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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

Ririro

## Ozoplaning with the Wizard of Oz: Strut of the Strat Sets Off for Oz (8/20)

"Don't you do it! Don't you do it!" Plumping down on his air cushion, for the effects of the air-ade had worn off at last, the Soldier with Green Whiskers wildly sounded retreat on his green bugle. Jellia, knowing he would run as fast as he could and perhaps wreck the Ozoplane before she and Nick could reach it, jumped off her throne and seized him by the coat tails. As she did so, Strut gave the glass gong beside him a resounding whack. Before any of the three



travellers could take another step, the twenty Blowmen tramped back into the Royal Pavilion. The cheer engendered by the cheer gas had entirely evaporated by now, and they looked very grim indeed. At a signal from Strut, one seized Nick, a second the Soldier. A third was taking hold of Jellia, when Strut sternly waved him aside.



"No No! Not that one! She is our new Starina!" he told the Blowman roughly. "Now you are to stay right here, Jellia, my dear, and help rule over Stratovania while I descend to Ohs and take possession of that rich and prosperous country. And, sooner than soon, I will return, bringing you the magic treasure and jewels and the crown and scepter of this Ohsma!"

"Oh, but you mustn't!" wailed Jellia, clasping her hands desperately. "Ozma is a real Princess and much more beautiful than I!"

"In that case, I shall bring Ohsma back and make her a Starina also!" promised Strut.

"Now Hippenscop," he directed, shaking his finger at the odd-looking page, "you and Junnenrump are to obey Jellia in everything. I'll leave three Blowmen here to protect our Starina. The others, and all of my able-bodied fighters, shall fly with me to Ohs."

"The Ozoplane holds only four!" cried Jellia, looking desperately over at Nick who was struggling angrily to free himself from the Blowmen. But they had his arms pinioned behind his back, and the poor Tin Woodman was unable to help himself.

"Oh, that's all right!" answered Strut, "I and this Tin Emperor will ride in the Friend-ship, and the others will follow on their flying sticks and soon I will return with all the treasures of Ohs!" As the Blowmen started away, shoving Nick and the Soldier ahead of them, Jellia felt so frightened and alone that she burst into tears.

"Oh, please, please—couldn't you leave the Soldier to keep me company?" she sobbed, wiping her streaming eyes on her sash.

"Of course, if you wish!" Motioning to the Blowmen, they picked up Wantowin as if he had been a sack of potatoes, and tossed him roughly back into the Royal Pavilion. He landed with a clatter at Jellia's feet.



"But see here! I am not sure I can find the way back to Oz!" protested

Nick Chopper as Strut fell into step at his side. "I happened upon this airosphere by the merest chance, and have no idea in which direction Oz now lies."

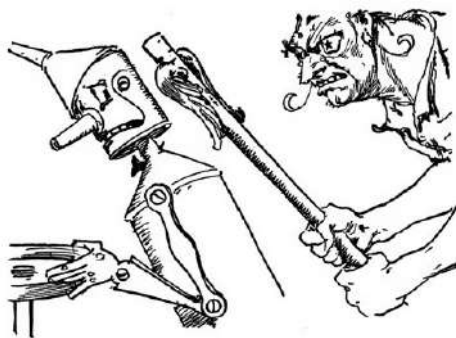
"Just the same—I think you will take me there!" Strut grinned wickedly, tapping Nick on the shoulder with his staff. He already had sent Junnenrump to summon the army, and, glancing over his shoulder, Nick saw a thousand young airmen strutting along behind them. As they came to the shores of Half Moon Lake, Hippenscop came panting and gasping into view.

"Her Skyness the new Starina, bade me give you this," he puffed, handing the Tin Woodman the small oil can the Wizard had given him at the party. Nick had forgotten all about his oil can and without it he was likely to rust and become perfectly helpless. Taking it thankfully from the messenger, he hung it on a hook

beneath his arm and headed reluctantly for the Oztober. Nick had no intention of flying Strut to the Emerald City. Even if he had to wreck the plane, he would find some way to keep the greedy airman and his legions from conquering Oz. Then he would return and rescue Jellia and the soldier.

But, without a word to Strut, for argument at this point would have been useless, he mounted the ladder, walked through the cozy cabin and seated himself in the pilot's chair. Strut paused on the top rung of the ladder before he entered.

"Follow us closely, men," he commanded gruffly, "no matter how far or fast we fly." Strut's young warriors raised their flying staffs to show that they understood, and with a few final directions, the Stratovanian stepped over the sill, slammed the door of the Oztober and walked rapidly forward, examining everything with lively interest.



"So this dragon-body really flies?" he said, bending curiously over the navigator's table. "Ho, what's this? I thought you told me you

had no way of finding the route back?" Nick Chopper, much more surprised than Strut, picked up the tidy map that lay on top of the buttons. It certainly had not been there when he left the plane, but here it was now, showing the complete course they had taken since leaving the Emerald City. Concluding this was some of

the Wizard's magic, Nick examined the map attentively. Each turn up or down, each mile east or west, was charted accurately.

"All you have to do is follow this in reverse," exclaimed Strut. Unaccustomed as he was to flying except by staff, he was nevertheless sharp enough to realize the value of a good map when he saw one. "And remember now—no tricks!" he warned, sternly. "Land me safely in Ohs and you will be suitably rewarded. But land me anywhere else and you will be completely obliterated!"

Nick said nothing. Weary of Strut's threats and boasts, the Woodman touched the button to inflate the Oztober's balloon, and the "up," "south" and "fast" buttons. In the whirr and splutter of their take-off, the Airlander's further remarks and directions were completely drowned out.