the tower.

Suddenly Slim screamed and went into a dive. “My wing is jammed!” he shouted.

The two flyers rushed after him. They zoomed down past the tower and into the dark cavern below. Ozen and the bird people watched.

“Go!” Rayk hissed. He flew off across the peaks. Jan, the judge, and Prof followed.

Slim had been right. Soon they caught an air current. It was a tail wind that rushed them on toward Ejie City.

“Slim will pull out of the dive near the bottom. That gives us a good head start,” Rayk said.

They were tired when they landed in Ejie City. Everyone was anxious to go home. But first they took Slim's copter and flew back to Piyer Ridge. They dropped down their wings onto the patio.

"Now, maybe Ozen will trust us," Rayk said.

Some birdmen stood on the patio. One waved. Perhaps it was Slim.

"Hey, Rayk, have you ever heard of the Lost Tribe of Glos?" Prof asked.

"Yes, I have. But that's just a story. I don't believe they exist," Rayk told him.

"Do you want to bet? If I find them, you must go along as my guide," Prof said.

"And Dad and I are going, too," Jan added.

Rayk grinned. "It's a deal," he said.

