



Wind

Fontenay, Charles Louis

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When you have an engine with no fuel, and fuel without an engine, and a life-and-death deadline to meet, you have a problem indeed. Unless you are a stubborn Dutchman—and Jan Van Artevelde was the stubbornest Dutchman on Venus.

Jan Willem van Artevelde claimed descent from William of Orange. He had no genealogy to prove it, but on Venus there was no one who could disprove it, either.

Jan Willem van Artevelde smoked a clay pipe, which only a Dutchman can do properly, because the clay bit grates on less stubborn teeth.

Jan needed all his Dutch stubbornness, and a good deal of pure physical strength besides, to maneuver the roach-flat groundcar across the tumbled terrain of Den Hoorn into the teeth of the howling gale that swept from the west. The huge wheels twisted and jolted against the rocks outside, and Jan bounced against his seat belt, wrestled the steering wheel and puffed at his *pijp*. The mild aroma of Heerenbaai-Tabak filled the airtight groundcar.

There came a new swaying that was not the roughness of the terrain. Through the thick windshield Jan saw all the ground about him buckle and heave for a second or two before it settled to rugged quiescence again. This time he was really heaved about.

Jan mentioned this to the groundcar radio.

"That's the third time in half an hour," he commented. "The place tosses like the IJsselmeer on a rough day."

"You just don't forget it *isn't* the Zuider Zee," retorted Heemskerk from the other end. "You sink there and you don't come up three times."

"Don't worry," said Jan. "I'll be back on time, with a broom at the masthead."

"This I shall want to see," chuckled Heemskerk; a logical reaction, considering the scarcity of brooms on Venus.

Two hours earlier the two men had sat across a small table playing chess, with little indication there would be anything else to occupy their time before blastoff of the stubby gravity-boat. It would be their last chess game for many months, for Jan was a member of the Dutch colony at Oostpoort in the northern hemisphere of Venus, while Heemskerk was pilot of the G-boat from the Dutch spaceship *Vanderdecken*, scheduled to begin an Earthward orbit in a few hours.

It was near the dusk of the 485-hour Venerian day, and the Twilight Gale already had arisen, sweeping from the comparatively chill Venerian nightside into the superheated dayside. Oostpoort, established near

some outcroppings that contained uranium ore, was protected from both the Dawn Gale and the Twilight Gale, for it was in a valley in the midst of a small range of mountains.

Jan had just figured out a combination by which he hoped to cheat Heemskerk out of one of his knights, when Dekker, the *burgemeester* of Oostpoort, entered the spaceport ready room.

"There's been an emergency radio message," said Dekker. "They've got a passenger for the Earthship over at Rathole."

"Rathole?" repeated Heemskerk. "What's that? I didn't know there was another colony within two thousand kilometers."

"It isn't a colony, in the sense Oostpoort is," explained Dekker. "The people are the families of a bunch of laborers left behind when the colony folded several years ago. It's about eighty kilometers away, right across the Hoorn, but they don't have any vehicles that can navigate when the wind's up."

Heemskerk pushed his short-billed cap back on his close-cropped head, leaned back in his chair and folded his hands over his comfortable stomach.

"Then the passenger will have to wait for the next ship," he pronounced. "The *Vanderdecken* has to blast off in thirty hours to catch Earth at the right orbital spot, and the G-boat has to blast off in ten hours to catch the *Vanderdecken*."

"This passenger can't wait," said Dekker. "He needs to be evacuated to Earth immediately. He's suffering from the Venus Shadow."

Jan whistled softly. He had seen the effects of that disease. Dekker was right.

"Jan, you're the best driver in Oostpoort," said Dekker. "You will have to take a groundcar to Rathole and bring the fellow back."

So now Jan gripped his clay pipe between his teeth and piloted the groundcar into the teeth of the Twilight Gale.

Den Hoorn was a comparatively flat desert sweep that ran along the western side of the Oost Mountains, just over the mountain from Oostpoort. It was a thin fault area of a planet whose crust was peculiarly subject to earthquakes, particularly at the beginning and end of each long day when temperatures of the surface rocks changed. On the other side of it lay Rathole, a little settlement that eked a precarious living from the Venerian vegetation. Jan never had seen it.

He had little difficulty driving up and over the mountain, for the Dutch settlers had carved a rough road through the ravines. But even the

2-1/2-meter wheels of the groundcar had trouble amid the tumbled rocks of Den Hoorn. The wind hit the car in full strength here and, though the body of the groundcar was suspended from the axles, there was constant danger of its being flipped over by a gust if not handled just right.

The three earthshocks that had shaken Den Hoorn since he had been driving made his task no easier, but he was obviously lucky, at that. Often he had to detour far from his course to skirt long, deep cracks in the surface, or steep breaks where the crust had been raised or dropped several meters by past quakes.

The groundcar zig-zagged slowly westward. The tattered violet-and-indigo clouds boiled low above it, but the wind was as dry as the breath of an oven. Despite the heavy cloud cover, the afternoon was as bright as an Earth-day. The thermometer showed the outside temperature to have dropped to 40 degrees Centigrade in the west wind, and it was still going down.

Jan reached the edge of a crack that made further progress seem impossible. A hundred meters wide, of unknown depth, it stretched out of sight in both directions. For the first time he entertained serious doubts that Den Hoorn could be crossed by land.

After a moment's hesitation, he swung the groundcar northward and raced along the edge of the chasm as fast as the car would negotiate the terrain. He looked anxiously at his watch. Nearly three hours had passed since he left Oostpoort. He had seven hours to go and he was still at least 16 kilometers from Rathole. His pipe was out, but he could not take his hands from the wheel to refill it.

He had driven at least eight kilometers before he realized that the crack was narrowing. At least as far again, the two edges came together, but not at the same level. A sheer cliff three meters high now barred his passage. He drove on.

Apparently it was the result of an old quake. He found a spot where rocks had tumbled down, making a steep, rough ramp up the break. He drove up it and turned back southwestward.

He made it just in time. He had driven less than three hundred meters when a quake more severe than any of the others struck. Suddenly behind him the break reversed itself, so that where he had climbed up coming westward he would now have to climb a cliff of equal height returning eastward.

The ground heaved and buckled like a tempestuous sea. Rocks rolled and leaped through the air, several large ones striking the groundcar with ominous force. The car staggered forward on its giant wheels like a drunken man. The quake was so violent that at one time the vehicle was hurled several meters sideways, and almost overturned. And the wind smashed down on it unrelentingly.

The quake lasted for several minutes, during which Jan was able to make no progress at all and struggled only to keep the groundcar upright. Then, in unison, both earthquake and wind died to absolute quiescence.

Jan made use of this calm to step down on the accelerator and send the groundcar speeding forward. The terrain was easier here, nearing the western edge of Den Hoorn, and he covered several kilometers before the wind struck again, cutting his speed down considerably. He judged he must be nearing Rathole.

Not long thereafter, he rounded an outcropping of rock and it lay before him.

A wave of nostalgia swept over him. Back at Oostpoort, the power was nuclear, but this little settlement made use of the cheapest, most obviously available power source. It was dotted with more than a dozen windmills.

Windmills! Tears came to Jan's eyes. For a moment, he was carried back to the flat lands around 's Gravenhage. For a moment he was a tow-headed, round-eyed boy again, clumping in wooden shoes along the edge of the tulip fields.

But there were no canals here. The flat land, stretching into the darkening west, was spotted with patches of cactus and leather-leaved Venerian plants. Amid the windmills, low domes protruded from the earth, indicating that the dwellings of Rathole were, appropriately, partly underground.

He drove into the place. There were no streets, as such, but there were avenues between lines of heavy chains strung to short iron posts, evidently as handholds against the wind. The savage gale piled dust and sand in drifts against the domes, then, shifting slightly, swept them clean again.

There was no one moving abroad, but just inside the community Jan found half a dozen men in a group, clinging to one of the chains and waving to him. He pulled the groundcar to a stop beside them, stuck his pipe in a pocket of his plastic venusuit, donned his helmet and got out.

The wind almost took him away before one of them grabbed him and he was able to grasp the chain himself. They gathered around him. They were swarthy, black-eyed men, with curly hair. One of them grasped his hand.

"*Bienvenido, señor,*" said the man.

Jan recoiled and dropped the man's hand. All the Orangeman blood he claimed protested in outrage.

Spaniards! All these men were Spaniards!

Jan recovered himself at once. He had been reading too much ancient history during his leisure hours. The hot monotony of Venus was beginning to affect his brain. It had been 500 years since the Netherlands revolted against Spanish rule. A lot of water over the dam since then.

A look at the men around him, the sound of their chatter, convinced him that he need not try German or Hollandsch here. He fell back on the international language.

"Do you speak English?" he asked. The man brightened but shook his head.

"*No hablo inglés,*" he said, "*pero el médico lo habla. Venga conmigo.*"

He gestured for Jan to follow him and started off, pulling his way against the wind along the chain. Jan followed, and the other men fell in behind in single file. A hundred meters farther on, they turned, descended some steps and entered one of the half-buried domes. A gray-haired, bearded man was in the well-lighted room, apparently the living room of a home, with a young woman.

"*Él médico,*" said the man who had greeted Jan, gesturing. "*Él habla inglés.*"

He went out, shutting the airlock door behind him.

"You must be the man from Oostpoort," said the bearded man, holding out his hand. "I am Doctor Sanchez. We are very grateful you have come."

"I thought for a while I wouldn't make it," said Jan ruefully, removing his venushelmet.

"This is Mrs. Murillo," said Sanchez.

The woman was a Spanish blonde, full-lipped and beautiful, with golden hair and dark, liquid eyes. She smiled at Jan.

"*Encantada de conocerlo, señor,*" she greeted him.

"Is this the patient, Doctor?" asked Jan, astonished. She looked in the best of health.

"No, the patient is in the next room," answered Sanchez.

"Well, as much as I'd like to stop for a pipe, we'd better start at once," said Jan. "It's a hard drive back, and blastoff can't be delayed."

The woman seemed to sense his meaning. She turned and called: "*Diego!*"

A boy appeared in the door, a dark-skinned, sleepy-eyed boy of about eight. He yawned. Then, catching sight of the big Dutchman, he opened his eyes wide and smiled.

The boy was healthy-looking, alert, but the mark of the Venus Shadow was on his face. There was a faint mottling, a criss-cross of dead-white lines.

Mrs. Murillo spoke to him rapidly in Spanish and he nodded. She zipped him into a venusuit and fitted a small helmet on his head.

"Good luck, *amigo*," said Sanchez, shaking Jan's hand again.

"Thanks," replied Jan. He donned his own helmet. "I'll need it, if the trip over was any indication."

Jan and Diego made their way back down the chain to the groundcar. There was a score of men there now, and a few women. They let the pair go through, and waved farewell as Jan swung the groundcar around and headed back eastward.

It was easier driving with the wind behind him, and Jan hit a hundred kilometers an hour several times before striking the rougher ground of Den Hoorn. Now, if he could only find a way over the bluff raised by that last quake... .

The ground of Den Hoorn was still shivering. Jan did not realize this until he had to brake the groundcar almost to a stop at one point, because it was not shaking in severe, periodic shocks as it had earlier. It quivered constantly, like the surface of quicksand.

The ground far ahead of him had a strange color to it. Jan, watching for the cliff he had to skirt and scale, had picked up speed over some fairly even terrain, but now he slowed again, puzzled. There was something wrong ahead. He couldn't quite figure it out.

Diego, beside him, had sat quietly so far, peering eagerly through the windshield, not saying a word. Now suddenly he cried in a high thin tenor:

"*Cuidado! Cuidado! Un abismo!*"

Jim saw it at the same time and hit the brakes so hard the groundcar would have stood on its nose had its wheels been smaller. They skidded to a stop.

The chasm that had caused him such a long detour before had widened, evidently in the big quake that had hit earlier. Now it was a canyon, half a kilometer wide. Five meters from the edge he looked out over blank space at the far wall, and could not see the bottom.

Cursing choice Dutch profanity, Jan wheeled the groundcar northward and drove along the edge of the abyss as fast as he could. He wasted half an hour before realizing that it was getting no narrower.

There was no point in going back southward. It might be a hundred kilometers long or a thousand, but he never could reach the end of it and thread the tumbled rocks of Den Hoorn to Oostpoort before the G-boat blastoff.

There was nothing to do but turn back to Rathole and see if some other way could not be found.

Jan sat in the half-buried room and enjoyed the luxury of a pipe filled with some of Theodorus Neimeijer's mild tobacco. Before him, Dr. Sanchez sat with crossed legs, cleaning his fingernails with a scalpel. Diego's mother talked to the boy in low, liquid tones in a corner of the room.

Jan was at a loss to know how people whose technical knowledge was as skimpy as it obviously was in Rathole were able to build these semi-underground domes to resist the earth shocks that came from Den Hoorn. But this one showed no signs of stress. A religious print and a small pencil sketch of Señora Murillo, probably done by the boy, were awry on the inward-curving walls, but that was all.

Jan felt justifiably exasperated at these Spanish-speaking people.

"If some effort had been made to take the boy to Oostpoort from here, instead of calling on us to send a car, Den Hoorn could have been crossed before the crack opened," he pointed out.

"An effort was made," replied Sanchez quietly. "Perhaps you do not fully realize our position here. We have no engines except the stationary generators that give us current for our air-conditioning and our utilities. They are powered by the windmills. We do not have gasoline engines for vehicles, so our vehicles are operated by hand."

"You push them?" demanded Jan incredulously.

"No. You've seen pictures of the pump-cars that once were used on terrestrial railroads? Ours are powered like that, but we cannot operate them when the Venerian wind is blowing. By the time I diagnosed the

Venus Shadow in Diego, the wind was coming up, and we had no way to get him to Oostpoort."

"Mmm," grunted Jan. He shifted uncomfortably and looked at the pair in the corner. The blonde head was bent over the boy protectingly, and over his mother's shoulder Diego's black eyes returned Jan's glance.

"If the disease has just started, the boy could wait for the next Earth ship, couldn't he?" asked Jan.

"I said I had just diagnosed it, not that it had just started, *señor*," corrected Sanchez. "As you know, the trip to Earth takes 145 days and it can be started only when the two planets are at the right position in their orbits. Have you ever seen anyone die of the Venus Shadow?"

"Yes, I have," replied Jan in a low voice. He had seen two people die of it, and it had not been pleasant.

Medical men thought it was a deficiency disease, but they had not traced down the deficiency responsible. Treatment by vitamins, diet, antibiotics, infrared and ultraviolet rays, all were useless. The only thing that could arrest and cure the disease was removal from the dry, cloud-hung surface of Venus and return to a moist, sunny climate on Earth.

Without that treatment, once the typical mottled texture of the skin appeared, the flesh rapidly deteriorated and fell away in chunks. The victim remained unfevered and agonizingly conscious until the degeneration reached a vital spot.

"If you have," said Sanchez, "you must realize that Diego cannot wait for a later ship, if his life is to be saved. He must get to Earth at once."

Jan puffed at the Heerenbaai-Tabak and cogitated. The place was aptly named. It was a ratty community. The boy was a dark-skinned little Spaniard—of Mexican origin, perhaps. But he was a boy, and a human being.

A thought occurred to him. From what he had seen and heard, the entire economy of Rathole could not support the tremendous expense of sending the boy across the millions of miles to Earth by spaceship.

"Who's paying his passage?" he asked. "The Dutch Central Venus Company isn't exactly a charitable institution."

"Your *Señor* Dekker said that would be taken care of," replied Sanchez.

Jan relit his pipe silently, making a mental resolution that Dekker wouldn't take care of it alone. Salaries for Venerian service were high, and many of the men at Oostpoort would contribute readily to such a cause.

"Who is Diego's father?" he asked.

"He was Ramón Murillo, a very good mechanic," answered Sanchez, with a sliding sidelong glance at Jan's face. "He has been dead for three years."

Jan grunted.

"The copters at Oostpoort can't buck this wind," he said thoughtfully, "or I'd have come in one of those in the first place instead of trying to cross Den Hoorn by land. But if you have any sort of aircraft here, it might make it downwind—if it isn't wrecked on takeoff."

"I'm afraid not," said Sanchez.

"Too bad. There's nothing we can do, then. The nearest settlement west of here is more than a thousand kilometers away, and I happen to know they have no planes, either. Just copters. So that's no help."

"Wait," said Sanchez, lifting the scalpel and tilting his head. "I believe there is something, though we cannot use it. This was once an American naval base, and the people here were civilian employes who refused to move north with it. There was a flying machine they used for short-range work, and one was left behind—probably with a little help from the people of the settlement. But... ."

"What kind of machine? Copter or plane?"

"They call it a flying platform. It carries two men, I believe. But, *señor*... ."

"I know them. I've operated them, before I left Earth. Man, you don't expect me to try to fly one of those little things in this wind? They're tricky as they can be, and the passengers are absolutely unprotected!"

"*Señor*, I have asked you to do nothing."

"No, you haven't," muttered Jan. "But you know I'll do it."

Sanchez looked into his face, smiling faintly and a little sadly.

"I was sure you would be willing," he said. He turned and spoke in Spanish to Mrs. Murillo.

The woman rose to her feet and came to them. As Jan arose, she looked up at him, tears in her eyes.

"*Gracias*," she murmured. "*Un millón de gracias*."

She lifted his hands in hers and kissed them.

Jan disengaged himself gently, embarrassed. But it occurred to him, looking down on the bowed head of the beautiful young widow, that he might make some flying trips back over here in his leisure time. Language barriers were not impassable, and feminine companionship might cure his neurotic, history-born distaste for Spaniards, for more than one reason.

Sanchez was tugging at his elbow.

"*Señor*, I have been trying to tell you," he said. "It is generous and good of you, and I wanted *Señora* Murillo to know what a brave man you are. But have you forgotten that we have no gasoline engines here? There is no fuel for the flying platform."

The platform was in a warehouse which, like the rest of the structures in Rathole, was a half-buried dome. The platform's ring-shaped base was less than a meter thick, standing on four metal legs. On top of it, in the center, was a railed circle that would hold two men, but would crowd them. Two small gasoline engines sat on each side of this railed circle and between them on a third side was the fuel tank. The passengers entered it on the fourth side.

The machine was dusty and spotted with rust, Jan, surrounded by Sanchez, Diego and a dozen men, inspected it thoughtfully. The letters USN*SES were painted in white on the platform itself, and each engine bore the label "Hiller."

Jan peered over the edge of the platform at the twin-ducted fans in their plastic shrouds. They appeared in good shape. Each was powered by one of the engines, transmitted to it by heavy rubber belts.

Jan sighed. It was an unhappy situation. As far as he could determine, without making tests, the engines were in perfect condition. Two perfectly good engines, and no fuel for them.

"You're sure there's no gasoline, anywhere in Rathole?" he asked Sanchez.

Sanchez smiled ruefully, as he had once before, at Jan's appellation for the community. The inhabitants' term for it was simply "*La Ciudad Nuestra*"—"Our Town." But he made no protest. He turned to one of the other men and talked rapidly for a few moments in Spanish.

"None, *señor*," he said, turning back to Jan. "The Americans, of course, kept much of it when they were here, but the few things we take to Oostpoort to trade could not buy precious gasoline. We have electricity in plenty if you can power the platform with it."

Jan thought that over, trying to find a way.

"No, it wouldn't work," he said. "We could rig batteries on the platform and electric motors to turn the propellers. But batteries big enough to power it all the way to Oostpoort would be so heavy the machine couldn't lift them off the ground. If there were some way to carry a power line all the way to Oostpoort, or to broadcast the power to it... . But it's a light-load machine, and must have an engine that gives it the necessary power from very little weight."

Wild schemes ran through his head. If they were on water, instead of land, he could rig up a sail. He could still rig up a sail, for a groundcar, except for the chasm out on Den Hoorn.

The groundcar! Jan straightened and snapped his fingers.

"Doctor!" he explained. "Send a couple of men to drain the rest of the fuel from my groundcar. And let's get this platform above ground and tie it down until we can get it started."

Sanchez gave rapid orders in Spanish. Two of the men left at a run, carrying five-gallon cans with them.

Three others picked up the platform and carried it up a ramp and outside. As soon as they reached ground level, the wind hit them. They dropped the platform to the ground, where it shuddered and swayed momentarily, and two of the men fell successfully on their stomachs. The wind caught the third and somersaulted him half a dozen times before he skidded to a stop on his back with outstretched arms and legs. He turned over cautiously and crawled back to them.

Jan, his head just above ground level, surveyed the terrain. There was flat ground to the east, clear in a fairly broad alley for at least half a kilometer before any of the domes protruded up into it.

"This is as good a spot for takeoff as we'll find," he said to Sanchez.

The men put three heavy ropes on the platform's windward rail and secured it by them to the heavy chain that ran by the dome. The platform quivered and shuddered in the heavy wind, but its base was too low for it to overturn.

Shortly the two men returned with the fuel from the groundcar, struggling along the chain. Jan got above ground in a crouch, clinging to the rail of the platform, and helped them fill the fuel tank with it. He primed the carburetors and spun the engines.

Nothing happened.

He turned the engines over again. One of them coughed, and a cloud of blue smoke burst from its exhaust, but they did not catch.

"What is the matter, *señor*?" asked Sanchez from the dome entrance.

"I don't know," replied Jan. "Maybe it's that the engines haven't been used in so long. I'm afraid I'm not a good enough mechanic to tell."

"Some of these men were good mechanics when the navy was here," said Sanchez. "Wait."

He turned and spoke to someone in the dome. One of the men of Rathole came to Jan's side and tried the engines. They refused to catch. The man made carburetor adjustments and tried again. No success.

He sniffed, took the cap from the fuel tank and stuck a finger inside. He withdrew it, wet and oily, and examined it. He turned and spoke to Sanchez.

"He says that your groundcar must have a diesel engine," Sanchez interpreted to Jan. "Is that correct?"

"Why, yes, that's true."

"He says the fuel will not work then, *señor*. He says it is low-grade fuel and the platform must have high octane gasoline."

Jan threw up his hands and went back into the dome.

"I should have known that," he said unhappily. "I would have known if I had thought of it."

"What is to be done, then?" asked Sanchez.

"There's nothing that can be done," answered Jan. "They may as well put the fuel back in my groundcar."

Sanchez called orders to the men at the platform. While they worked, Jan stared out at the furiously spinning windmills that dotted Rathole.

"There's nothing that can be done," he repeated. "We can't make the trip overland because of the chasm out there in Den Hoorn, and we can't fly the platform because we have no power for it."

Windmills. Again Jan could imagine the flat land around them as his native Holland, with the Zuider Zee sparkling to the west where here the desert stretched under darkling clouds.

Jan looked at his watch. A little more than two hours before the G-boat's blastoff time, and it couldn't wait for them. It was nearly eight hours since he had left Oostpoort, and the afternoon was getting noticeably darker.

Jan was sorry. He had done his best, but Venus had beaten him.

He looked around for Diego. The boy was not in the dome. He was outside, crouched in the lee of the dome, playing with some sticks.

Diego must know of his ailment, and why he had to go to Oostpoort. If Jan was any judge of character, Sanchez would have told him that. Whether Diego knew it was a life-or-death matter for him to be aboard the *Vanderdecken* when it blasted off for Earth, Jan did not know. But the boy was around eight years old and he was bright, and he must realize the seriousness involved in a decision to send him all the way to Earth.

Jan felt ashamed of the exuberant foolishness which had led him to spout ancient history and claim descent from William of Orange. It had been a hobby, and artificial topic for conversation that amused him and his companions, a defense against the monotony of Venus that had

begun to affect his personality perhaps a bit more than he realized. He did not dislike Spaniards; he had no reason to dislike them. They were all humans—the Spanish, the Dutch, the Germans, the Americans, even the Russians—fighting a hostile planet together. He could not understand a word Diego said when the boy spoke to him, but he liked Diego and wished desperately he could do something.

Outside, the windmills of Rathole spun merrily.

There was power, the power that lighted and air-conditioned Rathole, power in the air all around them. If he could only use it! But to turn the platform on its side and let the wind spin the propellers was pointless.

He turned to Sanchez.

"Ask the men if there are any spare parts for the platform," he said. "Some of those legs it stands on, transmission belts, spare propellers."

Sanchez asked.

"Yes," he said. "Many spare parts, but no fuel."

Jan smiled a tight smile.

"Tell them to take the engines out," he said. "Since we have no fuel, we may as well have no engines."

Pieter Heemskerk stood by the ramp to the stubby G-boat and checked his watch. It was X minus fifteen—fifteen minutes before blastoff time.

Heemskerk wore a spacesuit. Everything was ready, except climbing aboard, closing the airlock and pressing the firing pin.

What on Venus could have happened to Van Artevelde? The last radio message they had received, more than an hour ago, had said he and the patient took off successfully in an aircraft. What sort of aircraft could he be flying that would require an hour to cover eighty kilometers, with the wind?

Heemskerk could only draw the conclusion that the aircraft had been wrecked somewhere in Den Hoorn. As a matter of fact, he knew that preparations were being made now to send a couple of groundcars out to search for it.

This, of course, would be too late to help the patient Van Artevelde was bringing, but Heemskerk had no personal interest in the patient. His worry was all for his friend. The two of them had enjoyed chess and good beer together on his last three trips to Venus, and Heemskerk hoped very sincerely that the big blond man wasn't hurt.

He glanced at his watch again. X minus twelve. In two minutes, it would be time for him to walk up the ramp into the G-boat. In seven

minutes the backward count before blastoff would start over the area loudspeakers.

Heemskerk shook his head sadly. And Van Artevelde had promised to come back triumphant, with a broom at his masthead!

It was a high thin whine borne on the wind, carrying even through the walls of his spacehelmet, that attracted Heemskerk's attention and caused him to pause with his foot on the ramp. Around him, the rocket mechanics were staring up at the sky, trying to pinpoint the noise.

Heemskerk looked westward. At first he could see nothing, then there was a moving dot above the mountain, against the indigo umbrella of clouds. It grew, it swooped, it approached and became a strange little flying disc with two people standing on it and *something* sticking up from its deck in front of them.

A broom?

No. The platform hovered and began to settle nearby, and there was Van Artevelde leaning over its rail and fiddling frantically with whatever it was that stuck up on it—a weird, angled contraption of pipes and belts topped by a whirring blade. A boy stood at his shoulder and tried to help him. As the platform descended to a few meters above ground, the Dutchman slashed at the contraption, the cut ends of belts whipped out wildly and the platform slid to the ground with a rush. It hit with a clatter and its two passengers tumbled prone to the ground.

"Jan!" boomed Heemskerk, forcing his voice through the helmet diaphragm and rushing over to his friend. "I was afraid you were lost!"

Jan struggled to his feet and leaned down to help the boy up.

"Here's your patient, Pieter," he said. "Hope you have a spacesuit in his size."

"I can find one. And we'll have to hurry for blastoff. But, first, what happened? Even that damned thing ought to get here from Rathole faster than that."

"Had no fuel," replied Jan briefly. "My engines were all right, but I had no power to run them. So I had to pull the engines and rig up a power source."

Heemskerk stared at the platform. On its railing was rigged a tripod of battered metal pipes, atop which a big four-blade propeller spun slowly in what wind was left after it came over the western mountain. Over the edges of the platform, running from the two propellers in its base, hung a series of tattered transmission belts.

"Power source?" repeated Heemskerk. "That?"

"Certainly," replied Jan with dignity. "The power source any good Dutchman turns to in an emergency: a windmill!"

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