

This story is brought to you by Ririro.com for free. Our mission is to give all children in the world free access to a variety of stories. The stories can be read, downloaded and printed online and cover a wide range of topics, including animals, fantasy, science, history, diverse cultures and much more.

Support our mission by sharing our website. We wish you a lot of fun reading!



Ririro

IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

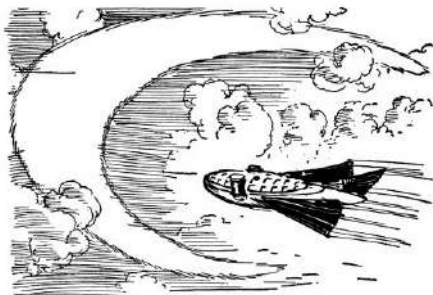
Ririro

Ozoplaning with the Wizard of Oz: The Spikers (5/20)

Nick waited until he was well over the crescent before he attempted to land. As he flew along he planned exactly how he would go about it and everything worked out as planned, except for one thing. The "slow," the "zig" and the "down" buttons brought the Oztober within a foot of the glittering air Isle, but the "stop" button functioned a bit late. Instead of stopping on the surface, the plane dropped clear through with a crash like the smashing of a thousand thin tumblers. Peering up through a spray of splinters, the Tin Woodman found he had knocked a jagged hole in the Crescent.



"Attention! Shoulder arms! Company, fall in!" yelled the Soldier with Green Whiskers. Jolted completely awake, he sprang up in the aisle, aiming his gun at the ceiling.



"Yes? Yes! Coming, your Majesty!" Jellia, mistaking the musical crash for the ringing of Ozma's morning bell, rolled sleepily out of her

seat and started down the aisle after the Soldier.

"Now, now—don't be alarmed," remarked Nick Chopper.

"I was just trying to land."

"Land? Where is it? Quick! Let me out of here!" panted Jellia Jam, remembering all in a rush where she was, and the dreadful experiences of the night before.

"I see no land," said the Soldier pressing his nose against one of the windows.

"Well, it certainly looked like land!" The Tin Woodman spoke in a slightly exasperated voice. The Oztober, still quivering from its impact with the island, was hanging motionless about ten feet below the Crescent. "Can't tell about these Sky Countries till you try them."

"I'll bet it's nothing but a cake of ice," shivered Jellia, hugging herself to keep warm. "Being of tin, I don't suppose you'd notice it was freezing! I wonder if that stove lights?"

"Ice?" meditated Nick, as Jellia hurried toward the back of the cabin. "Why, I do believe you are right, my dear. In the upper stratas the air does become colder. We probably cracked through a frozen cloud!"

Jellia, turning all the switches on the stove, paid little attention to Nick's scientific discourse. She was too busy warming herself over the glowing burners.

"If we just had something to cook," sighed the little Oz maid, staring wistfully into the cupboard beside the stove. But the shelves were perfectly empty. Reflecting that the Wizard had not had time to stock up for the flight, Jellia, who was an orderly little soul, began picking up the china that had broken when it fell from

the cabinet the night before. Rather pompously, the Soldier with Green Whiskers began to help her.



"Will someone kindly explain what we are doing, flying around in this dangerous and haphazard manner?" he inquired

loftily. "I understood we were to wait for Ozma's return before we made a trial flight! And really, you know, I'm needed at home to guard the castle."

"Oh, indeed!" sniffed Jellia. "And who do you suppose started us off, Mr. Whiskers. Nobody but yourself. A fine pickle you put us in when you fell on that steering board."

"I?" The Soldier straightened up, aghast.

"Yes, YOU!" declared Jellia. "You and your pickles."

Sweeping the rest of the broken plates into her skirt, she marched to the end of the cabin and dumped them into the big basket beside the water cooler. "Goodness knows whether we shall ever get back," she sighed, sinking despondently into the last seat and staring out the window.

"But we're backing now," muttered the Soldier. This was quite true, for Nick, to avoid hitting the crescent of ice again, was maneuvering the plane from beneath; then, feeling it might be dangerous to go any higher, he began slowly and cautiously to descend. Neither he nor

Jellia paid any more attention to the Soldier with Green Whiskers, who glanced uncomfortably from one to the other. After a little silence he remarked in a hollow voice: "I shall consider myself under arrest. I shall walk guard for two hours without a pause for rest or rations!"

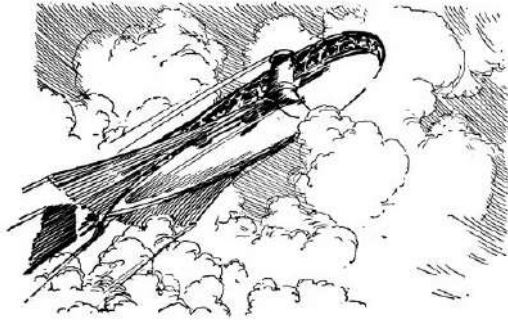
"Oh, don't be a goose!" giggled Jellia. "You'll probably go without rations because there aren't any. But what good will walking guard do?"

"As Commander-in-Chief, I have sentenced myself to walk guard. As a first class Private in the Army of Oz, I shall carry out this sentence," insisted the Soldier.

"Discipline must be maintained!" Hoisting his old fashioned blunder-buss to his shoulder, he began tramping stiffly up and down the short aisle of the cabin.

Born in a small Munchkin village to a family named Battles who had promptly christened him Wantowin, he had applied as soon as he was grown for a position in the army of Oz. The Wizard, then Supreme Ruler of the Kingdom, impressed by the Soldier's height and long green whiskers, had immediately hired him. Later he had been promoted by Ozma to fill the position of the entire staff and army of Oz. Wantowin had never been much of a fighter, but as war in Oz is practically outlawed, and victories usually won by magic, he had got on very well. At his tenth about-face, Wantowin suddenly recalled the piece of cake he had stuffed into his pocket the night before, and generously offered it to Jellia.

"Oh, Wanny, how wonderful!" To the famished girl, the cake tasted even better than it had at the Wizard's party. Breaking it in half, she tried to force the soldier to eat a piece, but raising his hand sternly, Wantowin continued his self-imposed sentence. Seeing argument



was useless, Jellia ate her own share and put the other half in the cupboard for the soldier's supper.

The plane still was slanting smoothly downward. After oiling all of Nick's joints and thinking

how fortunate it was they had brought along the oil can, Jellia began marching up and down behind the Soldier, examining the pictures and charts on the wall as she went along. The cake and a long drink of water from the cooler had done much to restore her courage and cheerfulness, and an occasional glance out the window was both pleasant and reassuring. The Oztober was dropping through fluffs and puffs of creamy cloud.

"Just like whipped cream on strawberries—if we had any strawberries!" mused Jellia, withdrawing her gaze reluctantly from the window and resuming her march.

"Oh, Nick, here are some directions!" she cried suddenly, stopping before a finely printed notice beside the water cooler.

"Directions?" The Tin Woodman looked round rather annoyed. He felt he had almost mastered the mechanism of the Ozoplane and did not care to start a

new system. But the directions that Jellia read off had nothing to do with the navigation of the plane. They were rules for the behavior of passengers in the strat. "The air in this cabin has been magically treated," stated the notice. "So long as the windows and doors are closed, riders may safely pass through the highest stratas. On debarking, however, it would be well to don my patent protective air helmets, see chest beneath second seat, or to take one, for each mile up, of my elutherated altitude pills, from the recess in the table leg."

Jellia, whose bump of curiosity was larger than most, lost no time hunting for the helmets. Dragging the chest from beneath the second seat and paying no attention to the marching soldier, who stepped over her each time he passed, she impatiently lifted the lid. The four helmets in the chest were of some pliant, glassy material resembling cellophane. They belted in at the waist and after holding one up for Nick's inspection, Jellia put them back and returned the chest to its place.



"Now which leg of which table?" pondered the little Maid in Waiting, her mind turning to the altitude pills.

"Oh, what does it matter?" grinned the Tin Woodman as Jellia crawled under the navigator's table and began tapping its legs one after the other. "You'll soon be on

solid earth and won't need altitude pills." Nick had made up his mind to bring the Oztober down to a landing wherever they happened to be. But Jellia scarcely heard him for at that moment she had discovered a small hook on one of the front legs of the table. Pulling it down, she disclosed a tall, triangular bottle in the hollow center. The pills were triangular too, and of every color in the rainbow.

"Take one after each mile," read Jellia, uncorking the bottle and taking a good sniff. The pills smelled as good as they looked and she was about to sample one, when the Soldier with Green Whiskers gave a hoarse scream and such a leap that his head hit the ceiling.

"Now what's the matter?" demanded Nick Chopper, turning around stiffly, while Jellia hastily corked the bottle, shoved it back into the tableleg and crawled into the aisle.

"NICK!" shrieked poor Jellia. "What is it? What are they? Oh, Ozma! Oh, Wizard! Oh, help! HELP!"

And well might Jellia scream, for swarming round the tail of the Oztober came a perfect horde of iridescent monsters. In shape each resembled an octopus, but instead of arms, they had long, horny spikes and spines. Pressing close to the plane they ogled at the shivering passengers as if they were fish in some strange aquarium. Then, evidently angered at what they saw, they began hurling and banging themselves against the sides of the Oztober till it sounded like the rattle of machine guns. At this juncture, I am sorry to report, Wantowin Battles, after sounding a shrill retreat on the

bugle attached to his belt, rushed into the dressing room and wrapped himself in the shower curtain. Nick Chopper, who already loved the Wizard's ship as if it were his own, shuddered as each spike struck the shining metal. Then, deciding that flight was the better part of valor, he hastily changed course, zooming up and up, faster and faster and FASTER! For perhaps a thousand feet the goggle-eyed monsters pursued them, but at last, the air grew too thin and rare for the spikers and one by one they fell away. Their horrid squeals and screeches still came faintly to the three voyagers, and Jellia ran quickly to the back window to stare down after them.

"Why, I never knew there were wild animals in the air," stuttered Jellia, blinking her eyes rapidly.

"Now, I wouldn't exactly call them wild animals," said Nick argumentatively, twisting his neck from side to side to be sure he was not rusting.



"Well, they certainly weren't birds!" declared Jellia indignantly. "And how did they fly without wings? Come on out, Soldier, they're gone."

"Ah, so we have won?" Jauntily the Soldier stepped out of the dressing room and resumed his marching.

"Give me credit for sounding the retreat, comrades," he observed cheerfully. Jellia sniffed, and Nick Chopper said nothing.

"What are we going to do now?" inquired the little Oz Maid, going over to stand by the wheel. "How can we ever fly down with those awful creatures below?"

"We'll just travel horizontally till we are out of their area," Nick told her, complacently. "But for a while, anyway, we'll go up. After all, one has to go up to come down, you know. And when we do come down—" Nick gave a satisfied little nod, "it will be in a safe spot and far from those spiky airmals."

"So that's what they are! But how did you know?" Jellia looked admiringly at the Tin Woodman.

"Oh, it just came to me," admitted Nick, with a modest cough. "Beasts of the air must have names, I suppose. Make a note of those monsters, will you Wantowin?"

"I'm writing them up in my little green book now," mumbled the Soldier, who was, in fact, scribbling away hastily as he tramped up and down. "I've made a sketch of one, too."

"Good!—although I didn't suppose you'd looked at them long enough for that!"

said Nick, a bit sarcastically. He glanced hastily at the page the soldier held before his nose. Then, deciding they had flown high enough, he pointed the Oztober toward the east and after an hour's leisurely flying, again began a slow and cautious descent.



"I do wonder where we'll land?" mused Jellia, trying to pierce with her bright eyes the bank of fog that lay beneath.

"Somewhere in the Quadling Country, I should judge," answered Nick, twirling the wheel deftly to the right.

"And when we do—" At that instant, the Soldier with Green Whiskers let out another panicky squawk.

"Climb! Climb!" he panted, running up and down the aisle so fast he almost ran himself down on the about-faces. "We're ambushed, comrades! Fire in the fog! Land on the stern!"

"Oh, tin cups and canyons!" rasped Nick Chopper, losing his temper at last. "If this keeps up, how are we ever to get down? Hammer and tong it! Something's always getting in the way. WILL you stop that silly marching?" he yelled, snatching at the Soldier's sleeve as he raced by.

"HALT!" quavered Wantowin. Instantly obeying his own command, he stood trembling beside the navigator's table as Nick peered desperately down through the fog.