

Skyrider

by Mary A. Fall

Hawk stood silent on the edge of the cliff, staring at the birds soaring on the breezes around him. His soul longed to be up there with him, but his mind knew the desire to be impossible. His ancestors had long ago traded the power of flight for such safety as they had been able to find on Throm. Now he could only watch in envy as the huge, graceful seahunters soared and dove in the sunlight.

"Do you think we're doing the right thing?" whispered Wilma from where she and Buck stood at the edge of the woods. They held strange apparatus in their arms.

"I'm sure of it," asserted Buck confidently. "Hawk told me once how he and Koori used to go to what they called the Soaring Place and used gliders to imitate the power of flight their ancestors had."

"Well, you know him best," Wilma shrugged, hoping that Buck really knew what he was doing. Hawk had withdrawn inside himself since Koori's death and the trial before the Galactic Tribunal.

"Hey, Hawk." Rogers plowed right ahead, wanting to get the thing settled one way or another. He didn't want Wilma to guess that he was as uneasy as she was.

"Buck. Wilma." The slender, dark-clad figure turned away from the cliff. "Have you need of me in the camp?" His voice expressed little except acceptance of a duty.

Mentally crossing his fingers, Buck pointed toward the harness that he and Wilma were hauling. "Not exactly. We'd like your opinion on this gadget."

"A glider." Something flashed in Hawk's eyes, quickly hidden again behind the unemotional mask he'd worn since the trial. "Where did you find it?"

"Dr. Goodfellow's been experimenting with equipment to help us in surveying some of these planets we've been running across. Said it would be a good way to cover some of this rocky terrain." Laughter filled Buck's eyes. "Think you could help us try it out?"

Hawk's hands unconsciously fondled the material of the glider, his thoughts suddenly back on Throm with Koori and their people. The hours they had spent in the mountains, flying as closely as possible in the ways of their ancient Earth ancestors. Buck's words broke through the thoughts, and his mask slipped, showing the joy that filled him at

the thought of flying once again. "If it would be of help...?"

Rogers wasn't fooled a bit by the formal words. "It sure would." He grinned ingratiatingly.

"Then I shall be glad to help the Doctor"

Eagerly, Hawk strapped himself into the harness, testing the straps and the unfolding wings, appreciating the strength of the materials used in its construction.

"Bon voyage," called Buck as his friend stepped into space, reaching instinctively for an updraft. Hawk nodded, responding to the tone, rather than the phrase, which he didn't understand. Then his mind was all on the wonder, the sensation of the air sliding past his body, the sharing of their element with the startled sea birds that had gathered around the cliff.

Below him on the ground, Buck and Wilma watched Hawk gliding effortlessly from one air current to another, almost as though he could see a pathway in the sky. "It's incredible," murmured Wilma, shading her eyes to keep him in sight. "He really is a hawk."

"Sure is." Buck felt a sudden twinge of envy, that he could never equal his friend's grace in the air. He would always feel heavy and clumsy.

Finally, Hawk brought the glider back to the cliff, expertly landing before his amazed friends. For the first time since they'd known him, the birdman's eyes glowed with naked joy, unafraid to expose himself to their eyes. "Thank you," he said simply, extending a hand as he had seen the humans do on *Searcher*.

"Any time," replied Buck, taking the hand, his own emotions in that moment as well. He'd been too long a man out of time alone. Now, with Hawk, he didn't feel so alone. "For a friend."

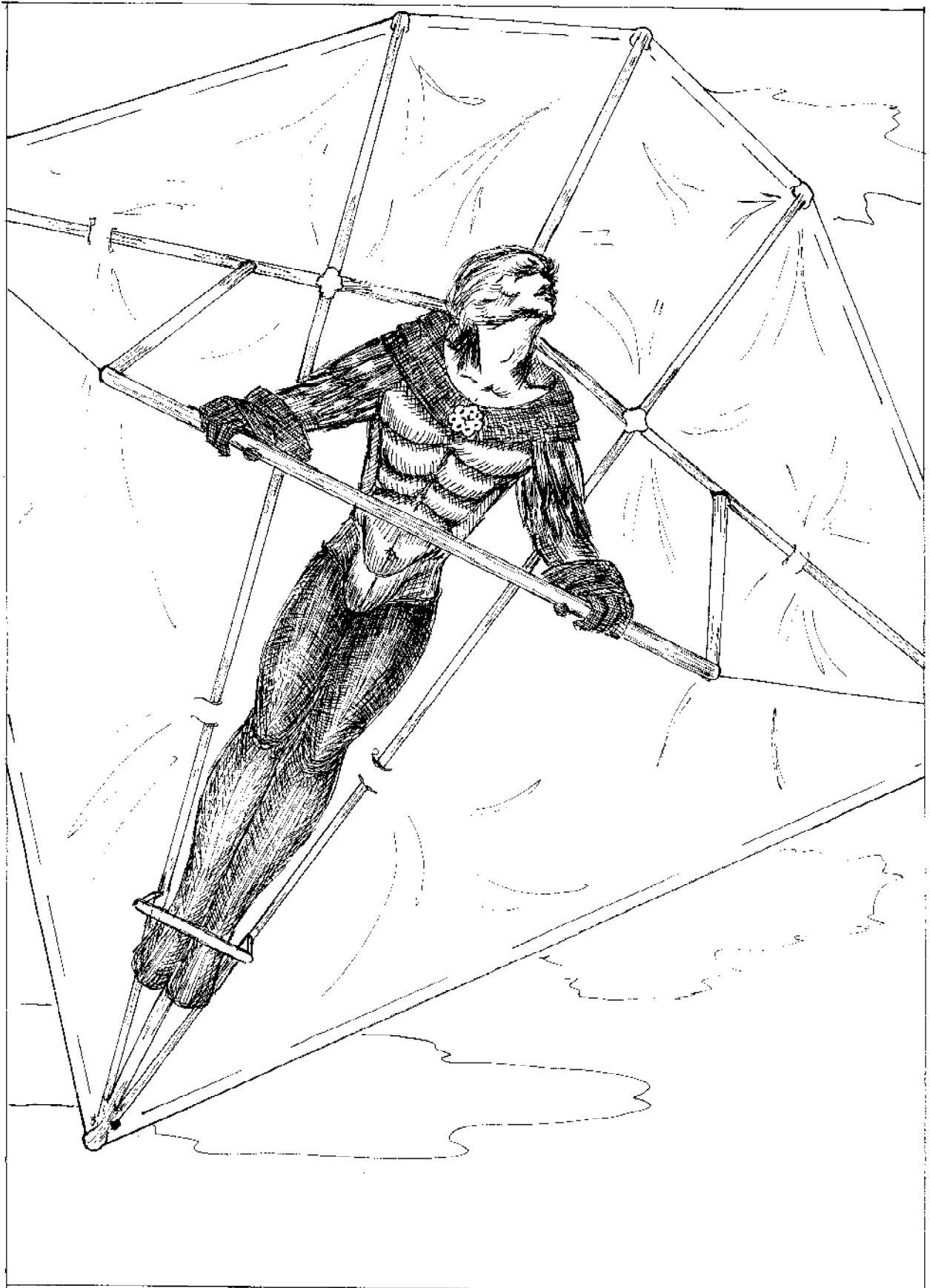
"For a friend," replied Hawk, nodding in understanding, then turning his gaze on Wilma. "Or two..."

"Thanks, Hawk." Wilman took Buck's other hand, amazed once again. "We'd better head back to camp and tell Dr. Goodfellow that his experiment is a success."

"Yes...we should tell him, in case he wishes to build more for the rest of you." Hawk walked with his human friends back to the camp, feeling at home with them at last.

end.

felgercarb



1920 *Omivald*