

The Report of The Second Expedition to 61 Cygni
Vol III.

Zhindy



Lee Willard

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The Second Expedition
to 61 Cygni

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Zhlindu

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The Second Expedition trilogy is dedicated to Trudi. Without her help and support this tale could not have existed.

Background information on the planet Kassidor and other stories by Lee Willard can be found at www.kassidor.com.

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Cover by Lee Willard

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While Alan believes he is in the 'and they lived happily ever after' part of his story, the expedition returns and the wizards prepare to defend the planet from their attack.

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Downtown Zhindu

Book I.

An Earthling in Zhindu

To the Castle

An endless wall of jungle-capped cliffs stretched into the hazy distance to both the north and the south. It loomed above thru a thin veil of cloud on jagged spires and pinnacles rising another half mile into the sky. Far away to the north a ragged ridge-line up to eight hundred feet high stretched many miles til it got lost in the haze of this horizonless distance. To the south the jagged jungle reached around behind him to a six hundred foot cliff wall two miles away and almost two miles long. Among the trees on the highest peaks, suntowers and windtraps glittered thru the mist. A spider-web of thin crystal bridges joined the spires. Every frond grew from the trunk or balcony rail of a living plant modified to grow into the shape of human habitation, in this case apartment buildings twenty or even forty stories tall, each layer of branches a floor. The cliffs were gleaming crystal-framed towers, hundred after hundred of them. They stood shoulder to shoulder in a ragged, meandering wall, five hundred feet high, give or take a hundred, all along the harbor wall for miles, all along the beach wall two miles behind him.

He knew what this was, this was the West Harborwall neighborhood in downtown Zhindu. Even if he thought it

was just one layer of rooms tacked onto the cliff face, the scale was overwhelming. He knew it was not one room deep. He knew it went back into the mountain for miles. He knew this harbor was only one of three like it that surrounded the central city. No city on the planet has a more concentrated mountain of this urban jungle than this one. It was built on a two thousand foot high basalt plug in the middle of a mathematically flat basin, with two to five hundred feet of masonry and carbon reinforced crystal structure above the rock, and another two hundred feet of live-grown housing above that. Over forty square miles were covered that way, twenty million inhabitants resided, worked, played, loved and raised families in the living mountain he faced at the far end of this pier.

The expedition Alan had resigned from three months ago originally thought the native cities were in ruins and reclaimed by the jungle. When they got closer to this planet, they thought the light industrial suburbs are the cities of this civilization. There had been several theories concerning why native cities seemed to cluster around patches of thick jungle-covered ruins, but the captain was too afraid of being discovered by the natives to actually investigate. It wasn't til Alan spoke with the natives that he found out these jungles are the heart of the city. The natives bio-engineered huge trees into apartment towers, the same way they engineered smaller ones into country homes.

This city has a reputation, world wide he was told, for its

devastatingly heavy music and its devotion to the party life. There is a saying that translates to 'You can get some of the people straight some of the time - except in Zhindu'. Zhindu is said to be world class in audio technology and heavy industry. This is not known as a rich city and since there had been no governments on this planet for thousands of Earth years, it is not a political center. But it certainly is the economic, transportation and cultural center of this basin, everyone he'd met since he'd been released on this planet agreed on that. The time scales are so vast, the land so flat and the population so high that all the rivers in this basin have been diverted to run down to Zhindu where they feed the turbines of its industry.

Right now Alan was a thousand feet out on one of the great piers of Zhindu's West Harbor. Almost half the water's surface was covered by the thousand or so ships transferring cargo in this harbor and the traffic was so brisk that ships were tugged in and out with big ropes and pulleys. Locomotive-sized twenty four-legged beasts called tumufs walked in circles on the ends of the piers pushing a capstan with their big flat heads to drive them. The creak of ropes is a steady background to the sounds of the harbor.

The three who had begun this journey on the backs of logs in the mountains of the basin rim were now standing at the rail of the ship together again. They'd just said good-bye to all the permanent crew and a few commuters who are

going to help maneuver the ship to a back dock while the permanent crew took a little shore leave. Their last duty shift on the great ship Vikenvor was over.

Desa, the girl to his right, was the native Alan had known the longest. He had stumbled unknowingly into the logging town of Yoonbarla, back in the mountains a thousand miles southwest of here, and asked if there was a reading teacher. Desa was the only teacher in the village. She is *such* a cute almost-red curly brunette. She's firm and supple and surprisingly strong but softly curved. In Earth's years, she *looked* to be about seventeen. In Earth years, she was really about four hundred.

By now 'wife' was the only English word he knew to describe his relationship with Desa. Their language used the word 'keh' for wife or husband; primary life and sex partner. But there was no such thing as 'legal standing'. The natives had very, very open 'marriages,' not as exclusive as 'going out with' was among English-speaking teenage mortal women in 2175 when the expedition's entertainment was purchased. He was still having a hard time getting used to that, but he was sure that as a friend Desa would always take his side. The trials they had endured on the way here insured that.

Luray had just come down from saying good-bye to shaNai, the melancholy guy she had shared a cabin with these past few weeks. Luray is a blonde beauty of an Elven witch though she is older than Christianity, from a time when only Elven wizardry could hold back the tide of years. Luray was

also from the town of Yoonbarla, she and Desa had known each other since before he was born.

Luray and a girl named Nuran had been most of the 'open' in Alan's 'marriage' during the later part of the trip down the Lhar. Lmore and Nuran had been with them since three weeks above Shempala. Nuran is a kid like Alan, it's her first time anywhere and she has big plans. But he knew he would not see Nuran again. He knew he had never been any more than 'let's have some fun on the river ride' to Nuran, and their relationship had ended badly when Nuran tried to take advantage of Desa. Sure enough, she was leading the old herdsman Lmore off the boat as he thought of her. By this time Alan wasn't sorry to see her go. He was a little glad to see that her eyes were glued to the overwhelming size of the mountain before them also, in spite of all her preparation.

"So are you two still going to Klarrain's first?" Luray asked Alan and Desa as she reached them at the rail. Earlier Luray had talked them into staying with her at Klarrain's until they got settled, instead of spending money at an inn.

Desa turned to Alan, "Or would you rather have a quick Noonsleep in a sailor's flop and deal with the trip across town after?"

"It's a fifteen hundred foot climb and some long streetcar rides. Can you handle that before you sleep?" Luray asked.

She had been here before, why ask him? "So why do we have to make this climb?" Alan asked, "Why can't we just

take a streetcar from here?"

"Oh we can, but they charge a lot for lifting you and the switchbacks or spirals make it take at least as long as walking the stairs. The hitching and unhitching of the lifting team takes time. One keda can't get a loaded streetcar up a very steep slope. I like to make the climb and get to a summit-level line where we'll pay a penny each instead of two irons. If we could find an elevator it would be about an iron for all of us but I don't know of one along this part of the harborwall."

"Can you make it that far?" Desa asked Alan. They hadn't really planned on the unloading taking quite so long.

Even she was asking him, didn't they understand how little he knew about this? For survival in the wilds he had been a little unsure of himself, here he was completely lost. He tried to guess what Desa really wanted to hear. Was she asking him to say he was too tired so she wouldn't have to be the one to do so? Her lively brown eyes and pixie face always seemed so ready and eager for anything and that was misleading at times. There was some weariness in her, but not as much as there should have been. This Morningday had been filled with a tricky sail and a lot of unloading even with swarms of docksmen helping. But then Desa, like he and Luray, would be pumped from the excitement of getting here at last and not ready to go right to sleep. Alan didn't know what a 'sailor's flop' was like, but he imagined it was just a hammock hung somewhere above some cargo, probably almost as noisy as the dock and full of parties, loud boasting

and sloppy sex. He wasn't up for that right now, he'd face the climb and more.

"No problem for me." Alan responded.

"Then let's go hike some stairs," Desa said.

They picked up their bags and began walking toward the towering wall of structures. The dock was wide and lined with ships stern-to on both sides, all of them busy unloading, loading, coming or going. It was noisy with the clatter of wagon wheels and roller racks, the creak of tackle and the shouts of docksmen and cargomen. The grunts of deckhands lent bass to their notes. The smells of the river, sweat, kedas and the cargoes from all over the basin flooded their nostrils.

They went to the second level of planked-up walkways above the pier to get out of the way of the hustling wagons and big hairy men with huge peg teeth moving things around. Up here there were numerous cook stands, tackle shops and cargo offices. The people were of more types than Alan had seen so far. This was the first place other modes of dress were common. There were lots of robes and even a few uniforms in a style something like a sari. There were shaven heads. There were people shaven and painted instead of dressed, one of whom's skin was bright sky blue. But most of the genetic science in use here was devoted to muscle. There isn't a lot of energy in use in this society other than muscle and having lots of it was an advantage to a dock or cargo worker paid by the ton.

As they walked down the pier he could easily see the huge torches out at the berthing edges of the piers that had lit the face of the city all thru the previous dark. A shipload of wax blocks was being unloaded into them. Ship after ship was unloading foodstuffs, at least one with livestock on this pier alone. Many were loaded with fuel, most of it cordwood, some of it bags of alcohol. Down the center of the pier, wagons hustled in both directions. The ships that were being loaded were taking on crates and boxes, racks of jars, or strangely, shiploads of sacks of fertilizer. Alan already knew that most ships would take on their cargo at a lesser dock on some side-harbor out in the industrial flatlands surrounding the city. Like the Vikenvor, most would be hauled from downtown empty, and sailed with a commuter crew out to the flats.

At the root of the pier the cargo wagons went on into the mountain and their level was cargo wagons heading along the harborwall. A stairway led up beyond another level full of streetcars. On the fourth level they reached the dockwalk, open to the sky. Once up here he could really see that the dockwalk wasn't just one long winding road along the waterfront, it was a series of plazas and promenades, all at the same level, paved with colorful stones and tiles and thronged with colorful crowds. The facades of some of the oldest buildings told him the water had receded four floors since they were built. The city wall was more indented than it

looked from below, streets emptied onto it every few buildings.

Most of the buildings right at the bottom were built of enormous mossy basalt blocks. Gracefully curling organic-styled ornamentation was carved into much of it, especially around windows and doors, an Elvish motif. Most openings went to major retailers, most had their names carved into the stone over the door in elaborate lettering.

Artistry that spoke of deep time in many different cultures surrounded a single plaza featuring food and entertainments of those cultures. Alan only knew the Dwarf and Elvish motifs at the time, he wasn't sure of any of the others. The plazas on the roofs of buildings were open to buildings above and behind them. They were thick with plantings. As one's eyes ranged upward, the buildings of the harbor wall became more crystal, overgrown first with vines, then with whole trees hundreds of feet above.

Alan never felt so far from the expedition. The weeks of watching this mountain grow on the horizon, the months of talk, the thousands of pictures that he had seen, could not prepare him for being inside this hive called Zhindu. He wondered how the city kept from exploding from the social pressure alone? He wondered if he would be driven insane as his head swiveled in all directions at the sights around him.

Of the many streets going back from the harbor, most were only a couple stories high with buildings of the harbor wall above them. Each was an opening to an indoor street,

called a 'khume,' that went back into the harborwall. Out on the dockwalk there were awnings on the buildings, as colorful as anywhere he had been so far. There were no vehicles on this street or plaza unless you wanted to count the wheels on cook's carts.

Luray lead them into a khume, one of what must be thousands along the dockwalk. They walked back a few blocks and up a few steps. There was a busy indoor square here, then another toilsomely long flight of steps lead up to another outdoor plaza. This was deep in a well of stone buildings, all of them with thick walls, heavy doors and lots of grown-in stained glass. It was dark enough down here that there were no leaves on any of the wood, just centuries of built-up varnish. High above the stone buildings were the grown buildings, seeming like ancient trees but laced with balconies and bridges. They spread so there was no clear view of the sky, the forest canopy closed in above them. It was at least thirty stories to the base of those trees.

"What's in all these buildings?" Alan asked.

"Right at the walk it's trendy tourist stuff, back a block from that it's mainly discount produce and staples dealers. A lot of people and most cooks come down here and backpack or cart their food up rather than pay high-ground prices," Luray answered. "This drop is noted for specialty retail, feminine clothing, jewelry, stuff like that, but those things are farther up. Down here we've got a few floors of exotic produce, spices, ornamentals and fragrances."

He could look in a door and see that it was full of produce stalls. There were lots of people with enormous backpacks full of produce among the crowd here, much more so than on the dockwalk itself. Luray picked a stairway and they began climbing. They would stop every few floors when a public hallway intersected the stairs. It seemed to Alan you could tell when there was a public hallway by the signs and paintings on the walls at that level. Even down this low in an atrium like this, Alan could see that the outer rooms were residential, but both sides of the first hallway were retail and pretty busy. The retail, and presumably the residential, were not that wide here, the people owning these booths must live on the atriums behind them. There were some places that he could have called department stores, but most retail businesses appeared to be a single counter, a proprietor and some shelving behind. A pottery jar served as the cash register. Some really nice things might be sold in an actual shop that had a door and an additional small jar for metal. The department stores and actual shops were not on the side of the aisle toward the atrium they were climbing.

They didn't push, Luray and to some extent Desa, did some browsing while resting from stairways, so it was almost an hour before they reached the top of this atrium. It seemed that a tall atrium with plenty of public stairways around it was called a 'drop'. Alan forgot the name of this drop and would never see it again.

When they finally reached the top of the atrium there was

a small, shady plaza with only a few stories of grown housing surrounding it. From this plaza he could see where another path went back toward the harbor and higher in the building and would have a great view. There would be time for that, none of them were anxious to do any extra steps at the moment. On the far side of the plaza was a wide stairway that went between lower floors of buildings for only a block, then it went between the middle floors of buildings farther up the hill.

Before going up there they stopped for a drink and a snack. There was plain water available at less than half the price of the palest yaag. Alan filled his skins with that while they paused for some teriyakied inglethor sticks just like in Yoonbarla and at less than six times the price.

"This is cheap here," Luray said, "The minimum wage I've ever seen is a penny and something per psi-hour for pedaling."

"I've seen it five sixths of a penny lately," the cook told her, "especially down here. You might get over a plastic on the high ground still," he told them, "But I haven't really nosed around up there these last few decades."

"This is 'down here'?" Alan was still puffing.

"You're atop the harbor wall," the cook answered, "but that's all. All packed out the way you folk are, you must be just getting off a boat?"

"I've been away in Wescarp a few decades," Luray said, "their first time in the city," she pointed to Alan and Desa.

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