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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

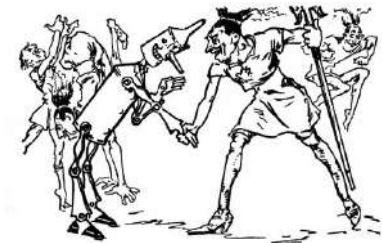
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Ozoplaning with the Wizard of Oz: A Most Reluctant Starina (7/20)

As the last note died away in a sweet, reluctant echo, Strut's Blowmen threw down their horns. With wild shouts and cheers they began to embrace as if each were the other's long lost brother. The behavior of the rest of the Stratovanians was equally puzzling. They sang, they whistled, they laughed and stamped their feet from sheer gaiety. Strut, hurrying over to Nick Chopper, shook him heartily by the hand.



"Say, Hay-Hurray! How ARE you?" he demanded exuberantly. "How are you and all of your aunts, uncles and infant nieces?"



"Wha—what's that?" sputtered Nick Chopper completely taken aback by this sudden show of friendliness. Kabebe the Queen, tears of joy streaming down her moon-shaped face,

seized the hands of the Soldier with Green Whiskers and was dancing him 'round and 'round. Unnoticed in the general hubbub and hilarity, Jellia managed to steal another glance at the green trumpet. Printed in white letters on the handle was this surprising sentence: "This trumpet contains cheer gas." Cheer Gas! With a tremulous sigh, for the last few moments had been a great strain, Jellia slipped the Wizard's instrument back into the kit bag and zipped it shut. Strangely enough the gas had not affected any of the people from Oz. In fact Jellia had never felt less like cheering in her whole life.

"This way! Ray, Ray, hurray!" shouted Strut, who now had Nick by one arm and the Soldier by the other.

"Quickly! Go and prepare the Guest Canopies, Queen Kabebe! These travellers are doubtless weary, and need rest and refreshment. Have you any preference as to canopies?" he inquired, leaning down to look in Nick Chopper's face.

"Do you have any tin canopies?" asked Nick hoarsely. He was still dazed by Strut's unaccountable change of manner. "I always feel safer under a tin roof. It is such a beautiful and dependable metal."

"Tin? Oh, Ha-Ha-HA!" Strut blinked his star eyes rapidly. "I'm afraid we have no tin, but any other kind, my dear —"

"Nick Chopper, Tin Woodman of Oz," put in Jellia, who felt it was high time they were properly introduced.

"And there—" She hastily indicated the Soldier with Green Whiskers—"There is Wantowin Battles, the Grand

Army of Oz!" At Jellia's introduction, Wantowin dropped Strut's arm to shake hands.

"And who are you, my lively little Skylark?" he questioned.

"Oh, I'm just Jellia Jam, Ozma's Chief Maid in Waiting," Jellia said as she trotted uneasily along at his side. The rest of the Stratovanians, still cheering and singing, but in a more subdued way, came streaming after them.



Rather anxiously Jellia wondered how long the effects of the cheer gas would last, and how soon Strut would remember about blowing Nick and the Soldier away again. It seemed unlikely that she would have another chance to open the kit bag without detection. The Queen, who had not been as cheered by the gas as the others, seemed somewhat unfriendly as she walked along behind her Royal Husband. Every few minutes, in fact, she would lean forward and give Jellia a spiteful pinch. Jellia bore this rude treatment with extreme patience, making no complaint or out-cry and merely walking a little faster to keep out of the creature's way. Jellia wanted to see all she could of this wonderful, sparkling airland so she could tell Ozma and Dorothy all about it when she returned to Oz.

The Soldier with Green Whiskers had fallen back to a place beside Queen Kabebe and was gazing about him with contemptuous snorts. Any country that was not green like the land surrounding the Emerald City, held

no interest for him. Noticing that Jellia was faring quite well without her helmet, and finding his rather stuffy, he took it off and slung it over one shoulder. As he did so he caught the Queen in the very act of pinching Jellia. Disgusted by such conduct, he sternly took her arm, and each time Kabebe pinched Jellia, the Soldier would slap her fingers. After the fifth slap the Queen peered at him with astonished admiration, for on this whole Tip-toposphere there was no man bold enough to strike a member of the reigning family. Soon, Kabebe was so fascinated by Wantowin's flowing green whiskers she forgot all about pinching Jellia. By this time the strange and still faintly cheering procession had reached Strut's Royal Canopy. Waving away his giggling Blowmen, Strut lifted Jellia to one of the splendid Star Thrones.

To Kabebe King Strut spoke impatiently. "Don't you remember you were to see about the Guest Canopies?" Kabebe dared not object but looked quite displeased. "Just tell Bittsywittle to bring us a tray of air-ades and a wind pudding," ordered Strut, giving the Queen a jovial shove to help her on her way. "You'd like an air-ade wouldn't you, little lady?" Poor Jellia shook her head no and then quickly changed it to yes. The furnishings of the Royal Pavilion were so rich and dazzling and the Star Throne so high and grand that she felt completely bewildered. As Kabebe shuffled away, Jellia smiled nervously at Nick and the Soldier. At Strut's invitation they had seated themselves cross

legged on bright blue air cushions, and looked as uncomfortable as they felt.

"Well, what do you think of Stratovania by now?" inquired Strut, settling back complacently. "I believe you will all enjoy high life as much as we do, once you are used to it."

Nick Chopper was on the point of saying they had no intention of getting used to it, or of staying one single moment longer than was positively necessary, when he caught Jellia's worried expression and muttered instead. "Beautiful—very beautiful."

"But where are the houses?" asked the Soldier with Green Whiskers, bluntly. "These tent tops are all right for a war, or for field sports, but I should think you'd find them rather chilly for all year 'round living."

"Stratovania," explained Strut as he crossed his long legs, "is never chilly. It is surrounded by a rim of warm air that keeps the temperature just as you find it today. No wind, no rain, no storms of any kind," he concluded, proudly.



"And it's all so bright and shiny," sighed Jellia Jam, blinking down at the floor of the pavilion which was an inlay of sparkling glass, and then off to the countless bright canopies that dotted the airspace beyond.

The surface of Strut's curious Skyland was of gleaming crystal, sometimes smooth as ice, sometimes rough and rocky, but always flashing with the brilliance of diamonds. "Everything sparkles

so," finished Jellia, rather wishing she had brought her dark glasses.

"That's because Stratovania is formed of solid air," smiled Strut, tapping one of the iridescent posts that supported the silken canopy over their heads. "And I am its High and Mighty Sovereign, ruler of the Spikers who inhabit the strata below, and of the Zoomers who inhabit the strata above, and of all the other spheres and half-spheres in this particular area. Strut of the Strat! Consider THAT, Little One, and be proud that you have been chosen to be our Starina!"

"But Jellia can't stay here!" cried the Soldier with Green Whiskers, springing indignantly to his feet. "Jellia's —"



"Tut! Tut! Now do not excite yourself! Here comes Bittsywittle and we'll all have a glass of liquid air." As Strut leaned forward to speak to his small, electric-haired page, Jellia shook her head sharply at Nick and the Soldier, for both seemed on the point of dragging her off the throne.

"Wait!" Jellia formed the word soundlessly, and with puzzled frowns her two friends sank back on their air cushions, accepting rather glumly the sparkling goblets of air-ade from the light-footed servitor. With the air-ade Bittsywittle passed heaping saucers of wind

pudding, a fluffy, cloud-like confection that made Jellia's mouth positively water.

"You will find the diet here light, but nourishing," Strut informed them blandly. "Our atmosphere is so rare and exhilarating, we need little but sun and star light to keep us going. But now, friends, I propose a toast to Jellia, our new Starina!" As Nick and Wantowin rose unwillingly to their feet, for the whole affair struck them as perfectly preposterous, Strut lifted his glass and downed his air-ade. Then the Soldier rather sulkily drank his. Nick, who never partook of food or drink of any kind, set his goblet on a small tabouret and stared sadly at Jellia Jam. The Tin Woodman feared she was seriously considering Strut's proposal. Jellia surmised what Nick was thinking, but as there was no way of explaining that she was just trying to gain time till

they could find some way to escape, she smiled wanly back at him and swallowed her own air-ade.



Suddenly Jellia felt herself rising into the air. Before she could utter a sound, her head was pressed tightly against the top of the canopy. Then, dizzily, she began to float 'round and 'round like a pretty balloon just let off its string.

"Ho, Ho!" roared Strut. "Our air-ade has made you light-headed, m'lass! But wait—I'll fetch you down!" He tapped the winged staff he held in his right hand

sharply on the floor. Instantly it spread its wings, carrying him up beside Jellia. Grasping her hand he drew her down to the throne.

"There," he chuckled, handing her a heavy glass globe to hold, "that will weigh you down!" Reflecting that one of these winged sticks might be a handy thing to have, Jellia clutched the glass globe. Still weak and giddy from her flight, she could not bring herself to touch the wind pudding Bittsywittle had placed on the arm of the throne. The Soldier with Green Whiskers, on account of his heavy weapons and boots, had not gone so high as Jellia, but even he, instead of sitting on his air cushion, was now seated on nothing—three feet above Nick Chopper's head. He looked extremely unhappy, as indeed he was.

"Don't worry," grinned Strut, who seemed highly amused by the whole affair, "you'll come down presently." He tapped his winged staff on the head as he spoke, and the staff immediately folded its wings. "Tell me," he urged, turning to Nick Chopper who was looking anxiously from the Soldier to Jellia. "Do you come from below or be-high?"

"Be-oth," answered the Tin Woodman, too confused by this time to know what he was saying. "Taking off from the Emerald City of Oz, we first flew up, then over, then up and next down!"

"Hmm—mmm, OZ?" Two very black clouds floated across Strut's transparent brow. "I seem to remember your mentioning Oz before! I seem to remember—" Strut's voice was no longer pleasant, and watching his

brow growing blacker and blacker, Jellia frantically sought to open the Wizard's kit bag. Unless she could release some more of the cheer gas, almost anything might happen.

Out of the third point of his left star eye, Strut saw what she was doing. "Don't fidget, my dear," he snapped crossly. "It is unbecoming for our new Starina of Stratovania to fidget, or to unpack her own bag. Here—" Taking the kit bag from her he tossed it carelessly beneath his throne. Jellia's heart sank. She hoped Nick would say no more about claiming Stratovania for Ozma. But the Tin Woodman, already launched upon a glowing description of their famous Fairy Land, was working up to that very point.

"One hundred and one thousand, eight hundred and sixty-seven feet below this airosphere," began Nick, taking a long breath, "lies the great, grand and incomparable Fairyland of Oz. Oblong in shape, it is divided into four triangular Kingdoms. The Northern and Purple Land of the Gillikens is ruled by Jo King; the Blue, Western Land of the Munchkins, by his Majesty King Cheeriohed; the Eastern, Yellow Land of the Winkies is governed by myself; the Southern Red Land of the Quadlings, by Glinda the Good Sorceress.

"But all of us are subject to the benign rule of Ozma, the young Fairy Ruler of the whole Kingdom. Her capitol, the Emerald City, in the exact center of Oz, is one of the most beautiful cities out of the world! Surrounding Oz and protecting it from invasions is a deadly desert, and in Ozma's possession are more jewels

and treasure than you doubtless have seen in the whole of your air existence."

"Humph!" growled Strut, looking fiercer than ever. But paying no heed to the ominous storm clouds forming on his brow, Nick loftily proceeded.



"Not only is Ozma possessed of more jewels than any other sovereign known, but in her castle are magic appliances that make her the most powerful of rulers. For instance, Ozma has a magic belt with which she can transport anyone anywhere. On her wall hangs a magic picture in which she can see what is happening to her friends or foes—right while it is happening. In her safe is a magic fan to blow away her enemies, and so many other strange instruments of magic, I have not time to describe them. Among her advisors is the famous Wizard of Oz, who spends all his



time studying magic and perfecting new inventions. The Ozoplane in which we made this perilous flight is his latest masterpiece. And now that you know a bit more of Ozma and her famous country, I am sure

you will be delighted to become a part of our happy realm and acknowledge Ozma as the Supreme Sovereign of Stratovania."

"What?" screamed Strut, bounding off his throne and furiously confronting the Tin Woodman. "How DARE you suggest such a thing? This is the second time you have done so! Why should I, Strut of the Strat, acknowledge this miserable earthlander as my supreme anything? I am a thousand times richer and more important than any Belowlander below. Oz! OZ! Indeed!"

As Nick backed off in some alarm, Strut shook his long staff over the Tin Woodman's head. "Why, you can't even pronounce the name of your own country!" he sneered. "It is not Oz, as you say it, but OHS—the zone of Ohs, to be more correct. And if Ohs is in the zone of Ohs it is Ozone, which means AIR—and that makes it belong to ME! So I, Strut of the Strat, hereby do claim OZONIA for myself and my people, and you, my fine Mr. Funnel Top, shall take me there!"