

Marauder - Isaac Asimov's Robots In Time - William F Wu

ISAAC ASIMOV'S
ROBOTS
IN TIME

by
WILLIAM F. WU

THE LAWS OF ROBOTICS

1.
A robot may not injure a human being, or through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.
2.
A robot must obey the orders given it by human beings, except where such orders would conflict with the First Law.
3.
A robot must protect its own existence, as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Law.

ISAAC ASIMOV'S
ROBOTS
IN TIME

MARAUDER

WILLIAM F. WU
Copyright © 1993

Databank by Matt Elson

This is dedicated to

William Q. Wu

My father, who bought me a red plastic pirate ship full of toy buccaneers for a dollar at the Menora Medical Clinic gift shop when I was little.

Special thanks in the writing of this novel are due to Michael D. Toman, Ricia Mainhardt, John Betancourt, and Byron Preiss.

1

R. Hunter sat in the chair of Mojave Center Governor, in the Governor robot's office, considering his next move. The office was located in the underground desert city called Mojave Center. Hunter was the new, specially designed humaniform robot who had recently been finished and programmed according to the specifications of the Governor Robot Oversight Committee. The scientists on the Oversight Committee had created Hunter to find and return Mojave Center Governor. One of six experimental Governor robots

designed to run complete, self-contained cities like Mojave Center, Mojave Center Governor was missing. In his absence, the city computer and individual positronic robots had taken over his responsibilities.

The other five experimental Governor robots had malfunctioned at approximately the same time, suggesting a basic design flaw. Since Mojave Center Governor was the only exception, the committee members wanted to study him as part of their investigation of the problem. To avoid being taken apart, MC Governor had fled.

Each of the Governor robots could divide at will into six component humaniform robots. One of the component robots who comprised MC Governor now stood motionless, shut down, in one corner of the office. Hunter and his team of three humans had brought him back from the distant past. The other five had also chosen to hide in earlier times.

For the last several minutes, Hunter had been monitoring the news through his internal receiver.

"A nuclear explosion on the southern coast of Jamaica yesterday continues to pile up casualties," said the announcer. "Fatalities are estimated in the hundreds of thousands, and within the next few hours, tidal waves will strike the coasts of other islands throughout the Caribbean. Over the coming week, these tidal waves are expected to strike heavily populated areas in Haiti, Puerto Rico, many other islands, and the coasts of Central and South America, causing incalculable destruction. Little time remains for emergency measures to prevent even more flooding and the suffering that will follow...."

Hunter shut off the reception. The extent of the disaster was clear. He had a lot of work ahead to prevent that explosion.

First Hunter had to brief the committee on his progress through a conference call that was linked to him through the Mojave Center city computer.

"Good day," said Hunter, as the four familiar human faces of the Governor Robot Oversight Committee appeared on his internal video screen.

The committee members greeted him with eager anticipation.

"You have good news, I hope." Dr. Redfield, a tall, slender blonde, spoke first. "What have you learned? Have you located MC Governor already?"

"Part of him," said Hunter, responding with precise accuracy.

"Part of him," Professor Post repeated thoughtfully. He stroked his pointed, black beard. "I take this to mean, then, that MC Governor divided into his component robots before your team could apprehend him."

"Yes, that is correct," said Hunter. "However, we have apprehended MC 1, the first gestalt robot, and returned him safely here."

"That was fast," said Dr. Chin, surprised. She was the short, pretty Chinese American with long, black hair. "Where did you find MC 1?"

Hunter hesitated, at least by his fast robotic standards. He and his team of human colleagues had followed MC 1 back in time to the Late Cretaceous Period of prehistory using a modified device in Mojave Center. They had found MC 1 in a forest full of dinosaurs.

The reality of time travel was a revolutionary discovery; Hunter did not want to mention it casually, without considering the long-term effects such a device might have on humans. The other members of the team had agreed to keep the secret until he chose to reveal it. Any significant action in the past might change human history in the present, creating unimaginable harm to people. The First Law of the Three Laws of Robotics that governed all robots' behavior said, "A robot may not injure a human being, or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm."

For the present, Hunter decided not to reveal the existence of the time travel device.

"We found MC 1 in Alberta, Canada," Hunter said simply. His statement was true; the event just happened to have occurred many millions of years in the past.

"Shouldn't you be looking for the others there, too?" Dr. Chin asked.
"No," said Hunter. "Our information is not complete, but the other component robots appear to have separated."

"I don't understand something," said Dr. Khanna, in his Hindi accent. "You captured MC 1 very quickly, considering that he was in Alberta and you were assigned to the task only yesterday. Now you have returned to Mojave Center already. How did you manage to work so efficiently?"

"I have a very capable team," said Hunter cautiously. They had returned to the present only a short time after they had left, though they had actually spent several long, difficult days in the past trying to capture MC 1. So to anyone in the present, they had not been gone from Mojave Center very long at all.

"However, Chad Mora has completed his work for me. I will need a replacement for him, this time a specialist in the history of the Caribbean."

"Please give us a report on your first mission," said Dr. Khanna.

"I would prefer to give you a complete report on concluding my assignment," said Hunter.

"I think if we are expected to continue hiring assistants for you, we can require a report at this stage," said Dr. Khanna, raising one eyebrow.

"I remind you that I am not a human seeking to keep a job," said Hunter. "I can work most efficiently with a team of human experts. You may decide how much efficiency you are willing to allow me."

"All right, hold it," said Dr. Chin. "I think we can wait for a complete report. The important thing is to get MC Governor back in one piece."

Dr. Khanna shrugged, frowning.

"How is the rest of your team?" Dr. Redfield asked. "Everyone worked out, I assume."

"Yes," said Hunter. "The roboticist, Jane Maynard, is definitely a help. Steve Chang, our general assistant, has a range of pragmatic experience that I and the more highly educated specialists simply lack. No amount of library data accessible to me can substitute for their combined contributions. They are still here in Mojave Center and will continue working with me."

"Even so," said Dr. Khanna. "I don't understand exactly how you are conducting your search."

"I don't think it matters," said Professor Post. "Since MC Governor has divided into his components, the assignment we gave Hunter is now six times as difficult. The fact that he succeeded so quickly with the first part of it convinces me that his judgment is sound."

"I agree," said Dr. Redfield. "I can wait for your report too."

"So can I," said Professor Post.

"Very well," said Dr. Khanna. Hunter was relieved. If they had given him direct orders, he would have had no choice but to obey them. The Second Law of Robotics was, "A robot must obey the orders given it by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the First Law." He also decided not to report to the committee that Dr. Wayne Nystrom had appeared on the scene, trying to get control of MC 1 before Hunter could. If the committee members knew more, they might change their minds and try to participate more directly after all.

"Tell you what," said Dr. Redfield. "We will authorize you to make direct contact with the new assistant you need to hire, instead of giving us the list as you did last time. Have this individual contact us for financial arrangements. Is this acceptable?"

"Yes," said Hunter. "Thank you. Is there anything else?"

"Can you give us an estimated time of completion?" Dr. Khanna asked.

"No," said Hunter.

After completing the call, Hunter paused to consider what he had done. That final answer to the Committee was not entirely true. If the time travel in all

the future missions turned out as well as it had in the first mission, he could estimate completion in five days. The team could accomplish that by returning from each mission the same day they left, no matter how long the missions took in the past. However, a five-day estimate might further trigger Dr. Khanna's curiosity.

Furthermore, Hunter was not sure how to give them a suitable final report without revealing the use of time travel. At the moment, in his own mind, he was just barely able to justify not giving the committee an estimated time of completion. He had decided that if Dr. Khanna placed obstacles in his way, it would interfere with his ability to prevent harm to humans as a result of potential changes the robots might bring about in the course of history. That interpretation of the First Law could be debated, but it had allowed him to avoid giving the estimate.

Hunter had the city computer use its access to employment agencies and lists of scholars to find a historian. Most of them, of course, were not technically available; the best ones were employed in schools or research centers, or pursuing independent projects of their own. However, time travel altered the possibilities a great deal.

Hunter now realized that he would in all likelihood bring his team back to the present only a few moments after they had left, just as he had last time. That meant anyone who was willing and able to travel to Mojave Center and back home the same day would have enough time for the job. The fee was considerable, especially for a task that would not take any time from their other commitments. Some danger would exist, of course, but with Hunter leading the team, the First Law would require him to give as much protection as a very large, powerful, state of the art robot could provide.

The immediate problem was persuading anyone of this without revealing the secret of time travel prematurely.

As soon as he had a short list of candidates, he began calling them. Within an hour, he hired a historian named Rita Chavez, who specialized in the history of the Caribbean during the period that Hunter's team would visit, the year 1668. She arranged to fly immediately from her home in Miami to the landing facility on the ground above Mojave Center.

Hunter had remained vague, however, about the details of the job. Instead, he had told her that she could still cancel her commitment after she had heard the details in person. The argument that she would receive a substantial fee without missing much more than her travel time to and from Mojave Center had clearly made an impression on her.

Hunter checked the time. Jane and Steve had been in need of a complete dinner and a good night's sleep after their trip back to the Late Cretaceous Period. He estimated that they were still asleep in their hotel rooms. By the time they woke up, Rita would probably have arrived.

As a robot, he had no need of rest as such; solar converters blended into his skin energized him when he was exposed to sunlight. Inside, of course, he could simply plug into the city's power grid if necessary. While he waited, he decided to gather new data and review the situation.

"City computer," said Hunter, through his radio link. "Please locate and present all data relevant to Jamaica in 1668. I will review it and copy selected portions."

"Acknowledged," said the city computer.

Hunter knew that this kind of quick research could not replace the advanced expertise Rita would bring. Still, he wanted to know as much as he could. When the information was available, he transferred it to his own memory.

The ongoing challenge in Hunter's mission, of course, was that Mojave Center's component robots were motivated by the Third Law of Robotics, "A robot must protect his own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Laws." The component robots were afraid that when the

committee had reassembled them into Mojave Center Governor, the Governor robot would be permanently dismantled and destroyed. They were physically small in stature, but they had their robotic intelligence and humaniform shapes to help them hide among humans.

Shortly before Rita's VTOL jet was due to arrive, Hunter received a call through his internal link.

"R. Hunter. This is the city computer calling."

"Acknowledged," said Hunter.

"I have a conference call from Steve and Jane for you."

"Patch them through."

"Hey, Hunter. Where are you? Still in Mojave Center somewhere?" Steve asked cheerfully.

"Morning, Hunter," said Jane.

"Greetings," said Hunter. "I am waiting for the new member of our team. She should arrive soon and I want to introduce you immediately."

"You have completed your sleep courses in English and Spanish of the 1600s?"

"Si," said Steve.

"I'm hungry," said Jane. "Let's meet in a restaurant. Bring her down."

"Where shall we meet?"

"Debbie's Diner. Jane and I already decided. It's on a side street called Foursquare."

"We will meet you there," said Hunter. "Bye."

"Okay!"

Hunter saw that the time had come to meet Rita. Normally, citizens would ride the slidewalks to travel through each level of Mojave Center. Hunter wanted privacy with her, however, and used his link to the city computer to commandeer a Security vehicle. A Security robot brought the electric vehicle to Hunter at MC Governor's office and turned it over to him. Hunter drove it up to the city terminal, in the top level of the city.

Hunter met Rita Chavez and introduced himself. Rita, who was short, slender, and dark-haired, wore a gray business suit and had a reserved, professional demeanor. They climbed into the vehicle and Hunter began the drive down to the restaurant. He used his radio link to warn robots ahead that they were approaching as he drove. Only the presence of human pedestrians required his ringing the melodic warning tone.

"When we spoke earlier," said Rita, "you declined to explain the entire job over the phone. What are you paying me to do?"

Hunter looked around. No one was nearby. "All right. But I must have your agreement that you will keep this confidential. A scientific development of grave importance is involved."

"But you're willing to trust me with it?"

"I require your help."

"All right," said Rita. "I agree not to reveal your secret."

Hunter omitted the scientific details, but told her about the time travel sphere. Then he gave her a quick explanation of the previous mission and what he could predict about the next one.

"I'm amazed." Rita stared at him in shock. "Your entire team has already been to the time of dinosaurs?"

"That is right."

"Hunter, I have to ask you something. I agreed to keep this secret and I will. But several people already know, including the man who preceded me and also this Dr. Nystrom you just told me about. Someone is going to start talking sooner or later. It's just too exciting to keep quiet forever. What will you do then?"

"I must confine my focus for now," said Hunter. "Only reproducible evidence matters in a scientific conclusion, so a small amount of early talk will not prove anything. I have the Bohung Institute secure at the moment. No matter

how long we have to chase component robots in the past, I hope to complete the search for MC Governor very soon, in real time counted from his initial disappearance."

"Then what will you do about keeping this secret?"

"I have not yet decided. I also prefer not to discuss it further now. The First Law will govern my actions."

"I see." Her tone was cool and professional, revealing little of her opinion. Hunter drove in silence for several moments.

"You told me you need my expertise as a historian regarding Jamaica in 1668," said Rita. "But how do you know that MC 2 will be in Jamaica at that time?"

"I took the information from the device the component robots used to flee," said Hunter. "But there is more. When they fled, they miniaturized themselves to microscopic size. The process made some of their atoms unstable. The time travel altered that miniaturization so that it is temporary. According to my calculations, MC 2 will return to normal size on a certain day in 1668. We certainly cannot locate him before that, but I want to catch him as soon as possible. Otherwise, once he starts interacting with other humans, he may alter the course of history."

"I know it's theoretically possible to change history," Rita said doubtfully.

"But it depends on the importance of his actions."

"I assume you have followed the news," said Hunter. "You know that a major explosion took place on the southern coast of Jamaica yesterday."

"Hm? Oh, yes. Wasn't that terrible? No one knows what it was, but the tidal waves are hitting all over the Caribbean. It's terrible."

"Yes," said Hunter. "That was actually MC 2 exploding. The instability of the component robots' atoms causes them to explode with nuclear force when they reach the approximate time from which they originally left, give or take a day or so."

"Oh, no." Rita stared at him in horror. "I'm beginning to understand." She hesitated. "They didn't explode all at once?"

"No. Apparently the component robots of MC Governor himself also have varied levels of instability. Since the others have not exploded yet, we will go to Jamaica. When we bring MC 2 back, this explosion will never have happened."

Hunter spoke stiffly, almost defensively. "If I fail to retrieve him, then I will have failed the First Law in allowing so much harm to so many people."

"I'm sure you can get him," said Rita. "After all, you got MC 1. You probably won't even need me, except for a little help here and there."

"I want you to understand that, for now, I have withheld the fact that the Jamaican explosion is related to MC 2 from the committee," said Hunter. "And certainly from the public."

She looked up at him, waiting.

"I expect to eliminate the problem, in which case an explanation will be unnecessary." He stopped the vehicle in front of Debbie's Diner. "Here we are. I will introduce you to the rest of the team."

2

Debbie's Diner was decorated in the fashion of a small Missouri town from the early twentieth century. The furniture was made of cedar, the deep red and white of the wood sealed by a clear preservative. Frilly blue and white curtains hung in all the windows. Jars of fruit preserves made by hand were for sale in the front.

Steve Chang had already requested a corner table in the back. He and Jane Maynard were waiting there when Hunter brought in Rita and made introductions. Hunter looked around, appraising the room.

As he did, Steve looked too. No one was seated close to them. Humans couldn't hear them, but of course a robot could increase his aural sensitivity.

"What's wrong?" Jane asked.

"We can get acquainted here," said Hunter. "However, the area is extremely open, offering virtually no privacy. I suggest we postpone our discussion of specific plans until we move to a secure location."

"Aw, Hunter." Steve grinned. "Are you kidding?"

"Of course not," Hunter said stiffly.

Rita was looking back and forth between them, curiously.

"Hunter, you hired me for my pragmatic experience, as opposed to the formal education possessed by the rest of your team. Right?"

"Of course."

"Well, take my word for it. As long as we don't discuss the science and technology required for our trip, then anything else we say will go completely unnoticed. Frankly, nobody believes in time travel."

"I think you have a point," said Jane. "They'll think we're going to a costume party or making a historical movie or something."

"I accept your argument," said Hunter, again glancing around warily.

"May I ask a question, then?" Rita asked. "I would like to know in more detail exactly what is expected of me. I understand that, in general, I'm to help with information about the history and culture of Jamaica in 1668...but what do you want, exactly?"

"While Jane and Steve were resting up from our last mission, I gathered clothing and equipment," said Hunter. "I need Steve to look it over for practicality and you to screen it for anachronisms."

"I see," said Rita.

"It'll be easier this time," said Steve. "Last time, we had to take nearly everything important with us. Now we're going back to a time and place that already has human necessities. But we'll want vaccinations for disease."

"I'll work up a list of likely ones," said Rita. "All the microbes will have evolved some over the years, but we should take the precautions we can."

As the group ordered the meals from a robot waiter, Steve studied Rita. She was petite and pretty, and coolly professional. At least she hadn't started needling him, the way the paleontologist on the last mission, Chad Mora, had done from the moment they met. Steve and Chad had parted friends but they had not started out that way. Rita's reserve was a welcome change.

"I've never heard of Port Royal, Jamaica," said Steve. "Not that I've been to the Caribbean. But I've never seen it on the ads for tourists or heard it mentioned when hurricanes are in the news. Where is it?"

"Under the water." Rita smiled nicety. "Port Royal was located on the southern coast of Jamaica, to the east. It was across a bay from modern Kingston. In the seventeenth century, it was the center of Jamaican buccaneer activity, but a big earthquake hit it in 1692. Its remains have been under the water ever since."

"Well, that explains that." Steve grinned at Jane. "No wonder I've never heard of it."

"No wonder," Jane agreed.

"We should all have weapons. I think." said Rita. "For our own protection."

"I will have to protect all of you under the First Law," said Hunter. "I am much stronger than any human my size, and much quicker. As long as we stay together. I can handle this task."

"We're going to enter a very rough, violent culture," said Rita. "Port Royal is even more violent than most areas were during the 1600s."

"Taking weapons is a problem for me," said Hunter. "One of my greatest concerns is that we avoid changing history. We should take back as few items as possible. Any material we take back beyond the bare minimum increases the chance that we will alter events in the future—that is, after 1668. Our own time might not be waiting here for us when we come home. That possibility makes it a First Law concern."

"I don't know how to impress upon you how dangerous Port Royal will be," said

Rita. "In particular, they will look at Jane and me in a very different way from what we are used to in our own time. You hired me for my expertise, and I believe we should all carry at least good-sized knives, if not pistols and swords."

"This may be too great a risk—" Hunter began.

"I suggest a compromise," said Steve.

"What kind?" Jane asked. "After all, Hunter, keeping us safe is also part of your First Law requirement."

"We'll take some money back with us," said Steve. "Coins from that time, 1668 or earlier. Spanish coins, English coins, whatever Rita says is appropriate. When we get there, we'll buy what we need, then leave it behind when we come home. That way we won't take anything that originated after 1668 back with us."

"That would satisfy my concern," said Rita. "But we'll have to keep our wealth well-hidden from the buccaneers around us."

"A compromise," Hunter said carefully. "Rita, are coins from that time and place readily available?"

"Well, they exist," said Rita. "Many of them were gold, so those are very expensive. Many are in museums and galleries now, so those aren't available at all. But some coins from that time can be found for a reasonable price. I would try collectors and dealers in the Caribbean."

"I have a certain number of such coins already," said Hunter. "I would prefer not to delay the trip while we wait for more."

"You know," said Rita. "They could be faked easily and cheaply. Or would that be too risky?"

"Fakes would increase the chance of altering history," said Hunter. "We would increase the local money supply."

"How much do you have?" Rita asked.

"One kilogram of silver coin," said Hunter. "The denominations vary."

Rita thought a moment. "Exact prices fluctuated, depending on what booty the buccaneers brought back at any given time. Barter was very common. For our purposes, however, I think that should do if we are careful with it."

"This will be a good move for more reasons than just getting weapons," Steve said. "We'll want to rent lodging and buy food, too."

"We will take two-way radio transmitters this time too," said Hunter.

"Yeah! That'll avoid some stupid problems we had last time," said Steve.

"They must be disguised," said Rita. "If anyone in 1668 hears voices coming out of the air, we might be accused of sorcery of some kind and killed on the spot. Buccaneers were very superstitious, impulsive people."

"I have the transmitters ready," said Hunter. "In the form of lapel pins."

"We should wear them out of sight," said Rita. "Jewelry will invite thieves."

"This whole arrangement sounds good to me," said Steve. "I think this mission may be safer than the last one. Food and shelter will be waiting and we won't have to watch for Tyrannosaurus rexes stampeding after us."

Jane laughed. "I'm convinced."

During dinner, Rita had Hunter access the city computer. In consultation with it, she gave Hunter a list of vaccinations that the human members of the team would need. He arranged to have the serums waiting at the Institute.

After dinner, Hunter drove the team through Mojave Center to the Bohung Institute. Rita began briefing them on what to expect in Port Royal, including some of the sailing terms and other historical references they might need in the language. Hunter stored it easily, of course.

As Hunter listened to Rita, he also eavesdropped on some of the people around them. Everyone seemed to be talking about the explosion in Jamaica. The toll of death, injuries, and destruction was still climbing. The world community was rushing to help with emergency supplies and services. Experts around the

world were speculating on the cause, but only Hunter and his team knew what it was.

Hunter's sense of failure under the First Law for allowing so many humans to suffer and die was increasing. He wanted to go back into the past as soon as possible to prevent the disaster. He was making an unusual effort to concentrate his attention on his duties. Reviewing the moves he had already made helped to distract him.

Before MC Governor had left, he had arranged for the city computer to coordinate the duties that were normally his. Hunter had found that the system was functioning effectively, so he had not interfered with it. Earlier that day, Hunter had also arranged, through the city computer, for the entire Bohung Institute to be closed down. He had cited emergency conditions that he had classified as "unexplained." It was now guarded by a full detail of Security robots.

This detail was temporarily under the authority of R. Ishihara. He was the robot who was normally assigned to Room F-12, where the experimental time travel unit was located. Originally designed for miniaturization, it had been modified by MC Governor for this second purpose. Hunter felt that leaving an Institute robot in charge was appropriate.

After dinner, Hunter drove the team in the Security vehicle up to the Bohung Institute. By the time he pulled up at the main entrance, he had already alerted Ishihara that they were coming. Hunter had also transmitted Rita's appearance, fingerprints, and voiceprint so that Ishihara could add them to the screening data for members of Hunter's team. It was just a precaution. Hunter fully expected that by the time he brought Rita through the Institute again on the way out, MC 2 would have been apprehended.

The Security detail was there partly to prevent unexpected visitors from entering, since the employees had already been notified that the Institute was closed. Charging the guards with the protection of the humans on Hunter's team under the First Law meant that no humans could use the Second Law to countermand his instructions. However, Hunter's main reason for assigning the detail was to capture Dr. Wayne Nystrom if at all possible. The team had last seen him in the Late Cretaceous Period, but he could be anywhere at any time by now.

Hunter led his team into Room F-12, where Ishihara was personally stationed. The room was very large and dominated by an opaque sphere about fifteen meters in diameter. The rest of the room was lined with countertops filled with computers, monitors, a communications console, and miscellaneous office items that had been in use when Hunter had suddenly closed down the Institute. Inside, Ishihara passed out the oral vaccines to the humans, who took them immediately. Then he waited by the door. Everyone turned to Hunter for instructions.

Hunter took them to a small stack of clothes and accessories on a counter. "Steve, Rita," said Hunter. "These are the clothes I gathered while Steve and Jane were sleeping. If they pass inspection, we can leave soon. I hired the robot tailor from the city personnel department to design and make them based on research I did in the library. I gave him Steve's and Jane's sizes. Rita's clothes may need alteration, which I can have done immediately. Since we will be in the tropics, the clothes are made of cotton, not wool. I directed that no modern synthetic materials be present in any of them. Steve and I have already agreed that we will not have to take any packs of survival gear with us."

Steve picked up a loose, white shirt and knee breeches, shaking them out to take a look at them. "Good enough, I'd say. I'll try them on in a minute." First he examined the other clothing, which included two long brown skirts for Rita and Jane. "These are practical enough, I think. These will help us blend in when we first arrive. That's the important part."

"The clothing design is correct," said Rita, taking items from Steve. "But this belt buckle is an anachronism."

"In what way?" Hunter asked.

"The buckle is made of stainless steel, a more recent development," said Rita, tossing the belt to him. She held the hem of one skirt up close to peer at it.

"Did you tell the tailor robot to avoid synthetic thread too?"

"No," said Hunter. "I was thinking of fabric when I gave him instructions."

"Better contact him to make sure," said Rita. She quickly glanced over all the clothes, including the shoes. "Everything else is acceptable."

"Take these," said Hunter, handing each of them a communicator. They were simple, decorative, silver buttons with a tiny speaker hole in the center, a pin on the back, and a tiny button on the side. "Pin them to the underside of your lapels, out of sight. That way, they will be close enough to speak into without attracting a lot of attention."

While the humans took turns changing their clothes in an adjacent room, Hunter called the tailor robot about the thread. He changed his own clothes at the same time. The thread was satisfactory.

"Fortunately," said Hunter, "the tailor robot understood my meaning when I asked him to use only natural fibers of cotton. Steve, are the belts necessary? We can save time if we do not bother to replace the buckles."

"No, we can get by without them, at least at first. We can buy some there if we need them."

"Good," said Hunter. "Rita, how are your clothes?"

"How do I look?" She smiled and did a little twirl in her loose blouse and full skirt. "They're a little big, but I think good enough. We don't need to delay the trip to make minor alterations." Now that she was out of her business suit, her manner seemed more casual.

"You look fine," said Steve. "Hunter, shall we go?"

"I believe we are about ready to go," said Hunter. "Everyone's communicator is in place, I see; good. Before we go, however, I want to brief you again on the matter of altering history."

"I think I've already heard it," Steve said wryly. "Jane too."

"Rita must hear it," said Hunter.

"Yeah, well." Steve rolled his eyes and sat down in a chair. "All right, let's get it over with."

"I have estimated that Mojave Center 2, the robot we seek, will return to full size from his miniaturized state about the time we arrive. That is how I chose the destination in time for our trip, since we cannot possibly find him while he is still microscopic. The greatest danger in this mission is that before we can apprehend him, he will take actions that alter the time line of history from 1668 to the present day."

"I already know that, Hunter," Rita said patiently.

"I have not made my point yet."

"Maybe you don't have to," said Rita. "Hunter, as a historian, I understand the theories behind your concern, but let me give you a counterargument, all right?"

"Go ahead," said Hunter. After all, what she had said earlier was right; he had hired her for her expertise.

Steve pointedly faked a yawn and pretended to fall asleep.

3

Actually, Steve listened with amusement as Rita earnestly argued with Hunter. Jane seemed seriously interested in their difference of opinion. Hunter's face, as usual, was calm and hard to read.

"On the surface of it, the history in this time and place really isn't very important," said Rita. "You see, the depredations of the buccaneers from Jamaica in this era were a side issue to European wars. In fact, much of the

booty that resulted from their raids never left the Caribbean."

"Wait a minute," said Steve. "I know my history isn't great, but I remember something about this stuff. I learned in school that the Spanish were taking huge amounts of gold back to Spain at that time. Sir Francis Drake and Walter Raleigh and the Spanish Armada—all that stuff. And that the English kept raiding Spanish ships and taking a lot of gold back to England. What about that?"

"Your history is correct as far as it goes, but that was a century earlier, during the 1500s."

"Oh. Sorry."

"No reason to be. That was simply a different phase of the same era. But even more to the point, Port Royal itself and three thousand of its inhabitants will be wiped out in the 1692 earthquake that I mentioned. So this town is not even going to last very long after we're there—only one short generation after we leave."

"So you don't feel that the events in Jamaica in 1668 are going to mean much to the overall direction of history?" Jane asked thoughtfully.

"No, I don't. I believe that history is driven by major developments in technology and economics, which in turn trigger social and political change."

"I am still worried about the application of chaos theory to our missions into the past," said Hunter. "You are familiar with the theory?"

"Yes," said Rita. "It's an application of a theory from physics, applied to time and, therefore, to history. Basically, it says that any change in the past, no matter how small, will send out continuing ripple effects that will eventually change history greatly."

"That is right."

"As a historian, I've never been convinced that chaos theory truly applies to history."

"I'm no scientist," said Steve, grinning. "But if I understand this theory at all, then our previous trip to the dinosaur age disproved it a little."

"What do you mean?" Rita asked.

"We made some changes. I mean, we captured a dinosaur to ride, trampled on a lot of plants, and caused a stampede. But when we got back, everything was pretty much the same."

"The question is where the threshold of change lies," said Hunter. "That is, how many changes must take place, or how important must they be, to set a course of permanent change?"

"I'm afraid we'll be the ones to find out," said Jane. "As the first time travelers, we may just find out the hard way, by making changes we don't want to make."

"Maybe not," said Rita. "Look, at your trip to the Late Cretaceous Period—one expectation might have been that minor changes from that long ago could have caused a divergent time line that would be very different by the time events reached the present—that the changes would become more extreme every second for millions of years. But that didn't happen. So another theory is that so much time was involved that the sheer weight of random events neutralized the changes you caused."

"That would not really be a form of chaos theory at all," said Hunter.

"Exactly," said Rita.

"You mean we didn't have to be so careful after all?" Steve grinned at Jane.

"All that extra effort."

"I disagree," said Hunter firmly. "By the argument Rita just presented, the time line marked from 1668 is much more fragile. Instead of many millions of years for events to neutralize any changes we might cause, only a few centuries will pass. That may not be enough time to absorb the effects of what we do. We still have to be as careful as before not to make unnecessary changes."

"All right," said Steve, with an exaggerated sigh. "Can we go now?"

"Yes. I shall set the controls while you three enter the sphere," said Hunter. "Just do not take the danger of MC 2's changing history lightly either. Please remember that when MC 2 reaches full size, his interpretation of the First Law may not be centered on preserving the future at all. Yet saving a human from harm in the 16005, when that person actually died according to history, could mean harming all the humans whose history and future are changed. That is theoretical, however, and the immediate danger is tangible. So we have to assume that the fugitive MC 2 is a real danger to the course of history, no matter what theory you believe in."

"Yes, I agree with that," said Rita.

While Hunter moved to the control panel, Steve caught Jane's eye with a grin and shook his head. Sometimes Hunter's boring repetition of this theoretical stuff reminded him of being a kid in school. Still, he realized that Rita's disbelief in chaos theory was probably worrying Hunter more than the robot was admitting.

Ishihara still remained by the door, where he would wait to apprehend Dr. Nystrom if he appeared. Hunter had told him that stopping Dr. Nystrom was a First Law imperative.

Hunter opened the sphere so that the humans could climb into it. The bottom was hard and curved. Designed as a laboratory instrument, it had never been intended to accommodate humans or robots. Steve huddled in the base of the curve with Jane and Rita, waiting for Hunter to set the timer on the controls. Then Hunter joined them; easing inside so as not to land on anyone, he closed the door.

Steve suddenly saw the darkness in the sphere vanish. It was replaced by the sudden brilliance of tropical sunlight. He fell onto a soft bed of green grass. The others tumbled around him.

For a longtime resident of the Mojave Desert such as Steve, the lush green island life of Jamaica was an abrupt change. Tall, full trees and bushes rose up all around them. The trees and brush were full of birds, twittering and chirping at them in startled concern. Colorful flowers bloomed nearby, red and white and orange. He gasped for breath, startled by the humidity of the air.

"It's beautiful," said Jane, looking around.

"It looks pretty much the same in our time," said Rita, sitting up. "More developed, of course, but not really spoiled. Not yet, anyway."

"It's late afternoon," said Steve, observing the position of the sun.

"That is right," said Hunter. "MC 2 will return to full size again sometime tonight, according to my calculations."

"Where are we?" Jane asked. "Out on some country road, I see."

"Yes," said Hunter. "But not too far from Port Royal. We are less than a quarter mile out of town. I wanted to make sure we landed away from the town, to lessen the chance that someone would happen to see us arrive."

"No one did, I guess," said Rita. "This late in the day, the townsfolk will be hurrying to get inside the walls. Anyone who did business from the plantations along this road has probably gone home already."

"We should join them," said Steve, getting to his feet. "Or else we'll be stuck out here in the dark."

The team began to walk along the rough wagon and horse track. Through the trees to their right, Steve could just see the blue water of the Caribbean. Then he realized that sometimes through the trees to the left, he could see more water of the same color. "Where are we, exactly?"

"Okay," said Rita. "I guess I should give you a quick geography lesson. We're on the southeastern coast of the island. That water on our right, to the north, will someday be called Kingston Bay. The city of Kingston itself will be built across the bay, on the far shore." She pointed to the water on their other side. "That's the open sea, to the south. We're walking along a very

narrow, long peninsula that the British called the Cagway, a corruption of the Spanish word Caguaya. It stretches westward, defining much of the southern enclosure of the bay. And that's Port Royal up ahead at the end of it, just coming into sight."

Steve looked where she was pointing. A few people on carts and horses were just entering the town. Steve found that in the humidity, he was already sweating freely.

"MC 2 can masquerade the same way we are if he gets some clothes," said Hunter. "Assuming he does, we will have to keep a sharp lookout for someone the right size in order to find him. He is unusually short and slender, virtually identical in build to the other component robots. You saw MC 1 in MC Governor's office."

Rita nodded.

"Rita," said Jane. "What are we going to find in Port Royal when we get there? Is it really going to be full of pirates, or will there be ordinary townspeople there too?"

"Both," said Rita. "Jamaica is a true British colony. Here's what happened. About 1630, the island of Tortuga became a pirate stronghold and hideaway. Tortuga isn't far from here. Just three years ago, in 1665, the various buccaneers and their hangers-on in Tortuga spilled over to Jamaica, which was already ruled by the English."

"Simple enough," said Steve.

"Yes, it is. English ships are still raiding Spanish ships for gold being sent from the New World, but the English are now keeping it here, not returning it to England. France nominally rules Tortuga, and lots of French buccaneers will also be present in Port Royal."

"Is there a difference between pirates and buccaneers?" Jane asked. "Or are they the same thing?"

"A perceptive question." Rita smiled indulgently. "Here, they're the same. The word 'pirate' means any pirate throughout history. 'Buccaneer' means specifically the pirates of the Caribbean during this time. It originally came from the native Arawak tribe's word buccan, which was a grid of green sticks used to grill strips of meat slowly over a fire. The first French pirates in the Caribbean cooked their food that way on Tortuga when they moved there from Haiti around 1630."

"You sure know your stuff," said Steve.

"We are getting close to Port Royal," said Hunter. "Before we arrive, what can you tell us about the political climate? What should we watch out for?"

"Port Royal is a wide open town full of impulsive, violent buccaneers," Rita said firmly. "The real danger is from them, not from the government."

"How much government is there?" Steve asked, looking at the town ahead. It seemed small, with its buildings crowded together against the blue sea.

"There is definitely some, but relatively little. Jamaica doesn't have much in the way of British ships or troops. Sir Thomas Modyford is the governor. In the past, he granted commissions as privateers to certain pirates, who could then raid the Spanish as representatives of the British crown. For instance, a year ago, word arrived here in Jamaica that the Spanish in nearby Cuba were assembling a fleet for a strike against Jamaica. Modyford prevented that by sending Sir Henry Morgan and a fleet of buccaneers on a preemptive strike against Cuba."

"What's a privateer?" Steve asked, puzzled. "Some kind of buccaneer?"

"Sort of." Rita laughed. "The line was always blurry. Basically, a government that was at war would commission pirates to fight for them against the enemy. In peace, pirates might attack any ship they wanted. The trouble is, the term turns on a legal technicality. They were basically the same people, doing the same things."

"Pirates were the ones who ran up the skull and crossbones flag," said Jane.

"Well, not in this time," said Rita. "The Jolly Roger didn't appear on the scene for another couple of decades."

"Too bad we can't invent it for them," said Steve. Then he turned to Hunter quickly. "Just a joke, Hunter. Not serious, okay?"

"Okay," said Hunter soberly. "I have data about jokes stored. Was that one funny?"

"No," said Jane.

The sun had dropped behind the trees to the west by the time they reached the gate in the town wall. A couple of bored uniformed sentries straightened slightly, obviously spotting the team as strangers. Hunter stepped forward, towering over both of them.

"What's your business?" One sentry spoke in a strong British accent. The other looked over Hunter's tall, solid build and did not seem pleased with the prospect of a confrontation.

"We seek shelter for the night," said Hunter. "We are looking for a friend."

"Oh, yeah? I says you jumped ship offshore and swam here, you and your loose ladies."

Steve stiffened, but Jane stifled a giggle.

"We only seek shelter for the night," Hunter repeated, less certainly.

Rita leaned close to Hunter, whispering something Steve couldn't hear. Hunter slipped a hand into the leather pouch hanging from his belt and drew out a couple of coins. He tossed one into the air to each of the sentries. As they looked up to catch them, Hunter pushed past them, then turned to make sure the rest of the team followed. They did; the sentries were busy examining the coins for their value.

Steve's appraisal of Port Royal from a distance still held up once they were inside. The streets were narrow and crooked, the buildings low and crowded together. They were in a part of town that was relatively quiet.

"Where should we go?" Hunter asked.

"To the waterfront," said Rita. "That's where the nightlife will be in a port town."

"And places to stay," Steve added.

"That's right," said Rita. "Taverns and inns. And real buccaneers."

"Jane," said Hunter. "MC 2 could be returning to full size about now, given the range of my calculations. Where do you think he might go in a town like this? As a roboticist, do you think he would go to the waterfront?"

"It's a reasonable guess," said Jane slowly. "But robotics isn't the issue, except to the extent that he was programmed to fit in with humans. When he returns to full size, he'll need clothes from this period in order to blend into the crowd. Without them, he'll have to sneak around in the dark for a while, so he'll be out at night. And without any money, he'll have to steal whatever clothes he can find."

"That might be easier in a part of town where everyone's asleep," said Steve.

"People in the better parts of town probably protect themselves and their belongings better," said Rita. "They'll take in their wash before sundown and have guard dogs and servants."

"I think he would be drawn to an area that has some activity after dark," said Jane. "He will need to learn what he can about the language and culture as fast as possible, so even overhearing conversations from hiding will be important to him."

"That's also where we can buy some knives to carry with us," said Rita.

"We will try the waterfront," Hunter decided.

4

As Hunter led the team down the winding streets toward the waterfront, he turned up the sensitivity in both his hearing and his vision. Every warning Rita had given about the violence of buccaneer culture had sharpened his

concerns under the First Law. He would have to evaluate each sight and sound for potential threats.

The strong scent of the sea came to him on the wind well before they reached the waterfront. All along the docks, torches were burning over the doors of taverns and over open-air booths, where wares of all kinds were for sale, including earthenware, knitting, and fabrics. The smell of oily smoke was thick. He looked through the crowd of people for someone the size of MC 2.

"There," said Rita, pointing.

"MC 2?" Hunter looked around.

"No, Hunter." Rita laughed. "Just a booth where we can all arm ourselves."

"Hey, look at that stuff," said Steve enthusiastically, hurrying over to the booth. "All kinds of knives, pistols, swords...wow."

"Try them out," said the proprietor, in a French accent. He was a bony, gray-haired man wearing only knee breeches and a large, gold earring. His bare feet were calloused and black with the rich island dirt. "Heft them, feel their weight. I am Henri the Ironmonger."

Steve picked up a flintlock pistol and turned it to one side, so that it pointed away from everyone. He looked at it carefully, then cocked it and pulled the trigger with a satisfying click. Then he set it down on the rough wooden table and picked up something else.

"This is good," said Rita, picking up a long, curved dagger. "I can wear it in a sash, where people can see it. And it's not too heavy for me to use."

"I see," said Jane. More reluctantly, she picked up a straight dagger of about the same length. "I don't know if I could use this on anyone."

"You probably won't have to," said Rita.

"What? Then what's the point?"

"The idea is to make some of these guys think twice about bothering us in the first place. With Hunter to protect us and these knives out where everyone can see them, we just might be left alone."

"I see."

Rita stepped back and made a couple of stabbing motions in the air, then swung the dagger around experimentally.

"But why are you so particular, if you don't think you'll have to use it—" Jane started.

"Maybe we won't have to use them," Rita reminded her, with a grin. "We want something we can handle, just in case."

"These are all so cruel," said Hunter, examining the weapons on the table. He felt a sense of alarm, reminded of how quickly the First Law could come into effect with so many weapons around. "They are intended only for committing grave harm to other humans."

"Where have you been, my gigantic friend?" Henri the Ironmonger laughed.

"Taking vows in a monastery?"

"No," said Hunter, cautiously.

"Try a cutlass," said Rita quickly. She raised up the handle of one of the long, curved swords. "You can handle a heavy weapon." Then she lowered her voice. "Remember, you're a buccaneer. Think of it as playacting."

"And you have permission to lie as part of the playacting," said Jane softly.

"Under the Second Law, I instruct you to maintain your role as a buccaneer."

"Acknowledged," said Hunter, accepting the cutlass. Imitating Rita's earlier moves, he stepped away from the others and swung it around in the air a couple of times. At the same time, he accessed some of his data on buccaneers, including some children's books he had recorded. "Avast, matey."

The three humans on his team laughed.

"Aye, a big fellow like yourself can use a big sword like that one," said Henri. "No sense in a strong, strapping man wasting his time with some little frog sticker. Lost your old sword, I suppose?"

"Yes," Rita said quickly. "Overboard. It was, uh, a difficult moment."

"I've had my share of those," said Henri, nodding sympathetically. "I may not look it now, but I have." He grinned, showing only a couple of teeth.

"Steve," said Hunter. He was uncomfortable with this playacting. "Have you picked something?"

"I'm not sure," said Steve. "A pistol would be good, but clumsy to load. And these flintlocks only shoot once before you reload."

"Of course," said Henri, puzzled. "Have you ever heard of any devil gun that could shoot more than once at a time? But it reaches out to your enemy before you enter the range of his blade."

"The chance of accident is greater, too," said Hunter. "Please choose an edged weapon."

"Okay," Steve shrugged and picked up a rapier. "I'll try this one. How about scabbards and belts?"

"Sorry, my friends," said Henri. "I have collected these fine weapons wherever I could, but mostly they came from unfortunates who fell in courageous battle. Belts and scabbards were not close to hand."

"Whatever," Steve shrugged.

"Bargain with him," Rita whispered to Hunter. Hunter tried, but without knowing the going price of swords and daggers, he was at a disadvantage. Rita helped, arguing vigorously and three times walking away from the booth in feigned disgust. Finally, at her instruction, Hunter bought all the weapons for less than a handful of coins.

The team walked away, satisfied.

"An interesting cultural phenomenon," said Hunter. "My stored information tells me that parts of the world still routinely bargain even in our time. I had never experienced it before. It is more psychology than economics."

"That's right," said Rita. "But now we all need belts or sashes to wear, to hold up our weapons."

"Rita," said Jane, pointing. "Look at the that booth, over there. Those are sashes and scarves."

"Perfect," said Rita. "Come on, Hunter."

This time, Hunter bargained alone and successfully purchased four long cotton sashes, two of faded blue and two that were more or less black. Each member of the team took one. At Rita's direction, they tied them around their waists and stuck their weapons through them at the hip.

"Good enough," said Rita, looking around with an excited expression. "This is really special for me. I can hardly believe I'm doing this. I've spent my entire adult life studying this time and this region. And now I'm actually here."

"We are glad to have you with us," said Hunter. He looked at Rita and Jane.

"What do you suggest now? How can we maximize our chances of finding MC 2?"

"Well..." Jane hesitated. "We're back to what I said earlier, I guess, about looking around the waterfront. After all, he may not have returned to full size yet, in which case we won't find him now anyway."

"I agree that we should circulate," said Rita. "Maybe we can meet a few people and tell them to watch for someone of his description."

"Ah, yes," said Hunter. "In other words, create a network of people who can help us search."

"That's right," said Rita. "But before we ask them for any help, we have to establish a rapport with them. Buccaneers survive partly by being suspicious of strangers. Offering a reward wouldn't hurt."

"We do not want to reveal unnecessarily that we are carrying much money," said Hunter.

"Let's talk to some people," said Jane. "Then we can decide how to handle them."

"I see taverns all up and down the docks," said Steve. "How are we going to pick one to start?"

Rita thought for a moment, gazing up the street. "We have to be careful. Buccaneer women aren't well thought of. Let's start in one of the open-air taverns. The clientele is more varied and we can get away more easily if we have to leave."

"I hope I don't regret this," said Jane.

"Hunter, you should go first. Lead us into that sidewalk tavern there." Rita pointed. "Some other women are there, and they seem safe so far."

"All right."

Hunter walked in front, with the other three close behind. He was aware that many of the rough, dirty men looked up at him in some surprise. Hunter was, of course, unusually tall and powerful, and he knew he had attracted some attention on their earlier walk through town. He decided that the buccaneers routinely appraised the fighting ability of those around them, either as potential opponents in a brawl or as comrades on board ship.

In front of Hunter, a short, brawny buccaneer stomped forward to a bar made of three rough planks resting on a couple of barrels. Behind the makeshift bar, an overweight man in a shirt with full, baggy sleeves was dipping tankards into an open keg and setting them on the bar. Hunter watched carefully.

"Gimme four o' those," said the man in front, tossing down a small coin.

Hunter quickly sorted through his pouch for a coin of the same size. When his turn came, he tossed it down on the bar. "I would like four drinks, also, please."

The barkeep glanced at him in surprise, perhaps at his phrasing, but said nothing. The man set four full tankards on the bar and scooped the coin into a pouch of his own. Hunter turned and handed out the tankards to his companions. "Let's move out of the way of the bar," said Rita. She edged through the crowd and the others followed her.

Hunter took a sip of his drink. He found the flavor too strong to be pleasant. As his system quickly analyzed its contents, he realized that the substance was called rum. In small amounts, it was not necessarily dangerous to humans, but its effects could be if the amount accumulated.

Steve took a mouthful and grimaced before swallowing. "Wow. No wonder these guys are mean."

"Please be careful with the amount of alcohol you consume," said Hunter.

"Remember, I am concerned with your health, under the First Law."

Rita and Jane both took more cautious tastes. "Our modern rum is more refined," Rita said quietly. "This is rather harsh, isn't it?"

Jane made a face. "I think I'll just hold mine, to look the part."

"Aye, drink up," said a stranger, hoisting his tankard to Hunter. "It flows freely in Port Royal tonight, but you never know when the river will stop." He was tall man, only a little shorter than Hunter, with bushy red hair.

"Good evening," said Hunter. "My name is Hunter. These are Steve, Rita, and Jane."

"Greetings to all. I am Leitch. Haven't seen you before, Hunter; you're too big to forget. Sail in recently, did you?"

"We arrived today," said Hunter. He glanced at Rita for help, concerned that he might say something that would reveal their status as ignorant strangers.

"I don't recall any ships putting in today," said another man, staggering against Leitch. He was a shorter, stocky man with a French accent.

Leitch elbowed him hard and shoved him upright again. "You sleep all day again, Cresson?"

Rita took Hunter's arm casually and leaned against him. He realized that this was part of her playacting, but he was not sure what to do in response.

Deciding to be cautious, he did nothing.

"Hunter," said Rita. "I'll bet these guys know a lot of people. Maybe we should tell them what your friend looks like. I know you want to be careful, but we could ask them."

"How's that?" Leitch looked at her over his tankard as he took another swig.

"I am searching for a friend," said Hunter. "A small, slender man, probably in clothes that, uh—" He stopped uncertainly, looking at Rita.

"He probably scavenged them someplace," said Rita. "He never has any money."

"Sounds like most of my friends," said Leitch, grinning at Cresson.

"He learns fast," said Steve. "But he hasn't spent much time in this part of the world."

"Ah! Doesn't know the ropes, eh?" Cresson nodded. "Can't say I've seen anyone of that sort around lately, but if he's on the docks, we'll see him sooner or later."

Leitch eyed Steve carefully. "Spanish, are you? With a touch of Moorish blood? Your English is very good."

"Thank you," said Steve, with a shrug.

Hunter saw that Jane was quietly shifting behind Steve. Cresson was studying her with a great deal of interest. Steve glanced at Hunter.

Suddenly angry shouts could be heard off to one side, toward the docks. Hunter turned and was able to see over the heads of most of the crowd. Two buccaneers had squared off, one holding a curved dagger much like Rita's and the other grasping a belaying pin.

Hunter's first reflex was to shove forward through the crowd and stop them. He resisted it, with effort, reminding himself that the larger First Law issue in the future took precedence over the welfare of these two buccaneers. Still, he stared at them with a kind of horror.

"Steady, Hunter," said Jane softly. "If you're having trouble, review your internal data about chaos theory. Reinforce your understanding that the First Law can be served by letting these guys fight."

"Thank you," Hunter said quietly. He followed her instructions instantaneously. It helped him keep his priorities clear, though his positronic brain still wanted to break up the fight.

"Haw! Look at that!" Leitch punched Cresson on the arm. "I'll wager the next round of drinks that Carlos takes him."

"With a belaying pin? You're on," said Cresson. "Come on, let's move closer." They both pushed forward to see better.

Hunter realized that nearly everyone in the crowd was laughing, yelling encouragement or insults, and wagering on the outcome of the fight. None of them seemed to take it seriously, though both combatants held potentially lethal weapons. Their casual attitude toward such violence matched his historical data, but it made him very uncomfortable.

"All right, Hunter?" Jane asked, taking his arm. "You aren't freezing up, are you?"

"No, Jane," said Hunter. "I have to remain active in order to protect the three of you if the violence spreads. I think we should leave, though, and look elsewhere for MC 2."

"Good idea."

"Okay," Steve said reluctantly. He obviously wanted to watch the fight.

"Let's go out this way," said Rita. She led the team away from the crowd to one side, well away from the developing fight. Other eager observers moved up to take their places.

The team followed Rita up the waterfront. Hunter felt a slight sense of relief, but he realized that these First Law situations were going to continue as long as he was in the past among humans. In this respect, going back to the dinosaur age had been easier, since the only humans there had all come from the future.

Jane stopped suddenly, grabbing Hunter's arm. "There's another fight."

Hunter looked. Ahead, two large men were shouting at each other in the light from a tavern doorway. A short, slender man was trying to interfere.

All three figures in the tavern doorway were silhouettes against the torchlight from inside. None of them could be seen clearly. So far, they were merely scuffling with each other, the two larger men yelling insults.

"Is the short one MC 2?" Rita asked anxiously.

"He's roughly the right size," Steve said in a low voice, uncertainly.

"Hunter, what do you think? What do you want us to do?"

Striding forward quickly, Hunter turned up all his senses. The figure trying to break up the fight was not speaking, but just pushing between the two men, so Hunter couldn't judge his voice. He was calling MC 2 on his internal radio link, but MC 1 had shut down his receiver to avoid receiving messages under the Second Law; MC 2 would probably do the same.

"We have to stop him and see," Hunter decided. "I will go first. If you can help, act on your own, but don't take any risks unnecessarily." He jogged forward.

Suddenly the two shouting men lunged at each other, grappling for a moment and trying to gain some advantage. The smaller figure had gotten caught between them. Hunter broke into a run.

"Stop!" Hunter shouted in a deep, authoritative voice as he drew closer.

"Stop!" None of the three struggling fighters seemed to hear him.

Hunter reached the three and grabbed an arm of the two larger men in each hand. Neither was as tall as Hunter. He pulled them apart and shoved, pushing them off balance. In the same moment, the smaller man ducked under one of Hunter's outstretched arms and backed away.

"Hey! What's it to you?" One of the big men glared at Hunter in surprise.

The other, without a word, swung a fist toward Hunter. With his fast reflexes, he dodged it with an easy, slight movement, then pushed both men away from him again. He was just about to speak, hoping to discourage them from further resistance, when he heard angry voices and the sound of footsteps running toward him from the tavern doorway.

Hunter turned and found a crowd of drunken pirates running toward him, yelling. He knew he could not stop them without a very hard collision, which might hurt them. So when the first four men threw themselves at him, he allowed himself to be tackled and taken down.

A moment later, however, Hunter gathered his legs under him and, with a wad of buccaneers' clothes in each hand, stood up. The others simply fell off him; the two flailed wildly in his grip. Hunter dropped them, judging that a fall to the street would not do them any harm. Then he stepped back, warily looking around to defend himself again.

The buccaneers were muttering among themselves, but none wanted to go after Hunter alone.

"Come on, Hunter," Steve called from behind him. "This guy isn't MC 2, after all."

Hunter stepped backward toward Steve's voice, eager to avoid any further chance of harming these violent humans. Likewise, they remained where they were on the ground, eyeing him in drunken surprise. None of them spoke as Hunter joined the rest of the team.

"Let's get out of here," said Rita. "Hunter, you bring up the rear and see if they follow us."

The slender buccaneer whom Hunter had rescued stayed with them as they jogged down the waterfront quickly, slipping through the crowd. Hunter focused both his vision and his hearing on the men they had left behind, but he detected no sign of pursuit. Instead, muttering to each other angrily, they just returned to the tavern.

"We have no pursuit," Hunter announced. "We can walk if you prefer."

"You sure?" Steve asked, but he slowed to a walk, as did the others. He looked

back over his shoulder. "I guess pirates could be pretty sneaky."

"They went back inside," Hunter assured him. "Their motivation for another fight was lower than their motivation for more drinking."

"That's no surprise to me, mate," said their new companion, in a strong British accent. "We merely had a difference of opinion about whose turn it was to pay for the round of drinks. Nothing to get your throat slashed for, hey?" Hunter studied him. He was a young man with sun-bleached blond hair and a quick smile. Now that he was out of the shadows and walking normally, Hunter could see that he was almost as slender as MC 2, but really much taller. His clothes were similar to those of Hunter and Steve, knee breeches and a loose white shirt with flowing sleeves for freedom of movement. A belt and scabbard with a rapier in it completed the man's attire.

"I am Roland Burke." He turned to Rita. "And, sweet lady, you are?..."

"Rita," she said, startled by the way he had addressed her.

Hunter introduced the rest of them.

"I'm pleased to meet you all," said Roland. "Hunter, I thank you for your assistance. My friends can be short-tempered when the talk turns to hard coin."

"Your opponents in the fight were your friends?" Hunter was surprised.

"Ah, well, does any buccaneer have true friends?" Roland shrugged.

Steve, saying nothing, was watching Roland with curiosity. Rita was staring at him in open fascination. Roland seemed oblivious to their interest, waving to an acquaintance in the crowd.

Hunter turned to Jane. "Is this important?" Hunter asked quietly.

"What do you mean?"

"This puzzles me," said Hunter. "Friends brawling with each other does not fit my data on human behavior. As a roboticist, please inform me."

"Yes, this is important." Jane smiled indulgently. "And it's reliable, at least in some circles and cultural milieus. Friendship is a complex idea. Store your new data. I suspect that the buccaneers are going to show you a lot of new human behavior before we go home."

Hunter nodded.

"Well, Hunter?" Steve looked up at him. "Aren't we going to keep looking for you-know-who?"

"Yes, of course. Let us walk."

Rita could hardly believe that she was actually talking to a real buccaneer. She had always loved reading about the buccaneers when she had been young. As an adult, she had chosen to make a career out of studying the history of the seventeenth century Caribbean. Until Roland had spoken to her, however, everyone had still seemed unreal. Talking to him had made her realize that she was truly in the past.

As Hunter led the way down the waterfront, with Steve and Jane behind him, Rita and Roland came last.

"You have some pretty rough friends," she said, jerking her thumb back toward the tavern.

"Eh? Oh, them!" Roland laughed. "No worse than I am, I fear."

"Oh?" Rita laughed too, amused at his tone. "Have you been in Port Royal long?"

"Oh, coming and going, I've been here a few years," he said, waving his hand vaguely.

"You mean sailing in and out of port?"

"Aye."

"Searching for Spanish ships?"

"Privateering, Rita." He caught her eye and grinned. That expression was almost a dare.

"Always?" She raised an eyebrow skeptically.

"Well...sometimes the governor's commission can run out, you know, or a treaty will be signed across the sea in London." He shrugged helplessly, still smiling. "What can a poor buccaneer do about that?"

"Not a thing, I'm sure." Rita laughed, telling herself that getting to know a real buccaneer would advance her professional knowledge.

"Aye, sweet lady, not a single thing." He winked and then threw his head back and laughed.

"You ever kill anyone?" She nodded toward the rapier swinging in its scabbard at his side.

"I'm still walking and talking, and not every man I've met on the high seas can say that."

That might have sounded grim, except for his lighthearted tone. Rita didn't think he was bragging as much as he was laughing at himself. She wondered if he was even better with the sword than he had admitted.

Roland jerked his thumb, imitating her gesture, toward the big knife she had stuck into her sash. "You ever kill anyone?" He gave her a challenging smirk.

"Uh-well, I'm still walking and talking, too." She smiled back.

"So you are, Rita. So you are."

They walked in silence for a while. Every so often, Roland greeted someone he knew. Hunter was easy to follow, since he towered head and shoulders above everyone else.

While Hunter, Steve, and Jane moved ahead through the crowd, looking for MC 2, Rita considered just how lucky she was to be here.

No historians had ever before had the chance to visit the era of human history they loved most. Only Chad Mora, the paleontologist who had accompanied Hunter's team to the age of dinosaurs, had been able to experience the time he had studied. She wondered if Roland had sailed on any ships she would remember studying.

"Roland—" She stopped suddenly, not sure what she wanted to ask. Questioning a buccaneer about his adventures might be extremely unwise, and even dangerous, no matter how charming he appeared.

"Yes, Rita?"

"Uh-well, I'm curious about your adventures. But I don't want to pry into your affairs."

"Ah! Curious about the buccaneering life, eh?" Roland grinned again. "Well, no need to be shy, sweet lady; you wouldn't be the first."

"Well...I didn't think so." She laughed, embarrassed. Since she couldn't tell him why she was curious about him, she wasn't sure what to say.

"So tell me, Rita," Roland said lightly, with a wary glance at Hunter in front of them. "Would you like to get better acquainted, then? And learn the buccaneer life? See Port Royal as I know it?"

Rita knew in an instant that this was what she really wanted. She also realized that Hunter would object since he was so concerned about the First Law and the danger that she might change human history if she wasn't careful. However, she simply did not share his belief that rather ordinary actions in this era of Jamaican history would ultimately matter. She reminded herself again that Port Royal would be drowned in an earthquake in just over twenty years.

She gave Roland a quick nod.

Roland waited until Steve said something to Hunter, distracting him. Rita knew, of course, that, as a robot, Hunter had multiple sensors and the ability to monitor them all with his full attention if he wished. However, he had no reason to keep track of Rita at every moment and his attention was on Steve's comment.

Suddenly Roland grabbed her wrist and slipped sideways into the crowd, pulling her after him. She saw that he was careful not to move too fast, or jostle anyone unnecessarily; that might attract Hunter's attention. Instead, he moved

carefully and patiently, allowing them to blend into the crowd without disruption as they worked their way toward a small side street. Rita looked back over her shoulder at Hunter, who was by then some distance away. He was still walking in the same direction as before, unaware that she was no longer right behind him. Then Roland pulled harder on her wrist and she hurried after him around a corner and out of Hunter's sight.

"Run, Rita," Roland called cheerily. He began to jog, still pulling her after him.

With her free hand, she reached up to switch off the communicator pinned to her collar. If Hunter called her, it would make some sort of sound, and might attract Roland's attention. She didn't want to wind up drowned, hanged, or burned as a witch if a buccaneer heard voices apparently coming from nowhere.

"Hunter," said Steve. "This is fun, but maybe we should find a place to spend the night. Like you said, if MC 2 is still microscopic, we can't possibly find him yet."

"A good point," said Hunter, looking toward the wooden buildings lining the waterfront. "I see a number of signs for inns. Shall we try that one?" He pointed.

Steve laughed, and caught Jane's eye. Shaking her head, she took Hunter's arm.

"Is this funny?" Hunter asked.

"We don't want to stay in a waterfront inn," said Jane.

"Too rough, Hunter," said Steve.

"The accommodations must still be better than those in our previous trip."

"It's not the building, Hunter," said Steve, glancing at Jane again with a suppressed smile. "It's the company. We need to find a place with a nicer clientele."

"I understand now," said Hunter. "So we should leave the waterfront and look around." He stopped and turned. "Rita, which way should we go?"

"Yeah," Steve said, also turning. "There must be a better part of town...." He trailed off, looking around.

"Rita?" Jane called.

"Just lost in the crowd for a minute, I guess," said Steve, peering at the faces of all the people who were walking past them. "Rita!"

"No," said Hunter. He was holding his head high, standing motionless. "I do not see her anywhere nearby. I have raised the sensitivity of my hearing, as well, and I do not hear her voice or Roland's, either."

"You think he snatched her?" Steve asked, still looking around in the crowd.

"I should have been watching them, but this never occurred to me."

"It was my failure, not yours," said Hunter. "I failed my First Law obligation again. However, I doubt that she went under duress. I would have noticed even the slightest scuffling or call for help originating right behind us."

"He was a charmer, all right," said Jane. "And Rita seemed to like him right away."

"We will have to pick up their trail," said Hunter. "Come on." He started back the way they had come, his eyes scanning the crowd.

"No point yelling for them," said Steve. "If she sneaked away deliberately, they'll both run harder if they know we're looking for them."

"Maybe they aren't really running," said Jane. "Maybe Roland just stopped to introduce her to a friend. Or maybe she saw a booth where she wanted to look at something."

"Maybe," Steve said reluctantly. "But she's a historian, not a tourist."

"That's true," said Jane.

Hunter said nothing.

Steve had never before seen Hunter act with the precise mix of deliberation,

sternness, and yet uncertainty that he exhibited after Rita's disappearance. Worried, Steve leaned close to Jane. "Is Hunter okay? He's talking in a monotone and walking like it's a military march. Is he having another First Law attack or something?"

"He's okay so far," said Jane. "But his First Law interpretation places Rita's welfare above that of the local population. He's very anxious to find her."

"Yeah." Steve straightened again. "Not to mention his fear that she'll change history."

"Excuse me," Hunter said politely, to a couple of young buccaneers walking nearby. "Do you know a Roland Burke? I am searching for him."

"So?" They both laughed and moved on without breaking stride.

"Does anyone here know a Roland Burke? Has anyone seen him just now?" Hunter shouted, and his booming voice attracted considerable attention.

No one responded, however. They looked at him warily and just kept walking.

"Let's go over there," said Steve suddenly. He pointed to a small knot of people. In the center, a skinny, gray-bearded man dressed only in ragged knee breeches was juggling four belying pins. Steve led the way this time.

When the juggler had completed his performance, a few onlookers tossed coins into a scarf folded carefully at his feet. Steve stepped up quickly. Hunter and Jane stayed where they were.

"Hold it, friends," Steve called. "We're looking for a friend named Roland Burke, or any other friend of his. Does anyone here know him?"

Most of the audience just walked away, but a couple of young men remained.

"I'd say every third man on the waterfront knows Roland," said one of them, a tall, burly man with curly hair. "What's it to you?"

"We lost him in the crowd tonight," said Steve. "Just a moment ago. Where can we find him?"

"If he's a friend of yours, why don't you know that already?" The buccaneer who had spoken stepped in front of Steve and glared down at him.

"Easy, friend," said Hunter.

"Hunter—" Steve felt the big robot gently take his arm and pull him back. As Steve regained his balance, Hunter moved in front of him.

"I ain't afraid of you, either," said the curly-haired buccaneer. He was nearly a head shorter than Hunter, but hadn't given any ground.

Steve knew Hunter didn't want to hurt anyone, so he glanced around for a distraction. A small circle of onlookers had formed around them. He spied the juggler watching them, still holding his belying pins.

"How much do you want for one of those?" Steve asked, nodding at the belying pins.

The juggler grinned, showing gaps in his teeth. "Nothin'. I stole 'em off my last ship." He tossed one to Steve, obviously expecting him to use it on someone as a club.

Steve caught it. The belying pin was made of hardwood and was both heavy and sturdy. It had a thick, oblong head and a narrower pin, long enough to hold as a handle. On shipboard, a sailor would slip the looped end of a rope through the pin, then push the pin into one of the many holes drilled in the ship for that purpose. That end of the rope would be held firm. The shape made the pin perfect as a club too.

The curly-haired buccaneer watched Steve with caution but no fear. "You boys want a fight, you got it."

"Not me," said Steve. "I just want to demonstrate something on my friend here."

"And what would that be?"

"Hold still, Hunter," said Steve.

"Okay," said Hunter.

Steve held the belying pin as a club and reared back. He swung it up and then down on Hunter's head as hard as he could. The force of the blow shattered the

hardwood and tore the remains from Steve's hand. He gripped his sore hand with the other one, wincing.

Hunter smiled politely at the buccaneers, who stared at him in amazement.

"My friend has a hard head," said Steve.

Still not taking his eyes off Hunter, the curly-haired buccaneer reached down and picked up a chunk of the broken wood. "That's the real thing, ain't it?"

"Quite heavy," Hunter assured him.

"Would you like to take a turn?" Steve asked him amiably. "Our juggler friend has several more."

The curly-haired pirate turned away and pushed through the crowd, followed by his companion.

"Thank you," said Hunter. "You saved me the danger of a First Law violation."

"Glad to help," said Steve, grinning.

"I never saw nothin' like it," said the juggler. "You must have the hardest head on the seven seas."

"You know Roland Burke?" Jane asked.

"Aye, I've met him. But he ain't passed me tonight." The juggler shrugged apologetically.

"Do you know where he lives?" Steve asked.

"Nay. I don't know him that well. Just to have a mug o' grog now and then."

"Thank you," Hunter said politely.

"Any time," said the juggler, still eyeing Hunter's head for evidence of a wound.

Steve grinned at Jane as they walked on. Hunter continued to lead the way, using his enhanced vision and hearing in the hope of detecting signs of Roland or Rita that his human companions could not possibly notice. They followed him patiently, looking at the sights and pointing out different items of interest to each other from time to time.

They looked long into the night. Slowly, the crowd on the waterfront thinned out. The only sounds that remained were those of the breaking surf and the drunken singing from some of the taverns. Hunter ventured down some of the side streets, always alert for danger. Jane and Steve stayed close to him, but no one approached them.

"Hunter," Jane said finally. "I know you can search all night, but I'm not sure it's worth the effort. We need some rest. Rita is probably just exploring with Roland."

Hunter looked at them both. "I know you need to sleep. I shall also stay with you two, to make sure you are safe. Where should we go?"

"The town has quieted down now," said Steve. "With you to protect us, I think we can get a room in an inn just off the waterfront without a problem."

They had to walk for a while longer, but finally Steve and Jane agreed that a place called the Dover Arms catered to a clientele of higher social class than the waterfront inns. Hunter paid for a sizable room. Inside, he hooked the wooden shutter closed over the window and barred the door. Then, as the two humans went to sleep in their beds, he sat down on a chair in the middle of the room, alert for any sounds of potential danger in this unfamiliar environment.

At that moment, Rita sat with Roland at a table in a small tavern. No other customers remained. Her escort had given her a quick tour of the crowded waterfront and then tried his best to push several kinds of rum on her, without much success. The tavernkeeper was wiping off the other tables with a dirty cloth. Roland studied Rita's face.

"I still say, sweet lady, something is different about you that I don't understand," said Roland.

"Can you name what's so different?" She smiled at him, still ignoring the tankard of rum he had bought for her some time earlier.

"No," Roland said, shaking his head slowly. "I cannot. Something I just can't name."

Rita hoped she hadn't made a mistake. She was tired, but still didn't want to rejoin Hunter yet. This was her chance to find out what living in Port Royal was really like. She idly fingered the handle of the knife in her sash.

"I want a room to myself," she said, looking him in the eye. "With a bar on the door. I can pay for it if you will find it for me."

Roland smiled wryly. "I can do that for you. Now tell me why I should."

Rita could feel the sweat on her palms. If she couldn't keep Roland in a friendly mood, she could be in real trouble. Of course, she could still try to radio Hunter, but he might be some distance away.

"You will help me," she said carefully, "because you still want to figure out somehow why I'm different."

"Aye." Roland grinned suddenly. "Aye, you have me there. But you'll be my guest for breakfast in return."

"Fair enough." Rita gave him a confident smile, but inwardly she was very relieved. Maybe she really could handle this buccaneer.

Roland accepted a couple of coins from her and spoke to the tavernkeeper. They both escorted her upstairs, where she found a room a little larger than a closet and a plain, wooden bed with a thin mattress. The tavernkeeper lit a short stub of candle that stood on the window sill.

"It will do?" Roland asked her.

She glanced behind the door and saw the bracket and wooden bar that would lock it securely. "Yes, it will do. Thank you."

After they had left, she closed the door and slid the bar into place. Then she let out a long breath and smiled to herself. She was all right so far. Weary after the excitement and tension of dealing with Roland, she lay down on the bed and quickly fell asleep.

Early the next morning, Jane sat at an outdoor booth with Hunter and Steve. The morning was still cool, with the tropical ocean breeze blowing gently through the streets. She and Steve were eating some sort of meat pastry that Hunter had bought. Hunter, of course, was recharging his energy storage by letting the bright sun beat down on the solar power collectors hidden in the surface of his body.

"Well." Steve swallowed a big mouthful of his breakfast and turned to Hunter.

"So, how do you want us to look for Rita today, Hunter?"

"I am undecided," said Hunter.

Jane waited, expecting him to go on. He didn't.

Jane and Steve glanced at each other in surprise. Hunter was rarely undecided about something so simple and when he was, he usually wanted to discuss options. Worried, she lowered her pastry. Hunter was facing away from them, presumably searching for some sight or sound of Rita or Roland.

"Hunter," Jane said quietly. "Tell me under the Second Law. You're having a First Law problem over Rita's disappearance, aren't you?"

"Affirmative," said Hunter.

"I instruct you to discuss it with us. Why is this worse now than it was late last night?"

"You know my inattention has allowed Rita to leave the safety of my protection. By now, she may have come to harm. As you slept, I reviewed my data about Port Royal and the buccaneer society. The chance of her having come to harm last night is very high."

"I understand," said Jane. "Now listen carefully to your roboticist."

"Yes?"

"You are still dealing only in probabilities. Rita may still be perfectly well, but in potential danger. She, and we, need you at peak efficiency."

"I am clearly not at peak efficiency. If I had been last night, I would have

not have lost her."

"I dispute that judgment. None of us had any reason to think she would slip away from us of her own accord."

"You humans are not obligated by the First Law to look after her."

"Your misjudgment of her behavior is not in and of itself a First Law Failure."

"It led to one. After all, the First Law says in part that a robot may not allow a human to come to harm through inaction. It makes no exception for errors of judgment."

"Nor does it blame you for what may be happening. Until and unless you know that Rita has been harmed, you don't know that you have broken the First Law."

"Come on, Hunter," Steve interrupted with forced cheer. "Enough talk. Let's find Rita."

"All right." Hunter still sounded uncertain, but he led them away from the booth. "We shall walk around some more. I have continued sending out a radio signal to her communicator, but she has not responded."

Jane caught Steve's eye and smiled. Sometimes his pragmatic suggestions were worth more to Hunter than all of her theoretical arguments combined. Steve fell into step with her behind Hunter.

They found the waterfront changed. Instead of the wild, carousing buccaneers, Jane saw the ordinary people who kept the town functioning. Small fishing boats swayed on the waves out at sea; shopkeepers were just hanging out their wares. In fact, a few of the earliest fishing boats were already returning to the docks with their morning catch.

"Great climate, huh?" Steve spread his arms expansively. "Light breeze, blue water, tropical flowers everywhere. I never see anything like this in the Mojave Desert."

"It's beautiful here," Jane agreed. She was still watching Hunter, but he now seemed to be acting almost normally as he looked at and listened to their surroundings.

"Pretty carefree life-style around here, isn't it?" Steve nodded toward a woman chasing a couple of barefoot toddlers around a fruit stand.

"Yes, it is," Jane said, amused at the scene.

"Hey, not you, too. Come on. You can still enjoy the climate while we look for Rita."

"I have to admit, I'm worried about her. This is a pirate town, after all."

Steve nodded. "Yeah, me, too. But do you have any ideas about how to find her?"

"No, not really."

They continued to search for another hour without success. Even when the buccaneers who had been carousing the night before stumbled out to start their day, they were hung over. None of them were especially belligerent, but Hunter couldn't find anyone who could tell them where to find Roland.

"I have a suggestion," Steve said finally. "If it won't upset your First Law."

"Yes?" Hunter stopped to look at him.

"We really should split up and look through more of the town than the waterfront."

"I cannot risk--"

"Separating from either of us, I know," said Steve quickly. "Look, we aren't going to run out on you. And now we each have communicators. Jane and I will go together; if we run into any kind of problem, at least one of us can call you."

"I'll stay with Hunter," said Jane. "In case we have to discuss the First Law more."

"Then I'll be fine alone," said Steve.

"Very well," said Hunter. "You will be careful?"

"Promise," said Steve.

As Steve jauntily marched away down a side street, Jane watched Hunter carefully.

"Hunter," said Jane. "This question of your efficiency under the First Law came up during our last mission. I know that a clear, serious failure to obey the First Law can force a positronic robot to shut down. How close are you to making that decision?"

"I am not approaching that point yet."

"For the same reason you functioned through this doubt last time, as well?"

"Yes. My responsibility to take care of you and Steve forces me to continue functioning longer than I might in our own time, where you could better take care of yourselves or find another robot to help you."

"Good," said Jane. "You're right; we need you and so does the larger mission to find MC 2. Please focus on the fact that we have no one to take your place."

"Agreed," said Hunter.

Rita woke up with a surge of excitement at the first hints of dawn shining through the cracks around the closed wooden window. She dressed quickly and unbarred the door. Pausing to take a deep breath, she walked downstairs.

"Good morning, sweet lady," said Roland, waving to her. He got up from the chair in which he had apparently been waiting for her. "I shall take you to breakfast."

"I, urn, need a water pump to wash up and the private facilities."

"Outside in the back," said the tavernkeeper, who was wiping the bar.

When Rita had freshened up the best she could, she joined Roland again.

"I shall take you to the best stall in town," said Roland, turning to the left. "It's away from the waterfront about a block. On the docks, these drunken louts don't always care what they eat."

Rita laughed and walked with him. She liked looking around at the sights, enjoying the feeling that she was a part of the seventeenth century. Roland couldn't tell just how much of a stranger she was to Port Royal; that was the best compliment to her expertise she had ever received.

Hunter could certainly find MC 2 without her; she had given them a lot of basic information about Port Royal's history and culture already. She told herself that Hunter and his party didn't really need her. Right now, she wouldn't even mind if they went home without her.

After all, Hunter was the one who believed that almost any small action could change all of human history in the future. That sounded crazy to her, at least in this case. Suppose she spent the rest of her life in Jamaica. All she would have to do was be careful and stay out of Port Royal in 1692, when the big earthquake would drown the town forever. That would happen in twenty-four years. Certainly she wouldn't ever do anything that would change history.

"Here we are," Roland said cheerily, gesturing at a crowded open-air stall.

"Buns, sweet cakes, meat pastries, dried fish, fresh fish, and fresh fruit.

What is your pleasure?"

"Uh...I'm not sure. You know this place. Get me the best they have."

"As you wish, of course. Are you a little hungry, or very hungry, or somewhere in between?"

"I'm very hungry."

"Ah! I'm glad."

Roland ordered two of nearly everything and carried it all on a couple of wide, green leaves to a plank table and bench. As Rita sat down, he went back to the proprietor and returned with two mugs of some kind of herbal tea. She bit carefully into one of the buns and found it quite good.

Rita ate quickly, being too hungry to indulge in conversation. Roland watched

her with interest, pushing one item after another toward her. The dried fish was very salty, of course, as was the meat in the meat pastry. On the other hand, the bananas were exactly the same as in her own time, though a little more bruised.

"I have a bit of business," Roland said after a while. "You will sit and wait for me here?"

"I'd like to see the sights," said Rita. "I'll hurry if you can wait."

"Oh, I dare not take you with me this time." Roland grinned and rested one hand on his sword hilt.

"Uh-oh." She looked up at him in surprise. "You mean, uh, you might--"

"It's probably nothing," said Roland. "But I would not take you into such danger. Will you wait for me here, even after you've finished your breakfast?"

"Of course I will," she said, flattered by his concern. "I'll wait right here. Besides, this stuff is good. Um-am I safe here?"

"Aye, you've been seen with me." With another quick grin, he rose from his seat and slipped away through the growing crowd.

She watched him go, admiring his lithe, energetic walk. He looked as though he would be a good fencer, quick and agile. She wondered if he would get into a duel with some other buccaneer. They could be fighting over money, of course, or something more complicated. She also wondered if he would live. From the viewpoint of her own time, of course, he was long dead of one cause or another. He just didn't know what would kill him or when it would happen.

Dr. Wayne Nystrom sat in the shade of an awning which extended over the front of a tavern. It was a more expensive spot than most of the waterfront dives, catering to the wealthier customers, sometimes even nobility, who passed through Port Royal. He sipped a mug of herbal tea, waiting patiently. Wayne had arrived two days before, estimating that MC 2 would return to his normal size about then. Since he wanted to maximize his chance of finding the fugitive robot, he did not just rely on his own personal search. He had struck up a conversation with a friendly young buccaneer and hired him to look for several individuals.

When Roland came into sight, Wayne waved to him. They had arranged to rendezvous at the tavern this morning. Roland grinned and sat down.

"I bid you good morning," said Roland, glancing at the comfortable surroundings. "I don't doubt your wealth, Wayne, after you paid me in hard coin a few days ago instead of bartering with me, as most buccaneers would. But you certainly don't dress like a rich man."

"I'm wealthy enough to dress as I please." Wayne took another drink of his herbal tea, hiding behind the cup. "Order as you wish, as my guest."

Wayne was still wearing the casual clothes of his own time that he had been wearing when he had arrived in Mojave Center. His journey into the past had been rushed and unplanned, leaving him no chance to prepare ahead of time. He had arrived with a backpack containing a change of clothes and some personal items. Selling a brightly colored machine-knit sweater to a drunken buccaneer had brought enough money to pay Roland and eat at a cheap booth, with some coins left over. He had only come to the tavern to drink tea in order to make an impression on Roland.

"No need," said Roland. "I've found that group you hired me to look for."

"Already? Good." Wayne raised his eyebrows. "Describe them to me."

"Big fellow named Hunter, gigantic. Strong enough to throw two men around at the same time, one in each hand, but he doesn't really like to fight. Avoided it, I think."

"Go on."

"Steve. He's a young man, dark like a Spaniard or a Moor, but not exactly."

"You ever hear of Cathay?" Wayne was amused. He had only glimpsed Steve Chang, but he knew that he was of Chinese descent. Even in this age of sail, the

Chinese and Europeans had not mixed much except for a few sailors and traders. "Of course. Maybe I'll sail there someday." Roland shrugged offhandedly.

"Maybe you will. Who else?"

"They have two women with them. One is named Jane, the other Rita."

"Yes, that's them." Wayne had not known about Rita, but he said nothing about her. He did not want Roland to know he was surprised. Obviously, Hunter had changed his team a little to fit their particular destination.

"You promised me extra pay if I disrupted Hunter's party somehow."

"That's right. What are you going to do?"

"It's what I've already done."

"Yeah? What's that?"

"The lady Rita seems to enjoy my company. She sneaked off with me last night and I put her up alone in a room. We are breakfasting together and, even now, she is waiting for me to hurry back."

"Excellent!" Wayne smiled. "Yes, yes. Very well done." He knew that Rita's separation from Hunter would trigger the robot's First Law imperative to find her. That would interfere with his search for MC 2 and give Wayne and Roland a better chance of finding MC 2 first.

"I rather enjoy her company myself."

"Good. Keep her away from Hunter as long as you can. And she likes you. Even better."

"I can do that. But, uh..." Roland grinned and held out his hand.

Wayne nodded and pulled a few more coins out of his pocket. He did not have much left, but could not afford to admit that, or even look reluctant. Before he saw Roland again, he would have to find some more money. For the moment, he tossed the coins to Roland casually, as though they meant nothing to him.

"So," said Wayne. "Have you seen anyone who fits my other friend's description?"

"The man you call by his initials, MC 2." Roland took a careful glance at the coins before slipping them into a pocket. "I haven't seen him, but I've put the word out among my friends and shipmates. They don't know why I want him, but they'll tell me if they see him. A short, slight fellow, you say, likely to be poorly dressed and a bit confused?"

"Yes," said Wayne. "For all I know, he may be desperately searching for a pair of pants."

Roland laughed. "That poor, eh? What happened to him? Press-gang grab him in England and let him escape here?"

"Something like that," said Wayne. "He'll try to blend in. He won't know right away that anyone is here looking for him, but he'll run if he finds out I want to speak to him."

"He knows Hunter as well, I presume?"

"Not personally, no."

"Even better. Well, I must be off. Rita may not wait for me forever."

"Good job, Roland," said Wayne. "The longer you can keep Rita from returning to Hunter, the more compensation I will have for you."

"Well enough." Roland gave him a brisk, cheerful wave and strode away.

Wayne watched him go, wondering if he could get enough money to keep Roland happy. MC 2 might not return to normal size for a day or two, and even then he might escape Wayne's notice for quite some time. Wayne didn't know how much he might eventually have to pay Roland so that he would continue distracting Hunter from the search for MC 2.

When Steve left Hunter, he began improvising. Somehow, when Hunter was leading the team, his inexorable robot logic stifled Steve's spontaneity. Alone, Steve felt more relaxed and able to follow his intuition without having to explain everything to Hunter.

Steve walked up and down several side streets, staying close to the waterfront

without confining himself to it. He watched where people went and how they were dressed, gradually identifying some parts of town as more crowded and rougher than others. He saw which streets were thoroughfares and which ones only drew people who had business there.

On one block, a particularly impressive building caught his attention. A two-story wooden structure, it boasted a new coat of brown paint and a carefully tended bed of flowers along its front wall. An awning over the front entrance shaded some tables and chairs from the tropical sunlight. None of the other taverns he had seen was this elaborate. He was startled to see a man in modern clothes sitting at one of the tables, whom he suddenly recognized as Dr. Wayne Nystrom.

Steve stopped where he was, then quickly dodged to one side, behind a large bush growing by the side of the street. Then, sure that Wayne hadn't seen him yet, he peered through the big leaves on the bush. Roland, who had been talking to Wayne, was just leaving, giving Wayne a quick wave as he walked away. Steve tensed, waiting to see which way Roland would go, but he walked away from Steve up the narrow street.

Steve saw that Rita was not with either one of them. That worried him, though he would have preferred to see her with Wayne; Steve doubted he would hurt her. He understood, though, that Wayne was using Roland to sabotage Hunter's search. That much was obvious.

Steve glanced over his shoulder and waited for a couple of passersby to move on. Wayne was still sitting at the table. Steve pressed the button on the communicator pinned to his shirt and spoke quietly.

"Hunter, Steve here. Wayne Nystrom is here and Roland is working with him. I've seen them together, but Rita wasn't with them."

"Give me your location," said Hunter. "We will join you as soon as we can."

"He's getting up," Steve said suddenly. "He's walking away. I'll tail him, Hunter, and keep talking so you can track me. He's turning...toward the waterfront."

"What is the name of your street?" Hunter asked. "We can intercept him."

"Uh—" Steve glanced around but saw no signs anywhere. "I can't tell. I don't see a sign. This place is pretty haphazard compared to a city like Mojave Center."

"I understand. Continue speaking and I will follow your signal. Your voice will be clearer than the static and background street sounds alone."

"Here goes," said Steve, as he moved down the street at a safe distance behind Wayne. "I don't want him to see me because that will really put him on the defensive. I don't know if he has Rita locked up somewhere or if she's still with Roland."

"When I have caught Wayne," said Hunter, "I believe we can learn something about her. Wait for me to join you. Otherwise, I fear that he will escape you. Also, I am concerned that a real fight may attract attention and alter the behavior of the locals. I do not want to risk their involvement."

"He may get away anyhow," said Steve. "I can't follow him too closely. This street doesn't have enough people on it for me to hide among. If he turns, he'll see me."

"Your signal is much stronger," said Hunter. "We are walking as quickly as we can without attracting a great deal of attention."

"He just turned onto the waterfront. He's walking west and looking at stuff in the booths and shops." Steve shifted into a jog as Wayne moved around a corner.

By the time Steve had rounded the corner, Wayne was out of sight. Steve looked around frantically, then saw him again, idly examining a clay pot that was for sale.

"If it's a choice of grabbing Wayne or losing him, which should I do?"

"Do not risk a disturbance," Hunter said firmly.

Rita finished her herbal tea, glancing about for both Roland and Hunter's team. Since every sight was new and exciting to her, the time passed quickly. She wondered if Roland had survived his duel, or whatever he had gone to do. Then she also wondered if he had just wanted an excuse to leave her, but that didn't make sense. If he had tired of her company, he could have simply stayed away that morning.

When Roland came striding back down the street, he was smiling as cheerfully as ever.

"Finished, sweet lady?"

"Just finished. Dm, how was your...business?"

"Easy, Rita. No problem at all."

"Well, that's good." She decided she had better not ask what he had really been doing. A buccaneer wouldn't like a stranger prying.

"And now, will you accompany me for a walk along the docks? In the salt spray and morning sunshine?"

"I've seen the docks," she said, thinking to herself that Hunter might still be looking for her there. "How about showing me the rest of the town?"

He smiled engagingly. "That, too, can be done. But for now, will you indulge me?"

"Sure." She followed him, reflecting that Hunter would probably catch up to her sooner or later, anyway. Besides, maybe he was focused on finding MC 2 and wouldn't worry about her until later.

Hunter, still listening on his internal receiver to Steve's quiet chatter, led Jane quickly down the waterfront, scanning the booths. She hurried to keep up with his long strides. The area was crowded.

"I see you, Steve," Hunter radioed. "Look back over your left shoulder."

Up ahead, Steve did so and saw Hunter. He didn't seem to be in much of a hurry. Steve stopped and waited for Hunter and Jane to catch up. Then he just shook his head.

"Sorry, Hunter," Steve said. "I didn't dare get too close. Then I lost him in the crowd."

"What was he doing?" Jane asked.

"Just browsing in the booths and shops. Killing time, it seemed to me."

"We will keep moving," said Hunter. "Now that we are together, we can apprehend him if necessary. I will be present to see that the First Law is not violated."

"Finding him in this crowd will be tough," said Jane. "Now it's almost as dense as it was last night."

Hunter nodded and once again led the way.

Rita found the waterfront much more exciting on her second visit. In the daylight, she breathed in the salt air deeply and saw the sea gulls circling and diving over the water. Best of all, though, were the tall-masted ships anchored out in the bay. Those ships, even more than the buccaneers themselves, truly represented the era.

"A pretty sight, is it not?" Roland nodded toward the crowd of ships.

"Fascinating."

"I hear there is a merchantman out there of two hundred eighty tons that can take you back to Old England in four weeks." He grinned. "Not that I have any wish to go back, but it takes a fine ship to do that."

"A month." Rita suppressed a smile, thinking of how the supersonic planes of her own time could make the jump between lunch and dinner on the same day.

"The mere wink of an eye," said Roland. "Do you like ships, then?"

"They're beautiful," said Rita.

"You must have traveled by ship? That is, unless you were born and raised on

Jamaica."

"Uh-no, I'm not from Jamaica. But I don't really know ships."

"Let me help you. You see the biggest ones out there? Only two or three are in sight."

"The three-masted square-riggers." Again, Rita fought down a smile. From her book learning, she knew more about the ships of the era than Roland ever would. On the other hand, he had actually sailed them; she had never even seen a real one before.

"That's right." He pointed to one. "Those are the finest flagships of a buccaneer fleet. Each one is big enough to slug it out with even a naval frigate. They can also handle a long sea voyage."

Rita pointed to some smaller ships that were also three-masted and square-rigged. "What are those, then? They look similar." Of course, she knew very well what they were, but she wanted to keep him talking. Once he had explained the ships, she would no longer have to feign ignorance.

"Merchant ships, including the one I told you about a moment ago." He winked at her. "Some are here trading legally. Others were, shall we say, brought here by those of us under the governor's commission."

"What do you call the bigger of the two-masted ships?" She pointed to one of them.

"Those are brigantines, fine and reliable workhorses. They can take different sails, too, at different times, to suit different conditions."

"What about the little ones?"

"Ah! My personal favorites, those. The smaller two-masted ships are schooners, perfect in these waters for their speed and shallow draft. The smallest of all are single-masted sloops, the fastest ships on the water."

"Why are there so many ships in the harbor? Is that normal?" She didn't think it was, but of course the exact number would be changing day by day.

"Normal, is it?" Roland shrugged. "Ships come and go all the time."

"Have you sailed on some of these?" Rita winked back at him, smiling. "Maybe on the governor's commission and maybe without it?"

He threw back his head and laughed. "Aye, that I have. A fine brigantine out there is captained by a man named Quinn. The Hungry Hawk is her name. I've sailed with Captain Quinn a number of times. When he needs a crew, I usually hear about it."

"Do you always go?"

"If the mood strikes me, aye. I'm not bound to him. But he has a keen eye on the open sea. A man can make a profit with a good captain."

"Roland!"

At the sound of a man's voice, they both turned. A big, brawny man with a brown beard, wearing tattered knee breeches and nothing else, hurried toward them. He gave Rita a suspicious glance and she turned away to look at the ships again. She was still listening carefully, but she felt she had a better chance of overhearing something interesting if the two buccaneers thought she was distracted.

"What is it, Ned?" Roland glanced at Rita, lowering his voice. "No need to attract attention."

"Aye, well." He spoke lower, but Rita could still hear him. "I think we found him. That little fellow you were looking for. Want to see him?"

"That I do. Where is he?"

"Baldy Jim has him in a shed. You know the one?"

"I know it." Roland drew a coin out of his pocket and pressed it into Ned's large hand. "We'll meet you there in a bit. Go back and make certain Baldy doesn't lose him, all right?"

Ned nodded and rushed away.

Roland turned and studied Rita's face.

What she had heard sounded like a kidnapping to her. She gave him an

expression that she hoped was guileless. "Do you have more business to take care of?"

"Happens that I do," said Roland. "It won't be dangerous this time, though. Care to come along?"

"Sure!" Rita was surprised. She had expected him to tell her it was buccaneer business. "I'd love to."

"All right, then. This way."

As they walked, though, she felt that he was a little more subdued. Apparently something was on his mind. He was still pleasant and still smiling, but he didn't point out any more sights.

They walked briskly up the waterfront after Ned. Soon they had left behind the piers and booths and reached a shipyard. There lumber, pitch, canvas, and hemp were stored with other items that ships needed to be outfitted and repaired. Fewer people were around, but those Rita could see were all working on something. Roland nodded briefly to a couple of them who glanced up. He led her through a maze of the shipbuilding materials and broken, discarded refuse. Roland walked up to a storage shed, kicking aside some old bits of rope. The shed was made of unfinished wood that was warped from the humidity and tropical sunlight. He rapped twice on the door.

The door opened and Ned stuck his head out. Then he pushed the door open wider, looking at Rita in surprise. He said nothing, though, and Roland held the door open for Rita.

The heat and humidity in the shed were stifling. A small window was open high in the back, but little breeze came in through it. Rita saw a short, muscular man with a slick bald head standing by the window. A very short, slender man with rather ordinary, Western European features was sitting motionless on a small keg.

"That's him, ain't he, Roland?" Ned nodded toward the silent figure.

"Must be," said Roland, looking him over. "Can't be many fellows his size in Port Royal. Did you ask him his name? Who are you, fellow?"

"Don't waste your time," said Ned. "He's real obedient most times, like if you tell him to sit or walk or whistle a tune. But if you ask him his name or where he's been or anything personal-like, he don't make a sound."

Rita tensed, suddenly looking more closely at the seated figure.

"Funny. But I suppose we can make him talk if we want, now, can't we?"

"We ain't tried, Jim and me," said Ned. "Since we nabbed him for you, we didn't want to risk hurting him."

"He's a tough little bird," said Baldy Jim. "He ain't complained once about the heat in here. Ain't even broke out a sweat that I can see."

"What's your name?" Roland asked him.

The seated figure looked up at him but said nothing.

"Where did you find him?" Roland was still looking at the prisoner.

"A couple o' fellows saw him creeping around down here last night," said Baldy Jim.

"What was he doing?" Roland asked.

"Well, he didn't have no clothes and he was digging around in a rag heap. He found an old pair of breeches there and put 'em on. That's when our pals nabbed him and brought him to me. We all had the word from you to be on the lookout for him."

Roland nodded thoughtfully.

Rita knew the seated figure was MC 2. Everything she had heard and seen fit his description: he was small of stature; he had appeared without clothing; he was obedient under the Second Law. Yet if, instead of ordering him to provide information, they simply posed questions, he was free to ignore them.

Rita had to decide what to do. For the moment, she wanted to stay with Roland. Since he seemed to be in charge of MC 2, she could stay with Roland and keep track of MC 2 as well. Then, when she was ready, she could simply call Hunter

on her communicator and arrange for him to apprehend MC 2. She concluded that Roland, despite the arguments of the group, must be looking for some man of his own time who fit MC 2's description. Certainly she didn't see how an English buccaneer in Port Royal could be "on the lookout," as Baldy Jim had said, for a robot.

Roland leaned past her to look out the doorway. She watched his face and saw that he looked all the way down the waterfront again, carefully. He said nothing, however, and moved back inside the shed.

"Look, Ned," said Roland. "Do you happen to know if any ships are heading out soon? Like maybe the Hungry Hawk? Captain Quinn asked me to crew with him a few days ago, and he's still in the harbor."

"That's right," said Ned. "Quinn is sailing on the midday tide, but he has a full crew. Baldy Jim here tried to join him and they put him off."

"All right," Roland said quickly, tossing them both another coin. "Here's what we'll do. Bring a dinghy around, quick. Quinn owes me a few favors. We're going to the rag heap, then we'll meet you at the dock."

"Right-o," said Ned.

All the humans left the shed. MC 2 remained impassively on the keg. Rita couldn't talk to him alone, and she didn't want the buccaneers, even Roland, to know that she had special knowledge about their captive.

"I'll watch him," said Roland, "No need to lock it."

While the other two men went to find a dinghy, Roland led Rita without a word to a pile of refuse on the far side of the shed. Most of it was rags, but he pulled out a couple of torn articles of clothing that were basically still whole. He tossed them to her.

"You're much too ladylike, sweet lady. We're going on board a ship. Look as ragged and dirty as you can, and like a cabin boy if possible."

A thrill of excitement hit Rita all at once. She was actually going on board a pirate ship about to set sail. Anxiously, she shook out the old clothes he tossed her. Finally she found a pair of loose, baggy pants, a tattered, patched man's shirt, and a torn leather vest that she could wear over it.

"These will fit," said Rita, with a reluctant, wry smile.

"Change in the shed," said Roland. "I'll have our friend come out and stand with me."

9

Soon Rita was dressed in filthy, baggy clothes, carrying her others in a tight bundle. She followed Roland and MC 2 to the nearest dock. Ned and Baldy Jim were waiting there with a dinghy that tossed lightly on the waves.

"Get in, Shorty," Ned said to MC 2.

MC 2 obeyed without speaking and found a seat in the middle. Roland helped Rita climb down into the boat, then followed her. The buccaneers pushed off and began to row. Roland also took an oar and pointed to another for MC 2, who took it obediently.

Rita breathed in the sea air and let the spray hit her as it came over the side of the boat. Slowly but steadily, they drew nearer the big anchored ships. She searched her memory for the political situation in the Caribbean in 1668.

England, France, and Spain were at peace with each other. That meant the buccaneers couldn't get legal commissions from the governor of Jamaica as privateers. So when their money ran low, they would just go out and pirate a ship on their own, as outlaws. As long as their prey was not British, however, they had some confidence that the governor would look the other way.

Soon Rita saw that they were rowing for a brigantine named the Hungry Hawk. It was a two-masted square-rigger, well-weathered. The ship had not seen fresh paint for a long time, but the sails and ropes were in good condition. Sailors

on board saw them coming and began yelling to each other.

"Ahoy!" Roland cupped his hands around his mouth. "Ahoy the Hungry Hawk. Where's Captain Quinn?"

The sailors shouted for their captain, who came striding to the rail. Rita was hoping, despite her historical knowledge, that he might be a wild-looking character with a villainous stare, but of course she knew better than to expect that much melodrama. Captain Quinn was a man of average height and medium build with a brown beard. He wore a plain linen shirt and knee breeches, like most of his buccaneer colleagues, but he also wore a broad-brimmed hat with a blue plume.

"You're too late, Roland," called Captain Quinn. "We have a full crew already."

"I have some trouble," Roland shouted back. "And a couple of friends with me." Captain Quinn frowned and studied the group in the dinghy. "How many altogether?"

"Three of us. We need to get out of Port Royal for a bit. Can you help?"

"Come on, then." Captain Quinn waved for his men to throw down a rope ladder. Rita could see that Roland's need to leave town was the kind of argument that Captain Quinn and the other buccaneers understood easily. She waited to see what Roland wanted her to do, remembering that she was masquerading as a cabin boy if the buccaneers would buy that. If they didn't, she would have to hope that Roland could protect her on board the ship.

Roland grabbed the rope ladder and climbed up a few rungs. Then he motioned for Rita to follow. She took hold of the rough, thick rope carefully and felt the lowest rung sag slightly under her weight. When she started climbing, though, she found it fairly easy to do.

"You next," Roland called down to MC 2.

MC 2 obediently began to follow Rita. After what seemed like a very long, slow, clumsy climb, she finally reached the rail of the ship. Roland took her arm and helped her over the rail onto the deck, then did the same with MC 2. "Captain, these two young fellows are Rye and Shorty," said Roland, tapping Rita and MC 2 on the shoulder in turn. "They don't speak much and I like it that way. But they'll do as I say on board."

"Fair enough." Captain Quinn nodded to both of them. "You've always been a fine man to have, Roland. But tell me, now. How serious is the trouble in town?"

"It's not the governor," said Roland, lowering his voice conspiratorially. "A very big, brawny fellow and his mates are out to do harm to my young friends, here. We just need to give them time to cool off."

"I understand. You see your boys pull their own weight in the work." He glanced over the side to Ned and Baldy Jim, who were still waiting. "Them, too, I guess?"

"They're good men, with many months on the seas," said Roland. "They've hauled in plenty of Spanish gold in their time."

"All right." Captain Quinn turned to another man. "Help them pull that dinghy aboard." He slapped Roland on the back and walked away.

Rita let out a quiet sigh of relief. Roland winked at her. MC 2 remained motionless.

"I'm sorry I lost Wayne, Hunter," said Steve, looking up and down the waterfront.

"At least we know for sure he is nearby," said Hunter. "If he has learned more about MC 2 than we have, then his presence is further evidence that MC 2 may be here too."

"Thanks for the nice words," said Steve. "But I still feel lousy. I shouldn't have lost him."

"Every moment that goes by increases the chance that MC 2 is now visible at

full size," said Jane. "Theoretically, he could be anywhere in town, or even somewhere else on the island, but I don't take that seriously."

"Why not?" Hunter asked, still looking over the crowd as they walked.

"Once he has reached full size, he will either have to avoid human society completely to be safe from the imperatives of the Three Laws of Robotics, or else he will have to study the local culture very carefully in order to understand the customs and language. That's the only way he can live among humans and still obey the Laws."

"Makes sense," said Steve. "And you pointed out before that he'll need clothes."

"Since the nuclear explosion in our own time was centered in the remains of Port Royal, he obviously didn't go hide out in the mountains to stay," said Jane. "And if he's in town, the waterfront is the best location for displaced humans to find their way. Strangers come and go here all the time and no one thinks much of it. Many of them are destitute, too, and that will also camouflage MC 2."

"This is very logical," said Hunter. "So we will continue looking for him here."

"I wish we could do more than just walk around and look," said Steve.

"I have tried to call MC 2 directly by radio," said Hunter. "I also have done that with Rita, and received no response from either one. If MC 2 is listening, he knows that someone with the capability of radio transmission is here and he has chosen to remain out of contact."

"He has probably turned off his receiver," said Jane. "For the same reason MC 1 did on our last mission. As soon as he heard your first signal, he knew someone might have come to find him, so he's avoiding the chance of hearing a human voice under the Second Law."

"I suspect you are right," said Hunter. "However, that may be just as well. We might have a better chance to catch MC 2 if he cannot approximate my position from measuring the strength of my radio signal and my movements." As he spoke, he continued to look in all directions on a regular basis.

"Hunter," said Steve. "I'm no historian like Rita, but I think I understand how this town operates. People know a lot more than they tell strangers and they're all suspicious of authority. Bribes and payment for information will probably work a lot better here than just walking around asking polite questions."

"My data tell me that bribes are illegal and ethically objectionable," said Hunter. "Of course, I realize that laws and customs may be different here, but if they are wrong because humans would be harmed—"

"Think of it this way, Hunter," said Jane quickly. "This buccaneer society is a barely functioning anarchy. Further, it's definitely a free port with a laissez-faire economy. You have all these terms in your stored data, I'm sure."

"Yes. I understand what you mean."

"Good. Then you're using these more technical terms now to access your data on human societies."

"Yes."

"Then in order to accept Steve's advice under the First Law, I think all you have to understand is that this system worked to some degree in this time and place in history. How does that strike you?"

"I see what you mean," said Hunter. "But for the moment, bribery will not be necessary." He stopped where he was, looking out into the bay.

"What is it, Hunter?" Steve looked, too, but he couldn't tell where, among all the ships out in the harbor, Hunter was focusing his attention.

Hunter pointed. "Your unmagnified human vision cannot recognize faces from this distance, but you can see the dinghy that has rowed up to the second ship from the left."

"I see it," said Jane. "Who's in it?"

"Roland, Rita, and MC 2 are climbing from the dinghy up to the deck of the ship on a rope ladder. Two other men are holding the boat steady for them."

"You're sure it's MC 2?" Jane asked.

"He is identical to MC 1."

"They're going on board a pirate ship?" Steve was amazed. "What does she think she's doing?"

"She's on a great adventure," said Jane, grimly. "And she's the one who doesn't believe that any actions except the most significant ones can change history, especially from this little backwater town."

"At least she has the freedom of human judgment," said Hunter. "I am more afraid of MC 2. He may feel that under the First Law he must break up fights—I feel that impulse strongly myself. He is more likely than she to change history, I think."

"We can't just let them go," said Steve. "How are we going to follow them?"

Wayne stood near the far end of the docks by a stack of barrels of pitch, catching his breath after a long, frantic run in the humid midday heat. He had seen the dinghy being rowed out into the bay with Roland and MC 2 when it was still close enough for the passengers to be recognized. Desperately, he had tried to push his way through the crowd, shouting for them to stop. No one in the dinghy had even turned to look, though, and he was sure they had not been able to hear him. He had not recognized the others in the boat.

"Roland," Wayne muttered in puzzlement. "What possible reason could you have for running off with MC 2?"

He was still watching in frustration as the dinghy slowly drew up to one of the ships in the harbor. Then suddenly a possibility occurred to him. If Roland had figured out that MC 2 always protected humans and obeyed orders, then he might want to keep him around. MC 2 would make a perfect servant and bodyguard for a buccaneer. However, if that were true, then Roland had no intention now of bringing MC 2 back to Wayne.

"Lousy pirate," Wayne said angrily. "Can't trust him. Now I'll have to get MC 2 back myself. Well... at least I know where he is."

Steve helplessly watched the dinghy being hoisted on board the ship. "We're going to lose them, Hunter, if we just stand here."

"The name of the ship is the Hungry Hawk," said Hunter. "I can read it painted on the side. But I do not have the money to hire a ship to follow them. Nor can we expect to get it."

"I have an idea," said Steve. "But hear me out, okay? You might not like it at first."

"Agreed," said Hunter.

"Can't we get enough lumber for a small, fast-moving sailboat? I can give you a modern design and you can calculate the exact specifications we'll need."

"A modern design might catch on," said Hunter. "And change the course of sailing technology in history."

"No! That's my point—when we're finished with it, we'll destroy it—sink it or take it apart. We won't leave any evidence."

"What type of design do you have in mind?"

"A small outrigger," said Steve. "It will only have to carry the three of us and some drinking water and food. For speed, we'll want a high mast and a deep keel to balance it. The outrigger design can give us greater stability than we would have otherwise—that's the part that no one here in Jamaica right now is using."

"I have accessed some data on sailing design," said Hunter. "I believe we might have enough money to buy the lumber for such a boat. I also see that the outrigger may well work, but I fear that someone will see the idea behind it

and try to use it in the near future. It is the concept, not the exact design, that is important and might trigger a change in history."

"I wish we had our historian here," said Jane. "She hasn't been any help since she sneaked away. But really, Hunter, I doubt that the outrigger idea would be used here anyway because it isn't necessary."

"How's that?" Steve looked at her.

"My study of robotics included some history of technological development. Technological change is related to need as well as to concept. For instance, much of the sailing technology that was used by the early explorers in Columbus's generation had been in use for a century already in Dutch windmills. It only came into sailing use after the desire to explore by sea became more intense following the fall of Constantinople."

"In other words," said Steve, "you think people here won't care about the outrigger because the ships they already have are doing what they need."

"Well, yes. I guess I was a little long-winded, huh?" She smiled self-consciously. "What do you think, Hunter?"

"I understand," said Hunter.

"Shall we try it?" Steve asked.

"Yes. We must find a place to buy the lumber. I will calculate our exact material requirements as we go."

Rita stood with MC 2 by the rail, out of the way of the crew, as the ship set sail. She watched the men in the rigging and on deck with fascination. None of the book learning she had acquired over the years could replace actually standing on the deck with them, breathing the salt air and listening to the wood creak under the pressure of the sea and the wind.

"We have a good wind." Roland strode up to them, grinning. "I helped a little just to take part, but they don't need me. As the captain said, they had a full crew before we came aboard." He looked at MC 2. "So, Shorty. You like going to sea?"

"Yes," said MC 2.

"Where are you from, friend? Old England, or one of the colonies?" Roland spoke casually, but he was watching MC 2's face carefully.

"A colony," said MC 2.

"Which one?"

"Virginia."

"Virginia." Roland thought a moment. "That's up on the mainland coast, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"How long have you been in Jamaica?"

"Not long."

Roland watched him a moment, then just gave him a friendly pat on the shoulder and turned to watch Port Royal slowly shrink behind them.

Rita guessed that MC 2 was being careful under the Third Law of Robotics, which required him to protect himself if he could do so without violating the other two Laws. That would explain his reluctance to converse. She didn't know if he had really been manufactured in Virginia or not, of course, but it was possible.

She turned her back on both Roland and MC 2 and gazed out to the open sea.

10

Wayne knew he had very little time to follow the Hungry Hawk before it was lost on the open sea. His only hope was to find someone with a ship already outfitted who was willing to sail. He paced up and down one of the docks, squinting into the sunlight as he studied the ships.

"No use," he said to himself, finally. The distance was too great for him to see the kinds of details that would tell him if a ship out there was supplied

for a voyage. He glanced around for the nearest tavern and hurried toward it, planning what he would say as he walked.

The tavern was shadowed from the hot sun, of course, but the humid air was stale and motionless inside. Wayne blinked for a moment, waiting for his vision to adjust. Then he went to the bar and waved to the burly man behind it.

"What'll it be, mate?"

"I'm looking for a man with a ship ready to sail," said Wayne, keeping his voice low.

"What's his name?"

"No, I mean, I want to find such a man. Can you help?" He leaned on the bar.

"What's in it for me?" The burly barkeeper wiped the bar idly with a damp cloth.

"A cut from his end." Wayne glanced around warily, though the place was almost empty. "I have word that the Hungry Hawk is after a fat Spanish merchant ship."

"Is he, now?" The barkeeper's tone betrayed some real interest. "I did hear Quinn sailed 'cause he was desperate for a little hard coin."

"What better time is there? But I know which way he went and where he's headed." That last part wasn't quite true, of course, but Wayne knew he had to gamble.

"That old Quinn. He just might do that. He's a tricky one. Don't shoot his mouth off like so many men in this town." The barkeeper was silent a moment.

"I know a man who might want to speak with you. But I'll take my cut from both sides, thank you." He held out his hand.

Wayne knew he had no choice. "Don't waste any time. The Hungry Hawk is already under sail." He reached into his pocket and pulled out his few remaining coins. "It's all I have left," he said, dropping them into the other man's palm.

"Better than naught. Stay right here." The barkeeper walked down to the end of the bar and spoke quietly to someone mopping the wooden floor. With a quick nod, the other figure leaned the mop against the wall and darted out the back door.

Wayne wiped sweat from his eyes and collapsed into a seat. Without any money left, he couldn't pay for a drink at the bar or any food or lodging later. If his plan didn't work, he would probably have no chance to catch MC 2. In order to survive he would be forced to return to his own time and risk getting caught in some trap back at the Bohung Institute.

Through the open doorway, he could still see the Hungry Hawk sailing away. It seemed to move with painful slowness to someone accustomed to supersonic airplanes. Of course, speed was relative; a pursuing ship would be subject to the same winds.

Wayne was starting to doze in the heat when he heard the sound of fast, hard footsteps clunking into the tavern. Startled, he sat up quickly. A man's shadow was blocking out the sunlight.

"Who wants me?" The shadow shouted, shifting shape slightly as he looked around in the nearly empty tavern.

"What's in it for me?" The barkeeper walked down the length of the bar toward him.

"You'll keep your throat whole. Now your man brought me over here with a story, but you'll see no money from me until I've heard it all."

"He's the one," said the barkeeper, nodding toward Wayne.

"Oh?" The man in the doorway came inside and glowered down at Wayne. He wore a broad-brimmed hat with several plumes on it; under the hat, long brown hair hung to his shoulders. His beard was full and shaggy; he wore a white linen shirt, black knee breeches and buckled shoes, and a cutlass swung at his side.

"I'm Captain Mick Tomann of the Old Laughing Lady."

"Wayne Nystrom, Captain. Have a seat." Wayne sat up, gathering his wits. Tomann sat down, watching him suspiciously. "You know of a Spanish pigeon, do you?"

"Yes," said Wayne. He didn't, of course, but if he could grab MC 2 on the high seas, he could just take him back to his own time from there. "But the Hungry Hawk has already gone after it. I'm looking for a partner."

"What do I need a partner for?"

"I can tell you where to find the prey."

"Quinn is headed northeast around the island, probably headed for the coast of Cuba. I saw that on my way here just now. Any fool can see that."

"Ah, but what if you lose him? I know where he's going. And you'll need time to get under way."

Tomann frowned at him, resting one hand on his cutlass hilt. "Not much time, matey. I have some supplies already on board for a voyage I've already planned. Any my crew is hanging about on the waterfront, with naught to do and spoiling for a fight."

"You have the ship and the crew and I have the information." Wayne jerked his thumb toward the sea. "The Hungry Hawk is under sail even as we speak."

Tomann grinned suddenly, slammed his fist down on the table, and leaped to his feet. "Aye! Let's go. The Old Laughing Lady is a schooner that can outsail that fat old brig on any sea, in any weather!"

Wayne smiled with relief and stood up. The barkeeper came forward.

"Captain," said the barkeeper. "Since I brought you two together, I believe a consideration for your humble servant is in order here."

Tomann whirled on him, drawing his cutlass in a wild, sweeping motion. The barkeeper jumped back.

"We shall see, my humble friend. If the pigeon is found heavy in the water, I shall bring a trinket back home for you. Until then, back away."

The barkeeper did so.

"Come on, friend," Tomann added to Wayne. "We have a crew to gather." He sheathed his cutlass and strode out.

Wayne hurried after him.

Steve grinned as he trotted after Hunter. The big robot was carrying a massive armload of lumber on one shoulder, under the front end of the planks. He was easily able to carry the load, but Steve was hustling along under the rear end of the lumber, pretending to help so that passersby wouldn't notice just how impossibly strong Hunter was. In addition, Hunter was carrying a bunch of woodworking tools in his other arm.

Jane walked alongside Steve, amused by the masquerade.

Hunter kept walking after the docks ended. The trio wove their way through a variety of other work areas and warehouses along the water before they finally left the occupied areas behind. Then Hunter stopped and turned to look back over his shoulder, carefully checking to see that he did not strike Steve or Jane as he lowered his load to the sand.

"I have devised a plan to work from," said Hunter. "Partly from my stored data and partly from observing the ships in the bay. With these manual tools, I will be able to work much faster than either of you."

"I can still do whatever you say," said Steve. "Even a few minutes saved will help in the long run."

"Agreed," said Hunter. "I will give you specific tasks, since I have no way to convey the complete plan."

"You could draw it in the sand," said Jane.

"I dare not leave any record, even in sand," said Hunter. "If anyone seems to take particular notice of our actions, please inform me."

"I can help, too," said Jane. "I think."

"I do not doubt it," said Hunter. "But I fear that a woman doing such work

with us might attract attention in this time, and that would be unwise."

"I suppose," Jane shrugged. "Then I'll stand around and supervise."

"You cannot supervise without knowing the plan," said Hunter.

"That's another joke, Hunter," said Steve.

"Ah. Was it funny?"

"No," said Steve. "Now, then. How do we start?"

Hunter worked through the afternoon, doing most of the labor. He was not only faster than Steve, but also more precise in his work. Jane watched for company, but few people came so far from the center of the waterfront. Those who did walk by on the beach took no notice. Steve could see that among the buccaneers, minding one's own business was a survival trait, and woodworking was common along the docks anyway.

"There's another one," said Steve, standing up from a newly sawed board to wipe sweat from his face. "This climate is great for you, Hunter, because the sun beats down constantly on your solar collectors. But I need a break."

"Of course," said Hunter, without looking up from his chisel and hammer. "Suit your own need, as you wish."

"I want to dunk myself in the water," said Steve, turning to Jane. "Walk with me?"

"Sure."

Steve wanted to talk to Jane alone for a moment. He led her to the edge of the water and they waded along the surf, away from Hunter. Steve knew that if Hunter wanted to monitor their conversation, he could turn up his hearing to do so; the robot could probably even filter out the sound of the breakers. However, Hunter probably wouldn't bother.

Steve put his arm around Jane and leaned close to her ear. "Any idea what our chances are now?"

"Of catching MC 2, you mean?"

"Yeah. I mean, snagging MC 1 was a lot simpler in the dinosaur age. No other humans lived in that time to complicate the search. Now we have all these pirates to worry about."

"That's true, but this world isn't as complex as ours. I think if we can catch that ship, we'll still have a reasonable chance of finding MC 2."

"Even with all those pirates around?" He glanced back over his shoulder.

Hunter was working hard, but of course he could be listening without appearing to be.

"Well, it all depends on Hunter right now." Jane stopped and watched the surf splash around her legs, holding her skirt up with one hand. "Without his robotic abilities, we wouldn't be able to get this little sailboat made. If I can keep Hunter focused on action, instead of on frustration over the First Law, then he'll be worth any number of buccaneers."

"I don't doubt that part."

"What really makes me angry is Rita's lack of professionalism, running off like that." Her tone was hard.

"I know," Steve let himself fall into the cool water on his back, then spat out water and regained his footing. "I have to say, this life-style seems pretty carefree. Fruit and fish everywhere, the sea and the beaches, and a feeling of adventure."

"Not you, too."

"No, not really. Let's start back."

By the time the sun was low in the west and the fishing boats were coming in, Hunter had cut and shaped all the wood. Steve had done what little he could. Most of all, he was glad to feel the cool air of evening.

"Dinnertime," said Steve. "Tonight I wish Jane and I could just get what we need from the sunlight, but it won't work for us."

Hunter looked up at both of them.

"We can leave you here to keep working," said Jane.

"No," said Hunter. "The waterfront is too violent at night. I will come with you."

"I had a hunch you would," said Steve.

Rita stretched out on the deck of the Hungry Hawk after dark like the rest of the buccaneers, except for those on duty. The masts and sails rose high above her, their tops now beyond the reach of the torchlight on deck. Dinner had been fairly good, a sort of stew. On their first night out of port, the fresh meat and produce were still good. She knew that in such a warm climate, the fare would quickly turn to salted fish and pork, and hard biscuits.

Roland had picked out a spot in a corner of the deck toward the stern for the three of them. They were right under the rail, wadding up some empty burlap bags he had brought to use as pillows. MC 2 lay down near Rita, still imitating the behavior of the humans around him. Roland sat down on her other side.

"Faring well, sweet lady?" Roland whispered.

"Well enough." She looked out over the water, where the moon was rising.

"A fair night."

"Yes, it is." She decided to ask him some of the questions she had been considering, hoping that this would be a good time. Still looking away from him, she spoke casually. "Tell me about your travels."

"My travels?" He sounded surprised.

"That's right."

"Well, I was born to a London waterfront family. Nothing to speak of there, except the ships were always coming and going. So I grew up wanting to get out, and the sea was the way to go." He shrugged.

"How old were you?"

"I was an eleven-year-old cabin boy on a trader to Holland and back first. Later, I came out this way."

"When did you, uh..."

"Join the buccaneers?" He grinned. "I jumped ship off a brig in Tortuga a few years ago. Liked the climate and the freedom. Then I came to Port Royal with some shipmates just last year. It was too crowded in Tortuga." He shrugged.

"It's a better life than I ever had in Old England."

Rita didn't dare look at him. Instead, she watched the bright moon in the dark sky. It looked the same as it did in her own time.

She was telling herself not to ask any more about his life. He must have killed people, of course. His was a violent time and a violent life. He was a creature of his time and he had survived so far.

Uncomfortably, she reminded herself again that from the vantage point of her life and time, he had been dead for centuries. That was her professionalism coming to the fore again. After all, she repeated to herself, she was here first as a historian. She was merely doing field research, the same way anthropologists, zoologists, and other scientists had always done.

"Is something wrong?" Roland slipped his arm around her shoulders.

Rita stiffened, startled though not exactly surprised. Roland was exciting but his action scared her. She tried to push his hand away, but he held on.

"Ah, Rita, speak to me. What's on your mind?"

"Let go." Suddenly more afraid, despite his calm manner, she struggled to get free.

Instead, Roland grabbed her arm with his other hand. "What is it? All of a sudden, you're—" He stopped abruptly.

Rita saw that MC 2 had sat up and taken hold of one of Roland's wrists in a smooth, quick motion. MC 2 slowly but firmly pulled Roland's hand away from Rita.

"Go back to sleep," Roland ordered. "Or go away. Take a walk, Shorty."

Instead, MC 2 pushed Roland's other hand off Rita's shoulders.

"Hey, what's wrong, Shorty?" Roland moved up into a crouch, ready to fight if necessary. "You've been taking orders up to now without a complaint. Gone sweet on the lady, eh?"

Rita scooted out from between them. She got to her feet and moved to the rail. Her heart was pounding.

"You have quite a grip, there, Shorty." Roland stood up, eyeing MC 2 cautiously and rubbing one wrist.

MC 2 remained seated on the deck, watching Roland.

Rita, now relieved, suppressed a smile. MC 2 was far stronger than any human, even with his small size. If he was really forced to prove that, of course, he would no longer be able to get lost in the crowd of buccaneers. For now, though, Roland didn't seem inclined to fight with him.

"Think I'll take a stroll about the deck," said Roland. He nodded to Rita and walked away, glancing back once to make sure that MC 2 was remaining where he was.

Rita sat down next to MC 2 again. She felt safe now, but was still wide-awake. Still, she was also glad to know that MC 2 would keep her from harm if he could.

11

Dr. Wayne Nystrom, robotics researcher and inventor, was not comfortable. He stood in the shadows on the deck of the Old Laughing Lady, watching three different drunken brawls among members of the crew. Every man in the crew had started drinking rum from the moment the ship was under sail, not the least of them Captain Mick Tomann himself.

"Stand away! Stand away, lads!" Tomann was swaggering about the deck with a tankard in his left hand and a flintlock pistol in the other. As Wayne watched, the captain sighted drunkenly up into the rigging and fired. The ball chipped a piece of wood off a yardarm. "Ha! Got it." He stuck that pistol into his belt and drew another.

The sound of scraping metal rose from one of the brawls. The fight between two men had grown more serious; cutlasses had been drawn and Wayne could see the yellowish light from a swaying ship's lantern shining on them. Curious, but still careful, he moved up a little to watch.

"Hold! Hold there, I say!" Tomann somehow staggered toward the impending sword fight on the moving deck, brandishing his second pistol.

The crowd of buccaneers surrounding the fighters opened the way for him.

"Drop 'em!" Tomann heaved the rum out of his tankard into one man's face, then flung the tankard itself at the other. "Fight all you want, but save the cutting for the Spanish. We have gold to win tomorrow!"

Drunken cheers rose from the crew. A couple of men took the cutlasses away from their companions and gave them more rum instead. Distracted, they drank up. Tomann stumbled away in search of more rum.

Wayne sighed with relief and stepped back into the shadows. Then he looked out across the moonlit sea. The Hungry Hawk was hidden by the darkness, but Tomann had managed to get his crew together and set sail before it had been out of sight for long. Wayne had pointed out the way and, as Tomann had promised, the Old Laughing Lady was a faster ship. Shortly before sundown, the Hungry Hawk had come into sight again in the distance.

Steve stood with Jane on the dock, watching their small sailboat bob on the water, tied securely. Hunter had finished it near midnight. As Steve had suggested, one tall mast rose from a short, sharply pointed hull. Now that it was in the water, with the keel out of sight, it looked unbalanced, but the keel was big enough to help stabilize the little boat. Two long poles extended from the starboard side, holding a thick, smoothly polished log. The outrigging would make the craft even more stable. Hunter had stretched a

canvas tarpaulin across part of the hull to provide some shelter for the humans when they crawled under it.

"Looks good so far," said Steve.

"Let us load it," said Hunter. "Steve, if you will stand inside, I will hand the containers to you."

"All right." Carefully, he moved from the dock into the sailboat. It swayed, then steadied. "Hunter, don't wooden boats normally have to season in the water? So the wood will expand from absorbing the water and fill the cracks between the boards?"

"Usually, yes," said Hunter, handing him a keg of fresh drinking water. "I included this problem in my calculations. The hull was already watertight as I constructed it."

"Handy," Steve muttered to himself, impressed.

Earlier, right after dinner, Hunter had accompanied Steve and Jane to buy and carry some food and water for their trip. After they had loaded the supplies and Steve and Jane had taken seats in the boat, Hunter cast off the lines and stood on the dock, still holding the bowline.

"We have a moderate onshore wind," he said. "However, this boat is very maneuverable. I do not expect a problem." He stepped into the boat with a robotic sense of balance that hardly made the boat sway at all.

"We should name this craft," said Steve. "And break a bottle over its bow."

"Why?" Hunter looked at him. "That would waste valuable drinking water."

"It's another joke, Hunter," said Jane, grinning at Steve.

"Oh. Was this one funny?"

"Not any more," said Steve, smiling back at Jane. "Here." He reached down into the water and splashed water up against the hull. "I hereby christen her the Jamaica Jane."

Jane rolled her eyes, laughing.

In one smooth motion, Hunter hoisted the sail and sat down at the tiller, holding it firmly as the wind filled the sail with a jerk. Steve flailed for a handhold and got a fistful of Jane's hair. She jumped in surprise, then laughed as they both braced themselves against kegs of water.

Hunter took the Jamaica Jane away from the dock in a firm, sure tack against the wind. The boat tilted hard to starboard, driving the outrigger under the surface of the water. It held, however, preventing the sailboat from taking too extreme an angle.

Steve squinted against the breeze, feeling the cold spray hit his face. The night was cool but not cold, even over the water. He felt a surge of excitement.

"Hunter?" Jane turned around awkwardly to face him. "Can we really move fast enough to catch up?"

"Yes. We have an excellent ratio of sail to water resistance. Also, I have made careful calculations of the wind and currents." He leaned over the side and reached out with his long arm to dip one hand into the water. "As we go, I will continue to feel the currents. This will help me calculate the best angle at which to sail."

"Can you really do that? Feel the currents by sticking your hand into the water while we're moving?" Jane looked at the dark water doubtfully. "I know your robotic sensors are good, but does the water tell you that much?"

"Yes," said Hunter. "My data on sailing include some information about ancient Polynesians doing this. They could even calculate where unknown islands would be, from miles away, according to how the water moved around them."

"No kidding," said Steve. "Really?"

"Yes. We do not need to follow the Hungry Hawk precisely, or to use only line of sight to find it. Since I know the direction it took, the winds and currents it has had available to use, and the level of technology on the ship, I should be able to intercept it by sometime tomorrow."

"Sounds like we're all set," said Steve.

"We have one serious vulnerability," said Hunter. "This craft will not take high waves well. I will keep my sensors carefully trained on changes in ions, humidity, and temperature to predict the weather."

"I won't complain about that," said Steve, grinning. He felt a surge of excitement as the wind whipped his hair and the boat rose and fell with the waves.

"Good idea, Hunter," said Jane.

Steve leaned toward her. "Exciting, isn't it? Chasing a pirate ship across the Caribbean?"

She nodded, more nervous than excited. "What's wrong?"

"I've been thinking about these pirate ships. And the danger to MC 2. He's heavier than water."

"You mean if he goes overboard during an attack?"

"Yes. He can swim...if he's close enough to land, he can get back. But if it's too far—"

"He'll sink to the bottom."

"Actually, he doesn't need oxygen. He could sink and walk to shore. But again, he has to be close enough not to use up all his energy first. And walking through water would drain his energy much faster than ordinary walking."

"If he's lost on the bottom, we'd never find him."

"No. But when the right time comes, he'll still explode with the same force, wherever he is on the seafloor."

The next morning after a rather spare breakfast, Rita again stood by the rail with MC 2, staying out of the way of the buccaneers. Everyone was excited. As dawn had broken over the sea, they had spotted a Spanish merchant ship on the horizon. Rita watched it all morning, realizing for the first time how painfully slow the race between the ships would be.

"This feels like it will take forever," said Rita. Then she wondered if she could engage MC 2 in conversation while Roland was up in the rigging helping to sail the ship.

"Tell me why these two ships sail at different speeds."

Under the Second Law, MC 2 did not hesitate.

"Both ships are using the same wind for power out in the open sea. The only difference in their speed comes from the design of the ships and the weight they carry. Occasionally, one ship might move into a fast-moving current before the other, also giving it an advantage."

"Thank you." Rita smiled, pleased that getting the robot to talk was so simple. "Your eyesight must be better than mine. Tell me what you can see about that ship up there."

"By the name on its side, it is the Cadiz. That name suggests that it is Spanish. It is riding low in the water, obviously full of cargo. Also, from the shape of the ship I can see above the waterline, I infer that the shape of the hull below the water is wide and bulky. This creates more resistance against the water, slowing it down."

Rita knew he was correct. "Is there any chance it can get away?"

"By its own actions, I do not believe so. However, the sailors on our ship could conceivably make a mistake in their handling of the rigging or their calculation of the changes in the wind. Also, of course, the sails and rope on this ship are in various conditions. Any unexpected problem, such as broken rigging or torn sails, could affect the accuracy of my prediction."

"Or a change in the weather."

"I detect no atmospheric alterations that signal a coming change," said MC 2.

"But in principle of course, even a small storm could separate the ships."

"Realistically, then, we're going to catch the Cadiz," said Rita.

"Yes."

"How long will it take, under present conditions?"

"Approximately six hours."

"Six hours?" Rita watched MC 2 for a moment before looking out across the sea again toward the Spanish ship. Of course, from the perspective of her own time, the Hungry Hawk had either caught the Cadiz on this voyage or it had not; everything the buccaneers did, at least without the influence of the time travelers, was already decided. That left her wondering what MC 2 would do when the pirates attacked the Spanish.

Even a robot, acting alone, could not possibly stop all those humans from harming each other. Rita was no roboticist, of course, but any human of her time knew something of robots and the Three Laws. She decided to instruct him outright to tell her what he would do, even though doing so would reveal her as a human from his time.

"Tell me if the First Law will force you to try to stop the fight." Rita glanced at the buccaneers nearest them. None was paying attention to them. They wouldn't understand the entire question, of course, but they wouldn't like to hear that anyone might want to stop the coming fight.

"I did not know a fight was certain," said MC 2. "But of course, if you know the Laws, you must have pursued me here. Have you come to take me back?"

"I certainly should," she said carefully. "You are not to leave my company. That's an instruction under the Second Law. Understood?"

"Yes."

"Then tell me what I asked."

"I suspected a fight would occur, but the buccaneers have talked specifically of taking the ship and the cargo, not of harming humans. I am hoping that the Spanish will surrender without resistance."

"I wouldn't count on that," said Rita.

"Then you must know that the First Law requires that I prevent harm to humans."

"Changing history could harm them," said Rita. "Though I'm not sure this little isolated voyage is going to change much of anything."

"I am not certain what I will have to do," said MC 2. "I cannot forcibly stop two entire crews of humans from fighting each other."

"If your interpretation of the First Law will allow it, I instruct you to prioritize protecting Roland and me. Will that be acceptable?"

"I believe so," said MC 2.

All that day, Wayne sat on a keg by the rail of the Old Laughing Lady, watching the two ships sailing in front of it. One was the Hungry Hawk, of course; he couldn't read the name of its prey, but he was very relieved it was there. He had been gambling when he had told Captain Tomann that Captain Quinn knew of a merchant ship. Now he had been vindicated.

Late in the afternoon, the Hungry Hawk closed in on one side of the merchant ship just as the Old Laughing Lady drew near on the other side. Both ships fired their cannon. Huge splinters of wood flew into the air from the sides of the quarry. Gaping holes through the sails of their prey revealed blue sky beyond them. The merchant ship fired back, but it had few cannons and poor aim; plumes of spray rose where its cannonballs struck the water.

By that time, of course, all three crews were armed and anxious. Captain Tomann was striding up and down the deck shouting threats at the Spaniards, waving his cutlass angrily. Most of his crew had massed on one side. The front line eagerly waited with grappling hooks on ropes as the helmsman steered the ship into position alongside the Cadiz. The rest were armed with boarding pikes, cutlasses, rapiers, and flintlock pistols or muskets.

Wayne stayed where he was as the shouting buccaneers on each pirate ship grappled with the Spanish ship only moments apart. Shouts roared on all sides as the buccaneer crews leaped onto the merchant ship, waving their weapons.

The snapping of muskets and pistols threw puffs of smoke into the air. As some men screamed and fell into the water, Wayne gripped the rail, searching the crew of the Hungry Hawk for MC 2.

The Spanish crew, outnumbered and surrounded by buccaneers, did not put up much of a fight. They were quickly disarmed and hustled to one side, under guard. In only moments, however, the two buccaneer crews were facing off, yelling at each other and threatening to fight.

Amidships, Captain Tomann was bellowing at Captain Quinn, slashing at the air with his cutlass. Captain Quinn, holding his own bloody cutlass, was shouting back at him. Their men were not preparing to fight behind them, however; they were too busy looting the ship and getting into individual fights.

Finally, through the confusion aboard the Cadiz, Wayne saw MC 2 on the far side, still on the Hungry Hawk. He was standing protectively near a young buccaneer; they had apparently not left the Hungry Hawk to join the fight at all. Wayne leaped up and ran to the nearest spot along the rail where he could climb across to the Cadiz.

From the R. Hunter Files

The now-famous prototype of the highly successful "Hunter" class robot first demonstrated his remarkable abilities in the Mojave Center Governor case. The following images are drawn from the Robot City archives of Derec Avery, the eminent robotics historian.

R. Hunter in the Process of Bifurcation. R. Hunter's specialized skills include the ability to alter his shape and size to adjust to different environments or cultures.

Completed Bifurcation. Here R. Hunter has completed his facial changes and now resembles a Caribbean freebooter.

Hunter Sensenet Configuration. Underneath R. Hunter's synthetic skin is an advanced sensory network which augments his tracking and survival abilities. In emergencies, R. Hunter can dramatically increase his sensory input, although it drains his power supply rapidly.

Dr. Nystrom Negotiates with Roland. By recruiting a local buccaneer to aid in his attempt to steal the robot R. Hunter was tracking, Wayne Nystrom risks changing history—potentially wiping out millions of lives.

Bargaining for a Boat. Part of the unique value of the "Hunter" class robots is their ability to quickly and easily immerse themselves into human societies. Here, R. Hunter bargains for a boat in the local manner.

R. Hunter Shifts his Appearance. "Hunter" class robots are able to alter their appearance at will, within certain limitations. The largest limitation is mass: no matter how much the robot metamorphosizes, he always maintains the same body volume.

R. Hunter on his Way to Rescue Rita. Powered by solar cells integrated into the fabric of his skin, Hunter is capable of remarkable feats of strength and endurance—such as climbing the slippery side of a seventeenth century warship.

R. Hunter in a Barroom Brawl. The trip to the violent seventeenth century Caribbean presents particular problems. Despite his enormous strength, tracking abilities, and predatory name, R. Hunter—like all robots—is unable to harm human beings or allow them to come to harm.

R. Hunter Builds Jamaica Jane. Robots of R. Hunter's class possess not only extraordinary strength, but extraordinary knowledge. Their memory banks hold more information than most libraries. Here, R. Hunter draws on that information to build a boat fast enough to catch a buccaneer fleet.

Rita and Dr. Nystrom Aboard the Old Laughing Lady. Dr. Wayne Nystrom, though a brilliant robotics designer, was a dangerously unstable man. Here he resorts to kidnapping to try to thwart R. Hunter and his team on their mission.

The Fight at the Beach. When a buccaneer takes Rita hostage, R. Hunter is caught between his need to complete his mission, his need to preserve human life, and his inability to injure humans. Moral complexities have always been a stumbling point for robots, and R. Hunter is no exception.

Beyond the Hunter Class Robots. Following the success of "Hunter" class robots, "Seeker" robots were invented. "Seeker" class robots (example shown above) have all the features of "Hunter" class robots in a body roughly two-thirds as large. There are numerous small improvements: their eyes see farther into the infra-red spectrum, and their hands and feet feature an extra-sensitive sensor array for minute detail work. They are also fully functional in the vacuum of space.

12

Wayne picked his way quickly through the debris and knots of arguing, yelling, whooping buccaneers on the Cadiz. As quickly as he could, he dodged a couple of sword fights and one wrestling match to reach the other side. As he drew closer to MC 2 and the buccaneer with him at the rail of the adjoining ship, he reached inside his shirt for the control device that would carry him and anyone within a meter or so back to his own time. He would have to get MC 2 away from the others for just a moment.

"You!" Wayne pointed at MC 2 as he shouted, still running forward toward the rail of the Cadiz. "Come over here! To this ship! Under the Second Law, do what I say!"

"Don't move!" The buccaneer next to MC 2 grabbed his arm and held him.

"Remember your priority."

Wayne realized from the voice, suddenly, that the buccaneer was a woman. "MC 2, I'm Wayne Nystrom, your creator." He could see indecision in the robot's face.

"Roland! Help!" The woman waved her arms frantically, looking behind Wayne. Just as Wayne whirled around, Roland swung toward him on a rope dangling from the rigging overhead. His booted feet struck Wayne on the chest with a painful thud and threw him backward onto the deck, hard. With the wind knocked out of

him, but otherwise not hurt, Wayne lay motionless, gasping for breath. He waited helplessly, half-expecting the buccaneer to finish him off, but instead Roland leaped back aboard the Hungry Hawk. On the Cadiz, the buccaneers continued to loot and celebrate.

As the little Jamaica Jane whipped across the waves toward the three ships grappled together in the distance, Hunter could hear the sounds of men fighting hand to hand. He sat up straight, magnifying his vision to the maximum. However, he could not see any details that his hearing had not already identified.

"What is it?" Jane also peered at the distant ships, but of course he knew she could see even less. "What's wrong?"

"The fighting has begun," said Hunter. "I am worried that MC 2 will interfere with the fight and change the course of history. His presence and perhaps Rita's could alter the behavior of the buccaneers."

"We knew a fight was coming," said Steve. "Weren't you ready for this?"

"I anticipated it, of course."

"Listen, Hunter," said Jane. "Are we proceeding as quickly as possible?"

"Yes. I have the tack and the tiller at the optimum angles for speed under current conditions." He quickly reappraised the direction of the wind to double-check.

"Then you are doing everything the Laws of Robotics require at the moment. Acknowledge your agreement."

"Acknowledged."

"And if you experience indecision or if you shut down, Steve and I will suffer even greater harm. Right?"

"Right." Somewhat reassured, Hunter turned his attention back to the three ships ahead.

Twilight was falling by the time the Jamaica Jane drew near the three ships. Even Steve could hear the singing and shouting of a drunken celebration. The ships were still grappled together, swaying on the open sea, with their sails furled. None of the buccaneers noticed the small craft as Hunter sailed up to the stern of the Cadiz.

"What do you want to do?" Steve turned to Hunter.

"I must climb up to take a look at the crowd," said Hunter. "However, I dare not leave you two alone in this little sailboat, so you must come with me." Steve looked up at the steep sides of the big ships. "We have to climb up there?"

"Not exactly. I will tie us to the hull of the Cadiz and climb up myself with one of our ropes. Before I go, I will tie a fixed loop in this end to fit around you. Then I will lift you up when I have reached a safe place."

"Okay," said Steve.

Hunter tied the boat by the bowline and unfastened the longest rope from the rigging. He tied a fixed loop and gave it to Steve, taking the other end with him as he climbed up the hull of the Spanish ship. Below him, Steve and Jane watched anxiously, as the ship swayed over the waves.

The hull of the Cadiz was damp and slick with slime on the lower levels. Still, Hunter's precise analysis of the surface and his immensely strong fingers and toes allowed him to make maximum use of whatever slight holds he could find. Patiently, he rose little by little until he reached the windows of the captain's chamber. All of them were open.

Steve didn't think that Hunter could move his large body into any of them, but he was wrong. As he watched, he remembered that Hunter had the ability to alter his dimensions if he wanted. Now, Hunter used that ability to narrow his shoulders just enough to ease through one of the open windows.

He worked his way through headfirst, squirming. At last his legs slithered

inside. He disappeared for a moment, then leaned his upper body back outside with his end of the rope tied around his torso.

Hunter pointed to Jane. Steve nodded, understanding that Hunter did not want to risk shouting from up there for fear of attracting attention. He helped slide the fixed loop under Jane's arms.

"It'll be uncomfortable," said Steve. "Hang onto the rope with your hands and brace your feet against the hull so you don't swing against it too hard."

"Got it," said Jane.

Steve waved to Hunter, who began pulling her up. He watched, tense, as she swayed above him. The ships were still tossing on the waves, and she began to swing back and forth, though she did keep her feet out in front of her to kick away from the hull when necessary. Her long skirt swirled in the wind. Finally, Hunter had her at the window and he reached out to pull her in safely.

A moment later, Hunter tossed the loop back down to Steve, who fitted it under his arms and waved. Then the rope grew taut and he was lifted off his feet. He, too, kept his feet against the hull so he wouldn't slam against it with his body, but otherwise he was completely helpless. The wind almost spun him around once, and he didn't dare look down to see how far above the water he was. He was dizzy and losing his bearings by the time he felt Hunter's strong hands grasp him under the arms and pull him inside the ship.

"It's hot in here," said Steve quietly, dizzily collapsing into a chair.

"That must be why no one is here," said Hunter. "Everyone is on deck, out in the breeze." He coiled the rope neatly and laid it down. "I have been listening carefully to the voices. The buccaneers are all up on deck and I think they have had enough rum to cloud their judgment."

"What about it?" Steve asked.

"The Spanish crew is imprisoned in the hold where the cargo used to be. I am going to find some men's clothing for Jane. Then we will sneak up on deck and look around. Except for some lamps, it will be dark up there. If we are fortunate, everyone up there will assume we belong to the other ship's crew." Steve nodded, relieved that he would have a moment to get over his dizziness. Jane was clinging to a corner of a table, looking dizzy herself. The captain's quarters had been looted, leaving clothing, charts, and bedcovers scattered on the floor. Hunter quickly and quietly searched for clothing that would suit Jane. After a few moments, he tossed Jane some knee breeches, a loose, baggy linen shirt, and a vest.

Steve turned his back while Jane changed. When she had finished, Hunter gave her a large, red and white scarf. She tied it over her hair, in the style many of the buccaneers used. The clothing was loose and baggy on her.

"Well?" She looked back and forth between them.

"You're too pretty to fool anybody," said Steve. "But it's dark up there."

"Well, I'll hide behind you two."

"Good," said Hunter. "I will lead the way. Only whisper after we leave this chamber. And only if necessary."

Steve nodded and got to his feet.

"This time, Jane goes last," Hunter added. He opened the door to the darkened passageway and stepped outside.

Steve followed him, glancing back over his shoulder repeatedly to make sure Jane was close behind. Hunter opened an outer door and the three of them moved up a steep staircase to the deck. Drunken buccaneers were singing in groups, or stumbling around laughing and joking; wooden chests had been brought up from below and broken open to reveal gold coin, silver coin, furs, and rolls of tobacco. Many of the pirates were already asleep on deck with their tankards still in their hands.

Hunter stepped up on deck and moved quietly to his right, into an empty corner. Steve followed him and saw that Jane came right behind them. Hunter

pointed upward, to some voices he had apparently been tracking. Now even Steve and Jane could hear two men talking on the level above them. Steve supposed it was another deck. Hunter signaled for silence. All three remained motionless on the creaking, swaying ship.

"You got out here in short order, Tomann," said one man. "Not that I begrudge your coming. We've made a good haul here for every man."

"Aye, Quinn. And once we agreed on an even split, the men stored most of it on our own ships quick enough. Come morning, they'll clean up what's left on deck here."

"You know," said Captain Quinn. "One of my men asked a Spaniard why their ship was all alone so near Jamaica."

"Had to scare the truth out of him, I dare say."

"Aye, well, the answer has possibilities."

"Eh?"

"The Cadiz wasn't alone. She was in a convoy protected by a Spanish warship, but a storm separated them a few days ago."

"I say! That means some other fat chickens are nearby without a protector, just waiting for the likes of us."

"But if we go on searching, then we'll have to decide what to do with the Cadiz," said Captain Quinn. "We know she should bring a fine price from someone should we take her back to Port Royal with us."

"Aye." Captain Tomann sighed. "Better to take home the prize we have first, as we've already agreed. A skeleton crew will be enough to take the Cadiz on the short trip home."

"Well spoken, Tomann. I guess we both know that our buccaneer friends all know each other."

"Aye, and their loyalty is to hard gold, not to you or me." Tomann laughed harshly. "So long as we lead them to fat prizes, they'll let us have the captain's double share and take our orders grudgingly enough. But take them on one dry voyage, and they'll slit our throats as fast as any pigeon's."

"Well, we've kept our heads one more day, Tomann." Captain Quinn laughed, too, and clanked tankards with his companion. Then their footsteps clunked on the wooden boards as they strolled away.

Steve nudged Hunter. "You sail back on the Hungry Hawk," he whispered. "Jane and I will join the skeleton crew on the Cadiz. That way, we'll have someone on two out of the three ships to watch for MC 2."

"I cannot allow this," Hunter said firmly. "The increased danger to you is too great."

"Listen, Hunter," Jane whispered urgently. "You have to shift your First Law priorities. At this point, the danger of losing MC 2 completely is greater than ever. Steve and I can stick together and help each other. On the Cadiz, all the other crew members will think we came from the other ship."

"That's right," said Steve. "Besides, one of the reasons you hired me is that I'm used to improvising. This is the kind of situation you hired me to handle."

"We can function most safely as a team," said Hunter. "That was also my plan."

"Hunter, listen carefully," said Jane. "What I mean is, you may have to prioritize your First Law imperatives. Steve and I may have to be sacrificed in order to maintain the future as it should be for everyone else."

"Allow two humans to come to harm in order to save millions," Steve added.

"Respond, Hunter," said Jane.

"That should not be necessary," said Hunter.

"Look, we aren't giving up," said Steve. "We fully expect to rejoin you later. But we agree that the risk of splitting up to find MC 2 is worth it."

Hunter was silent for a moment, an unusually long time for a robot. Then he nodded. "All right."

"I want to leave you with one more thought while you're on your own," said

Jane. "Your independent action is crucial to pursuing this First Law problem about the future. Do not allow instructions from other humans under the Second Law to distract you from your larger task, as you allowed Wayne Nystrom to do on our last mission."

"Understood," said Hunter. "Now before we split up, I want to find you two a safe place to sleep for the night on the Cadiz. Then I will move to the Hungry Hawk. If anyone asks why I am on the wrong ship, I will tell them I had too much rum tonight and got mixed up."

Steve grinned. "You're playacting better all the time."

As the night deepened, Wayne remained alone and awake on the Old Laughing Lady. Gradually, the celebration on board the Cadiz wound down and most of the crew of the Old Laughing Lady returned, except for those who would help sail the Cadiz home. He was not sure what to do next. Ordinarily, he would simply pursue MC 2 directly, but he was afraid of Roland.

After some reflection, he had guessed that the woman buccaneer might be Rita, the woman Roland had mentioned as part of Hunter's team. For now, he decided to bide his time and wait for another opportunity to approach MC 2 alone somehow. He was certainly not going to risk another fight with Roland.

Captain Tomann stumbled back aboard last of all, his cutlass in its scabbard again. Now he carried an empty tankard in one hand, idling knocking it against doorknobs, brass handles, and other items as he passed them. Wayne suddenly realized that he could use a buccaneer ally, someone to counter Roland. He hurried after the pirate captain.

"That's quite a haul," he called out.

"Eh? Oh, aye, it is." Captain Tomann nodded, looking at him sleepily. "Still awake, are you?"

"Yes. I mean, aye. Wide-awake. Shall we visit, Captain? Maybe we can get better acquainted."

"I'm awake, myself." Captain Tomann looked into his empty tankard. "Well, then. Come along to my quarters. I have a private cupboard of rum for just such an emergency."

Steve and Jane huddled out of the wind on the deck of the Cadiz. Hunter had already moved to the Hungry Hawk, telling them that he would scuttle the Jamaica Jane before daylight so no one on board the larger ships would see it. "We're on a real adventure now," said Steve. "Alone together on a ship full of pirates."

"You don't need to remind me," Jane muttered.

"Hey, what's wrong? I thought you agreed this was a good idea."

"It is. But I'm not used to being away from robots and their dedication to the First Law. I work in an office and a lab, in a society where robots are common and none of them can allow harm to humans if they can prevent it."

"I know I can't fight like Hunter could," said Steve. "But I think we can avoid a fight. These pirates will just want to go home with their loot now, I think."

"Yeah." Jane nodded. "I guess you're right."

They slept out on the open deck with most of the buccaneers, under the peaceful Caribbean sky.

13

The next morning, Steve and Jane awoke as the buccaneers on board threw off all the grappling hooks and set sail on all three ships for Port Royal. Since the weather was clear with a stiff breeze, the work was simple. Steve looked for tasks that were obvious, where he could help others without revealing his ignorance of sailing. He joined another buccaneer rolling a fresh keg of drinking water across the deck and pried open a crate of salted fish. Jane

stayed with him and tossed hard biscuits to hungry buccaneers. Once the ships were under sail, breakfast on the Cadiz also included some kind of gruel from a large pot. Steve and Jane learned as they ate that the ship was now captained by a buccaneer named Jacques Duveau. The eastern coast of Jamaica came into sight by midday, though of course they would have to sail around the southeastern corner of the island to reach Port Royal on the southern coast.

Steve and Jane moved toward the bow, away from the others, when they could. They didn't want any of the buccaneers getting a good look at Jane in their free moments. So far, however, all had gone well except that they had seen no sign of MC 2, Rita, or Roland on board.

"We gambled wrong," Steve said finally. "Rita, Roland, and MC 2 are on one of the other ships."

"Maybe Hunter lucked out," said Jane. "I don't doubt that he can find them, but I wonder what he'll do. I don't think he'll take MC 2 back home without us."

"Good."

"But as a robot, he can't use the Second Law to order MC 2 to cooperate. I don't know if he'll be able to hold onto him forcibly or not."

"At least if he gets MC 2 into custody, that will be a start. We can all join up in Port Royal."

"Yes, that shouldn't be long. I hope indecision doesn't hit him too hard. If he's paralyzed by indecision because he feels he isn't following the Laws of Robotics, we'll have a bigger problem than ever."

"He seemed okay last night, didn't he?"

"I think so, or I wouldn't have agreed to split up." Jane shrugged. "But he still has doubts about his competence. I hope he'll be okay without me to help him interpret the Laws in a constructive way."

"Ahoy! Ship ahoy!"

Steve looked up. The man in the crow's nest, up on the highest mast, was waving and shouting to the crew below. Everyone on the ship looked up at him. Captain Jacques Duveau, a tall, lanky man with a black beard, looked out to sea, then yelled back up to the lookout. "What flag?"

"No flag. Can't see the make of her yet."

Steve could see that everyone was excited and curious, wanting to know what nationality and type of ship they had found. He suspected they would flee from a Spanish warship, which would have them outgunned. So far, he couldn't see the other ship at all.

For some time, the crew waited anxiously to learn what ship lay ahead.

Finally, the lookout turned to call again. "Spanish, by the look of her!"

Another merchant, Captain, and riding low in the water!"

Cheers rose up from the crew. Captain Duveau jumped up on a rolled sail lying on the deck. Steve grinned, anticipating what he would say.

"All right, men! What say you? Shall we pluck this fat bird or not?"

Another roar of cheers sounded. The crew raced around, preparing for another attack when they drew close enough. In a moment, Captain Duveau had raised the captured Spanish flag. They wanted to lull their prey into believing the original Spanish crew was still in control.

"It must be another ship from the same convoy as the Cadiz," Steve said quietly, leaning on the rail. "I guess it was blown off course here in the storm that separated all the ships in that convoy."

"Can they take it? With only a skeleton crew on board?" Jane stood next to him, the breeze tossing her hair.

"Sure. With the Spanish flag flying, they can probably come right up alongside."

"We'd be better off just getting back to Port Royal," Jane said doubtfully.

At the same time, Hunter was on board the Hungry Hawk. Early that morning, he

had finally seen MC 2, Rita, and Roland. He had also realized that the First Law would not allow him to return Rita and MC 2 home and leave Steve and Jane on board the Cadiz. If Rita saw him, however, she might flee again and take MC 2 with her.

For the first time, Hunter had used his ability to alter his appearance. Since he had only the clothes he was already wearing, he did not significantly change his height or his build. However, he altered the blond, blue-eyed, square-jawed appearance he had been given at manufacture. Now he assumed brown hair, a deeply tanned look as though he had spent years in the Caribbean, and a short, brown beard. Most important, he narrowed and lengthened his face. Since making that change, Hunter had spent all day moving among the crew, sharing in breakfast and helping with the rigging when he saw a need. He stayed relatively close to Rita and MC 2 when he could, always appearing to ignore them while eavesdropping with his enhanced robotic hearing. For the moment, he only planned to remain nearby and look for an opportunity to make a move.

The Hungry Hawk was just a short distance behind the Cadiz. When the lookout on the Cadiz reported another target, Hunter was the only one aboard the Hungry Hawk who could hear him. Within moments, however, the lookout on the Hungry Hawk made the same report. Captain Quinn and his crew enthusiastically chose to join the attack on the new Spanish ship.

Hunter understood immediately that he would have to find a way to witness the fight without interfering. Finally he decided to stay close to MC 2 and Rita. He could make protecting them a priority and leave the buccaneers to do whatever they must.

Rita watched with rising excitement as the sea chase continued. MC 2 stood on one side of her. Roland joined them, smiling broadly.

"Ah, sweet lady. We shall have easy picking this day. Do you see what is happening?"

"Well, we're chasing another ship," said Rita. "Is that what you mean?"

"Nothing so simple. You see, as the Cadiz sails toward her sister ship, the one in front assumes we two buccaneers are still chasing the Cadiz. At first, the new ship just wanted to flee. But now, as we draw closer, it appears that the Cadiz cannot possibly escape."

"What does that mean?"

"If you look closely, you can see that they have altered their tack."

"What for?"

"I believe they have some misguided notion about helping. Even these Spanish merchants mount a few cannon on board. Most of them don't have the courage of that captain, though—or his recklessness."

"He doesn't realize that three buccaneer ships are after him, then."

"No, he doesn't." Roland grinned and gave her a wink. "Not yet."

Still at the rail, Steve and Jane watched anxiously as the Cadiz finally drew close to the Sidonia, the Spanish ship just ahead. The buccaneers were still flying the Spanish flag. Many of them were hiding up in the rigging, while others lay flat on deck, all trying to stay out of sight.

The Hungry Hawk and the Old Laughing Lady were both bearing down hard, as well. Always faster than the merchant ships, they had caught up during the course of the day. The buccaneers had already taken their places, holding their weapons ready for the attack.

Steve took a couple of belaying pins from their holes in the rail. Thick and heavy, they were not holding ropes at the moment. He handed one to Jane.

"We should stay right here," he said. "If anyone gives you trouble, hit him with that. And don't be shy about it. These guys are tough."

"All right," said Jane, looking at it doubtfully. "I never had one of these in my office job. I wanted one occasionally, but I never had one." She smiled

weakly.

"If we're lucky, in the confusion nobody will notice that we aren't really participating."

The Cadiz had drawn close to the Sidonia. At the same time, the Sidonia was coming about to fire its few cannon broadside at the two ships to the rear. Suddenly Captain Duveau pointed to the man at his helm.

"Bring us around!" Captain Duveau shouted. "Fire at will!"

The buccaneer at the helm spun the wheel and held it hard. The Cadiz changed direction to match the tack of the Sidonia and slowly came up alongside it. As the first cannons came into position, the individual crews began to fire.

Cries of shock and alarm rose from the Sidonia, as its crew suddenly realized that they had been fooled. Before their ship could change direction, however, the buccaneers were flinging grappling hooks over the side of their ship. When the hooks had caught, the buccaneers on deck threw gangplanks forward between the ships and began to run across them. At the same time, the buccaneers hiding in the rigging began to swing across to the other ship on ropes.

Steve crouched, putting a hand on Jane's shoulder to bring her down too. The rail protected them on one side and a couple of barrels were in front of them. On the far side of the Sidonia, the Hungry Hawk was coming into position to grapple it. The Old Laughing Lady was coming up last, toward the Sidonia's stern.

Steve and Jane remained where they were. The crew of the Sidonia were outnumbered, of course, but they had fight in them. This was not going to be over quickly.

Suddenly a tall, brawny, laughing buccaneer now on the Sidonia leaped up on the gangplank near Steve and Jane.

"Ahoy! Stop your cowerin' there, you two! Come out and fight with the rest of us!" He laughed and whacked Jane on the back of her head with the flat of his cutlass.

"Hey!" Steve stood up, holding his belaying pin ready for a fight.

"I'm on your side, remember?" The big buccaneer laughed. "Come and join old Ned, now. Come on!" He stood over them, clearly not intending to go without them.

"All right." Steve climbed up on the gangplank with him. "Let's go."

"You, too," said Ned, grinning down at Jane. "Hurry it up there!"

Jane got up on the gangplank behind Steve. He hurried across and jumped down to the deck, then turned to wait for Jane. She hopped down next to him, still holding her belaying pin, and shrugged.

"Go get 'em!" Ned leaped down to the deck with a thump and ran toward a couple of brawling sailors and buccaneers. He had apparently lost interest in Steve and Jane.

Steve glanced around. "Let's just stay here as long as we can. It should be over soon."

"It's okay with me," said Jane.

With growing anxiety, Hunter had been watching the coming fight from the deck of the Hungry Hawk. He was successfully resisting his First Law imperative to stop the entire attack. His enhanced vision and hearing gave him a comprehensive picture of events on all sides.

Suddenly Hunter heard Steve's voice in the crowd. He quickly tracked his location and saw a large buccaneer herding Steve and Jane over the gangplank to the Sidonia. Instantly, the First Law took over his thinking.

Hunter glanced upward for the fastest route not only to the Sidonia, but to its far side. He spotted a long rope that was not in current use; it was fastened high on one mast. Then he picked out a climbing sequence to reach it. Almost as fast as he saw where to go, he began to shinny up a mast.

As the buccaneers shouted and fired their flintlocks on board the Sidonia,

Hunter reached a spot on the mast about nine meters above the deck. Then he reached up to grasp a hanging net. On it, he climbed another seven meters to where he could grab the dangling end of the long rope. He tied the rope loosely to one wrist to keep his hands free and moved up to a yardarm. There, at last, he checked the knot on the high end of the rope. It was tight and would hold his weight. Next, Hunter untied the loose end from his wrist. All the ships were far below him on the tossing sea. He took a careful look at the rigging of the Sidonia, to pick his destination. Then, taking a firm hold on the rope, he jumped, swinging hard. Using his robotic calculations of the physics involved, he released the rope at the top of his swing. He sailed through the air high above the decks but quickly grabbed a rope on the Sidonia. Once his hold was secure, he quickly climbed hand under hand down the rope to the deck. Hunter found himself in the middle of a wild melee, fought with pistols, belaying pins, boarding pikes, and swords. He looked around quickly and found Steve and Jane standing in a corner, avoiding the worst of the action. Even as he saw them, however, a determined Spanish sailor snatched up a fallen cutlass and swung it at Steve. Grimacing, Steve blocked it with a belaying pin, and the blade glanced off the scarred, hard wood. He had a determined but desperate look on his face. The sailor advanced on him again. Hunter frantically worked his way through the crowd toward them. A Spanish sailor jumped in front of him, brandishing a rapier. Hunter, bare-handed, waited for him to make the first move. As soon as the sailor began a feint, Hunter judged his motion and anticipated the sailor's complete motion and weight shift. Too fast for a human to match, Hunter leaned slightly to his right and grabbed the man's wrist in one firm hand. With his other hand, he took hold of the sword by its hilt and flung it away to clatter on deck. Then he pushed the sailor down flat on his back and hurried past him. Instantly, another Spanish sailor leaped on him, grabbing his shoulders. The human was much smaller than Hunter, but his angle and momentum pulled Hunter around. Hunter regained his balance, shoving the man away. When the man swung a fist at his head, he only ducked, then lifted the sailor under his arms and tossed him onto a rolled sail lying on the deck. Ahead of Hunter in the crowd, Steve now held his belaying pin in both hands. He swung it wildly, each time blocking a sword stroke from the Spanish sailor's cutlass. The impact of each blow forced him back another step; chunks of wood had been chopped out of his dwindling weapon. Jane was shuffling behind him uncertainly, also holding a belaying pin but not sure what to do. Hunter had to stop abruptly. Two men, wrestling with each other, fell to the deck in front of him and rolled. He stepped over them and ran toward Steve and Jane. As the sailor swung his cutlass back and forth at Steve, Hunter judged the arc of his swing, intending to wrench the cutlass from his hand as soon as it came within reach. Suddenly Jane stepped out from behind Steve. While Hunter was concentrating his attention on the sailor fighting Steve, Jane raised her belaying pin. She swung high, clubbing Hunter over the head hard enough to snap the wooden belaying pin in half with a loud crack.

14

Hunter was not physically damaged, but the shock profoundly upset him. Confused, he dared not fight any more for fear of making a serious error. He collapsed into a sitting position on deck, staring at Jane, mystified. Even on the original mission to find MC 1, back in the age of dinosaurs, Hunter had suffered from various doubts about his ability to follow the First

Law successfully. After being hit, he worried that these doubts had impaired his judgment. Burdened by additional doubts, he slowed down all his processes and lay back on the deck, motionless. He was certain that he must have done something seriously wrong for Jane to have struck him over the head like that. Steve was frantically blocking the sword blows of the sailor in front of him with his belaying pin. To one side, he had seen a tall, bearded buccaneer run up and reach forward. The stranger was huge, and Steve had hoped for a moment that Hunter would show up at the last second to stop him. Instead, Jane had stepped out from behind Steve and clobbered the big buccaneer. The sailor who was fighting Steve had been distracted for just a moment. Steve swung his belaying pin down on the sailor's head with a clunk. The sailor collapsed onto the deck.

"Traitor! Traitor!" A man's voice shouted at them from the crowd.

Steve looked around. It was Ned, the buccaneer who had chased them from the Cadiz across to the Sidonia a few minutes ago. He was almost as tall as the stranger Jane had just clubbed, though not as brawny.

In an instant, Steve understood. Ned had seen the two of them hanging back from the fight, and now he had seen Jane hit one of the buccaneers from behind. He had concluded that they were perpetrating some sort of betrayal, probably to take more than their share of loot.

"Oh, no," said Jane, looking down at her fallen opponent. "He's dressed like a pirate, isn't he? I thought he was charging at us."

"Look out!" Steve saw that Ned was running toward them angrily. He stooped down to pick up the cutlass the Spanish sailor had dropped.

Ned swung his cutlass at Jane's head. She ducked under it and Steve slashed at Ned with his cutlass. Ned blocked it easily and Steve was forced backward by the force of the collision.

"Jane, run!" Steve yelled. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw her slip away. At the same time, he was still blocking Ned's sword strokes, slowly backing away.

Steve was scared, and felt trapped; he couldn't possibly win a sword fight with an experienced buccaneer, especially one with a big advantage in height and reach. Still, he also felt exhilarated. He could hardly believe he was fighting a real pirate on a Spanish ship in the Caribbean.

Steve was inexorably driven back against the rail. Ned swung with hard, regular sword strokes, glaring at Steve angrily. Steve knew he couldn't fight his way out of the confined space. Finally, desperate, he jumped up on the rail itself.

"Ha!" Ned laughed and moved forward.

Steve threw his sword at Ned, turned, and jumped feet first into the sea far below.

The blue waves came up fast, and he hit the water hard, plunging deep below the surface. He kicked and stroked to break his descent and finally began to swim upward. It seemed like a longer way up than he had expected, and he held his breath desperately. Finally, he broke through the surface of the salt water, gasping.

"Steve!" Jane was shouting and waving anxiously. She stood at the rail far above him, but well away from the place where he had left Ned.

From his present position, Steve could only see the steep side of the hull, the rail, and the rigging stretching high above the deck. Jane was the only person close enough to the rail for him to see. He waved to reassure her, but he realized that he had no way to get back on board.

Then, as he watched, Jane ran to a hanging dinghy swaying horizontally over the edge of the ship. It was suspended from wooden arms by rope. She fumbled with a knotted rope for a moment, then jumped back as the rope came free. The heavy dinghy fell all the way to the water with a tremendous splash.

Steve struck out for the boat, swimming clumsily in his clothes, but he kept

his head above water so that he could see. Ahead of him, Jane took a deep breath and jumped feet-first into the water near the boat. When she surfaced, she swam to the boat and pulled herself up and over the edge.

As Steve neared the boat, Jane extended an oar for him to grab. He took it with relief, finding that he was exhausted from the effort of fighting and swimming. After pulling himself hand over hand along the oar, he grabbed the edge of the boat and rolled over the edge to fall inside.

"You okay?" Jane took his hand and helped pull him up into a sitting position.

"Yeah." Steve looked up toward the deck of the ship. He couldn't see much from the dinghy, but the sounds of the fight were continuing. "Anybody notice?"

"If they did, they didn't care. Besides, as soon as we went over the rail, we were out of sight." She looked at him. "Now what?"

"Well..." Steve pointed to the green coast of Jamaica. "I think we'd better row for shore. It's not too far. And I think the current will help us."

"Okay."

They sat next to each other on the center bench, each taking an oar. At first they had trouble coordinating their strokes, and the dinghy banged against the side of the ship several times. Finally they got into a steady rhythm and slowly began to move toward the shore.

Rita stayed with MC 2 at the rail of the Hungry Hawk as it approached the Sidonia from the side opposite the Cadiz. Roland had joined the buccaneer attack while Rita and MC 2 watched from safety. MC 2, however, was becoming more agitated as he watched.

"Don't interfere," said Rita. "These buccaneers belong to this time. Take care of me, and of Roland if you can."

"You are safe here," said MC 2.

Rita strained to follow Roland's movements as he darted about on the Sidonia. Sails, masts, and the crowd of fighting men all obscured her vision. MC 2 watched intently, however, with his robotic concentration. Suddenly he jumped on the rail and ran across the gangplank.

"Hey, wait! MC 2! Stop!" Rita shouted in surprise. When the robot ignored her instructions, she realized that the First Law was requiring MC 2 to act. She watched him as long as she could, but soon he, too, was lost in the crowd on board the other ship.

Even on the sidelines, Rita was thrilled. Nothing could match seeing the history she had studied for so long being made right in front of her. The clanging of the swords and occasional bang of flintlock pistols scared her a little, but she reminded herself that this was the buccaneer life-style.

Wayne was standing by the helm of the Old Laughing Lady with Captain Tomann, watching the other two ships attack their prey up ahead. They were drawing very close now. The previous night, Wayne had begun to make friends with the short-tempered buccaneer captain. He had not yet sought his help. First he had wanted to establish some rapport.

He had also known that he would have to tell Captain Tomann some kind of phony story. Thinking of one had taken a little time. Now, however, he decided the time to approach the captain had arrived.

"Captain," said Wayne. "I have another business proposition for you."

"Eh? Now? What would that be?"

"It appears to me that we are arriving a little late this time. That is, we might not get a full share of the booty. Don't you agree?"

Captain Tomann glowered, resting one hand on his sword hilt. "If we board before the fighting ends, we'll take our share in any way we must."

"Of course. But, uh..." Wayne glanced around suspiciously and motioned for the captain to step away from the man at the helm. "Maybe you and I can make a special profit from all this, if you're willing."

"Well, now. What's all this, then?"

"A short, slender man is on board the Hungry Hawk. I want him."

"To kill him?"

"No, no. As my prisoner."

"What's in it for me, then?"

"Ransom," said Wayne.

"Ransom?" Captain Tomann looked at him sharply, truly interested for the first time.

"You and I can split it evenly. No need to inform anyone else, though, is there?"

"Who is he?"

"His name is MC 2, but don't say it aloud. Someone else might overhear and figure out who he is."

"Goes by his initials, eh? So that's his name—but who is he, that someone's going to pay ransom to get him back?"

"The younger son of a colonial, up on the mainland."

"A rich man's son, is he? Who's his father?"

"No, no. If I tell you everything, then you don't need me anymore."

Captain Tomann grinned at him, showing broken teeth. "Aye, you're a sharper fellow than you look. Well, then, how much ransom can we get for this fellow?"

Wayne thought quickly. He decided to err on the side of generosity. "What would you say to one full chest of gold coin?"

"I would say, two are better."

"We'll get it."

"Ah! So what's the proposition, exactly?"

"You help me snatch him and hold him. In the meantime, I'll arrange the ransom."

"I think you need me more than I need you. I'll take more than half the share."

"Well..." Wayne shrugged.

"I can find out who his father is when I get my hands on him. But without me, you have no way to catch him and no place to keep him."

"That's right," said Wayne.

Captain Tomann, who had expected an argument, blinked at him in surprise. "You agree?"

"Sure. You take two shares to my one, whatever the ransom turns out to be."

"Why?" Captain Tomann scowled and leaned his wild-eyed face close to Wayne's.

"Why would you give up so much of the ransom so easy?"

"Call it a...grudge," Wayne said quickly.

"Eh?" Captain Tomann cocked his head and grinned slowly. "A grudge, you say."

"That's right," said Wayne, seeing that his companion accepted the explanation. "A personal matter."

"Aye, a personal matter. Now, that I can understand. All right, mate. We have a bargain, then." He pounded Wayne on the back.

"And like I said before, there's no need to tell anyone else, right?"

"Right you are, mate. It wouldn't do for my crew to know I was getting more than my normal captain's share. Now let's find this fellow. We're almost in position." He turned and waved toward the man at the helm. "Hard to port, there! Hard to port!"

The buccaneer at the helm suddenly turned the wheel. He strained to hold it in position. Slowly, the ship began to turn.

The prow of the Old Laughing Lady came up closely on the three grappled ships. Some buccaneers were ready with grappling hooks. Others were hanging in the ropes above them with their weapons. The ship angled carefully toward the free side of the Hungry Hawk, opposite where it was grappled to the Sidonia. When the old Laughing Lady came alongside, the buccaneers grappled the Hungry Hawk.

"Come on, then!" Captain Tomann punched Wayne in the arm and strode forward.

Wayne followed carefully. He was concerned about getting into the fight, but was a little more confident now that he had an ally in the fierce buccaneer captain. Besides, this might be his best chance just to grab MC 2 and go home with him.

Ahead, the buccaneers in the rigging swung forward on ropes to the Sidonia; the others hoisted gangplanks and ran across them.

The Hungry Hawk was nearly empty, since its crew was fighting on the Sidonia. The buccaneers from the Old Laughing Lady made their way across it quickly, anxious to earn their shares of the loot by joining in the taking of the Sidonia. Captain Tomann ran across the gangplank, his cutlass in one hand and his pistol in the other. He jumped down to the deck, looking around.

Wayne climbed up carefully on the gangplank, which shifted back and forth as the two ships under it swayed on the waves. He nearly lost his balance and pitched into the narrow space between the ships. Finally, his heart pounding, he ran across after Captain Tomann and caught up with him.

Captain Tomann pointed to a lone figure with his cutlass. "Who's that little fellow, standing by the rail?"

Wayne recognized Rita and shook his head. "That's not him, but it's a friend of his."

"A friend?"

"A friend who can help us," said Wayne. He decided that MC 2 must have been forced by the First Law to interfere with the fighting. "Well, come on!"

Wayne followed him, worried that Captain Tomann might hurt her. The buccaneer captain ran up behind Rita and grabbed her arm. She jumped and tried to pull away.

"I say, mate!" Captain Tomann still held her, but straightened in surprise as he looked at her carefully. "She's no buccaneer. It's a woman. You know that?"

"Easy," said Wayne to Captain Tomann. "Let's get her back to the ship. I can talk to her there."

"So be it, then."

"I'm Wayne Nystrom. Your name is Rita."

"That's right."

"We need to talk."

She just looked at him, warily.

"Come on."

Wayne and Captain Tomann each took one of her arms and led her back to the Old Laughing Lady. She said nothing, but did not seem particularly scared. Wayne wondered why she was being so cooperative.

Steve strained against the oar in the dinghy. Next to him on the middle bench, Jane was also working hard. As they rowed for the coast of Jamaica, they were facing away from the ships. Swaying on the gentle waves, each ship sent its masts angling high against the blue sky. At such a great distance, the few buccaneers Steve could see on deck were mere specks. None of them had taken any notice of the dinghy.

"It's just as well we're getting away," said Steve, breathlessly.

"What do you mean?"

"We told Hunter we could take care of ourselves with the pirates, but we didn't really do too well. Since we don't know where either one of the robots is, we don't have their protection any more. We'll be safer on dry land again than in the middle of a bunch of pirates during a fight."

"I think we handled ourselves just fine for a couple of people from our time."

"Well, I guess." Steve shrugged. After that, they used their energy only for rowing. Jamaica wasn't too far, but their progress was slow.

Every so often, Steve glanced over his shoulder to make sure they were heading

in the right direction. Finally, after a long time, he realized that they didn't have to keep rowing to reach the shore. He let out a deep breath of relief and shipped his oar.

"We can take a break."

"What? We can?" Gratefully, Jane shipped hers, "too. "Are we there?" She turned around to look.

"Not yet," said Steve. "But the current and the tide have taken us. We couldn't row our way back out now if we wanted to. So we might as well take it easy."

"I know people must have seen us go overboard, but I guess nobody saw us row away."

"No one who cared, anyway," said Steve. He looked back at the big ships. The first two pirate ships were still grappled to their prey. However, the Old Laughing Lady had pushed off again and was under sail, leaving the other ships behind. On its present course, it would pass them some distance away on its trip back to Port Royal.

He turned around on the bench, to face forward toward Jamaica.

"What's our next plan of action?" She turned on the bench also, bumping him with one shoulder.

"It looks like we'll have quite a hike back into Port Royal, so that's going to take up the rest of the day, I think." Steve looked down the coastline as far as he could.

"Are we going to land near the spot where we first appeared, do you think? Along the Cagway?"

"I'm afraid we'll have a much longer walk than that. We're going to land outside the Cagway, which means we'll have to walk the entire length of the peninsula. Or maybe we can get a ride on a farmer's cart or something." He looked up at the sun in the west.

"What's wrong?"

"I doubt we have enough daylight left to reach Port Royal."

"We might have to camp out on the way."

Jane glanced at him. "Camp out? Just...out in the woods?"

"I don't know if we'll have any choice."

She was silent for a moment. "Well, it'll be warm enough. But I guess we should contact Hunter with the transmitters at some point. Since his receiver is internal, it won't matter if buccaneers are with him; they can't hear it."

"Yeah!" Steve grinned. "I forgot about those in all the excitement. But let's wait until we land, so he can home in on a fixed location."

"He won't have a way to reach us here, unless he steals a boat or swims."

"He won't have to," said Steve. "We'll arrange to meet him on the docks."

"Sounds good to me."

They relaxed a little and let the water carry them in toward the shore. Steve finally felt a release of tension. They were about to land safely.

"You know," Steve said. "I feel pretty good, really. I actually survived a sword fight with a real pirate, even if I did have to jump overboard to get away." He laughed. "Not exactly a success, but I'm still here."

"I'd say it was a success," said Jane, smiling at him. "Thank you for stepping up and facing him. I... never went through anything like that before."

"You're very welcome. And thank you for dropping this boat down to rescue me."

"And you're welcome in return."

Steve grinned at her. He wanted to put his arm around her, but he didn't know if that was a good idea or not. After surviving the attack on shipboard, he felt closer to her than ever. Still, he wasn't sure how she would take such an action, and they had to work together for a long time yet. Instead, he just looked ahead to the shore, which was growing closer all the time.

Finally the dinghy ran aground in shallow water. Steve and Jane jumped out into the surf, throwing spray on themselves, and pulled on the bowline.

Steve's feet sank into soft sand and he struggled for traction. The dinghy, freed of their weight, came farther forward. Their clothes, which had finally dried out in the sunlight, became drenched all over again. Then the dinghy got stuck once more.

They waded out of the water, up onto an empty beach. For a moment, neither of them spoke while they caught their breath. By then the sun was low over the water in the west. The breeze was cooler than before.

Steve reached for his communicator. He didn't feel it. Worried, he looked down where it should have been.

"What's wrong?" Jane asked.

"My communicator's gone. It must have come off when I hit the water."

"Uh-oh." Jane checked for hers quickly, then looked up at him. "Mine's gone, too."

"That must be it, then," said Steve. "It's a long jump from the deck of that ship. We hit the water hard."

"Hunter won't have any idea where we are," said Jane.

"He may have seen us in the boat," said Steve. "Otherwise, all we can do is get back to Port Royal and head for the docks. He'll probably get there first."

"Yeah." Jane nodded. "Shall we go? We have a long walk ahead."

Hunter lay motionless on the deck of the Sidonia. Around him, the fighting had finally stopped as the Spanish crew surrendered. Then the combined crews of all three ships examined their new booty. As night fell, they lit torches and celebrated again. Hunter, concerned that any further action he might take would violate the Laws of Robotics in ways he did not comprehend, did not move, though all of his senses were still operating.

Around him, the buccaneers drank more rum, whooped and fired pistols into the air, and staggered around the deck singing.

"Hey, mate," said a drunken buccaneer. He leaned over Hunter, his head and shoulders a dark shadow against the stars in the clear sky above them. "You hurt bad, are ya?"

"No," said Hunter.

"Well, here."

Hunter felt the buccaneer and a couple of his companions lift him under his arms and pull him up into a sitting position against a rolled sail. Then, hoisting tankards of rum, they wandered away. Hunter remained where he was, gazing across the deck to the dark, open sea beyond it.

The three ships were ungrappled again and under sail for Port Royal. The night weather was so good that little work was required. Hunter could see the torches burning on the decks of the other ships in the distance. All three buccaneer crews were celebrating their excellent fortune; even the man at the helm of the Sidonia had a tankard in one hand.

Even in his uncertainty, Hunter was still alert for MC 2 or Rita on board the ship. As usual in the dark, he was using voiceprint, heartbeat, footsteps, and even breathing patterns to identify the humans within in his hearing. These supplemented his infrared vision, which was only useful for detecting people in his line of sight.

Hunter was burdened by a new contradiction, but this time it was self-induced. He felt certain that he had to have made some sort of error that had caused Jane to hit him. It had to be an error of a magnitude he estimated to be very unlikely in a positronic robot, especially a robot of his new and highly specialized design. Until he solved that puzzle, he was afraid to take any action for fear of compounding the error.

He was certain that the error had resulted from the stress he had already felt concerning his efficiency in obeying the First Law. Such stress had always been known to affect robots adversely; it was a side effect of the ultimate

priority of the First Law. Figuring out what his error had been was now a prerequisite to normal action; without his identifying and correcting it, the First Law would not let him risk harm to humans by taking any chance of repeating it.

On the other hand, the fact that he had made an important error at all told him that his thinking was faulty. So he really did not know if he was capable of figuring out what his error was. That contradiction kept him sitting right where the buccaneers had left him.

Other buccaneers staggered past from time to time, taking a look at him. Since he was not visibly injured, they left him alone. Hunter heard one of them comment that he was obviously drunk, and deservedly so.

As Hunter remained almost in a stunned state on the deck, he was also uncertain as to what he should do next even if he could summon the will to do anything. He wanted to get his group in one place again; at the very least, the First Law would be easier to obey if all the humans on his team were with him. However, he was not sure if he was worthy of continuing his mission. The First Law might require that he simply return with the team, leaving MC 2 behind, and advise the Oversight Committee to find a replacement for Hunter. Hunter recounted his various failures to himself. The first had been allowing Dr. Nystrom to escape his custody during the first mission. Wayne had eluded them in the Late Cretaceous Period and also at the Bohung Institute afterward. Then he had hired Rita, whose priorities were clearly not directed toward fulfilling her duties on this mission. Then, of course, he had failed to save Steve and Jane in their fight on deck. All along the way, any number of small historical changes had taken place. Some of them might lead to significant changes that would alter the future, as chaos theory suggested.

At last the buccaneers wanted to sleep, and anchored their ships for the night. Most of the buccaneers found places to sleep on deck. Hunter could hear the distant creaking of the other two ships as they, too, sailed down the east coast of Jamaica and rounded the southern corner of the island toward Port Royal.

The Old Laughing Lady had an early start on the other ships as it sailed for home. At first, Captain Tomann had insisted on interrogating Rita right away about the individual Wayne wanted to take hostage. He and Wayne took her down to a chamber that had been inhabited by a ship's officer before the buccaneers had taken the ship. As Captain Tomann shouted, blustered, and waved his cutlass around the confined space, she had winced but never spoken.

Finally Wayne drew the captain aside. "I think she's too scared to speak," he said quietly.

"She'd better be scared!" Captain Tomann bellowed, starting after her.

Wayne moved to stay in front of him. "Let me have a moment alone with her."

"Alone! So you can learn what you need and hold out on me? Is that it?"

"No! No, I still need you."

"Eh?"

"I will need your ship and your, uh, friendship to hold her here." Wayne lowered his voice. "She is afraid of your reputation as a pirate captain and the English scourge of the Spanish Main. Too frightened to speak."

"Is she, now?" Captain Tomann glared at her over Wayne's shoulder.

"Give me just a moment with her."

"Do as you will, then," muttered Captain Tomann. "Do not keep me waiting long." He stomped out and slammed the door.

Wayne turned to Rita, letting out a deep breath of relief. "You know who I am, I think," he said bluntly.

"What do you want?" Rita spoke carefully, not exactly answering his question.

"You know that, too. I want MC 2."

"Who?"

"Stop it," he ordered impatiently. "You're wasting your time. I know you came here with Hunter. If you want to leave this ship, you'll have to help me."

"All right," she said calmly, looking back at him. She did not look scared, despite what he had told Captain Tomann, but she was certainly wary.

"I don't care about you," Wayne said. "I don't want to hurt you or interfere with your trip home, either. But I've had to join up with Captain Tomann, and he's a little...well, he's a pirate. As you can see for yourself."

Her face tensed slightly. "What do you expect me to do?"

"You have a rapport with MC 2," said Wayne. "That means you can get close to him and then, under the Second Law, you can order him to obey me."

"Why are you so anxious to get MC 2 yourself?" She folded her arms.

"That's my business."

"If we all worked together, we could probably get him much faster. Then everyone could work together back home. What would be wrong with that?"

"Ha! I'll never get a fair shake from the Oversight Committee. Working with you and Hunter will ruin me." His eyes narrowed. "Besides, I don't see you exactly working with Hunter. What were you doing off by yourself like that?"

He grinned, knowing that she was still unaware that he had hired Roland to distract her or she would have mentioned it by now.

Rita ignored his question. "What about all the changes we may be causing here, in this time? Hunter believes in the chaos theory as applied to time, which means that any small changes can set big changes in motion."

"I don't agree with him. Any changes we cause are minor and will be absorbed by the larger forces of history."

She suppressed a smile. "I agree with you."

"MC 2 was with you. Did he join the fighting on the Sidonia?"

Rita hesitated. "It won't matter. Everyone is sailing back to Port Royal, anyway."

"I guess that's true. But I still want to know which ship he was on when you saw him last."

"Yes, he joined the fight on the Sidonia. I suppose the First Law took over."

"That's what I figured." Wayne studied her quietly for a moment.

"Well?"

He shrugged, then nodded toward the bed. "All right. You might as well get some sleep tonight."

"What are you going to do with me?"

"For now, Captain Tomann will keep you here. When we reach Port Royal, I'll go look for Hunter; I know he's looking for me, too. Maybe we'll make a deal."

"A deal?"

"I'll trade you for MC 2 and Hunter's promise not to interfere with me." Wayne moved to the door and then turned with a smile. "I believe that the First Law will force Hunter to place your welfare ahead of MC 2's. Now, after I leave, I'll have to bolt the door from the outside. You bolt it from the inside, too. You wouldn't want a drunken Captain Tomann coming for a visit."

Steve watched the sun go down in the west over the island as he and Jane walked through the thick Jamaican forest. The sweet aroma of flowers filled the air. They found themselves hiking by moonlight through the trees toward Port Royal. Then they came across a dirt road with wagon ruts and followed it. The moon shone down on the road, but only shadows were visible on each side.

"I hope this goes to Port Royal," said Steve. "Following the sun to go west was easy, but we can't see the stars too well, with all the trees overhead."

"I suppose it does," said Jane. "Where else would it go, this close to town?"

"Nowhere else I know of," said Steve. He rubbed his arms. "My clothes are still wet. Are you cold?"

"Yes. But I'm drying out slowly. I'll be okay."

"I'm still not used to this humidity. In the desert, we would have dried out

almost right away."

"What's that light over there?" Jane pointed to their left, up ahead. Steve looked. A small light flickered through the trees; some distance away. "It must be someone's campfire."

"Aye, that it is," said a man's voice.

As Steve stopped in surprise, the dark silhouettes of people stepped out of the shadows, merely shadows themselves in the darkness. Their movements rustled the tree branches and underbrush as they came forward. They had obviously been prepared for intruders. Some blocked the road in front of Steve and Jane, but others came out of the trees on each side of the road. When Steve glanced over his shoulder, he realized that some were behind them, too. He could hardly see them.

16

"And who might you be?" One of the men in front of Steve had spoken.

"Steve and John," said Steve, hoping Jane would say nothing. In the dark, the strangers could stand close and still not see that she was a woman. "We're shipwrecked off the Hungry Hawk." Taking a deep breath, he decided to be bold. "Who might you be?"

"I'm Nick Van Dyne," said the man in front of him. "Lately of Port Royal, but we haven't done so well lately. So it's our fire you see."

"We saw those ships from the shore this afternoon," said another man. "And we heard you coming down the road just a bit ago."

"Aye, we did," said Nick, resting his hand on his rapier. "But we have not been welcome in Port Royal for some time, those of us whose gold ran out. We haven't had a ship to crew for some time. I think these two might have some plunder they could share with us."

"We don't have anything," said Steve.

"Ha! Two Spanish ships were in that fight today, and they both set sail with the others back for Port Royal. I say they were both fat pigeons with plenty of booty for every buccaneer who took part in the voyage."

"We got thrown off the ship during the fighting," said Steve, carefully eyeing the buccaneer on his left. That man was holding his cutlass in one hand, down by his side. "No plunder had been divided yet."

"We shall see," said Nick, drawing his rapier. "Grab them both!"

Steve had been ready, however. As soon as Nick had reached for his rapier, Steve had whirled to the man holding the cutlass near him and punched him in the stomach. He wrenched the cutlass away just in time to block a thrust from Nick, backing up a step. Then, half-expecting the other buccaneers to jump on him from all sides, he waited for Nick's next stroke.

The crowd of buccaneers laughed, however, at the way Steve had caught the one man by surprise and taken his sword. Meanwhile, Steve figured that he had little to lose by fighting. These pirates were more aggressive, and probably more desperate, than those on the waterfront of Port Royal. From the bullies and brawlers he had known in the desert back home, he was sure they would respect a fighter. Any attempts he made to mollify them now would be considered cowardice.

"Stand back!" Nick laughed. "He's a poor man with a sword, but has spirit. Let's see what else he has."

Steve kept the cutlass high in front of him as Nick feinted, twirled his point in Steve's face, and lunged again. As before, Steve knocked the thrust aside with a minimal movement; he could see that a big swing of his arm would momentarily leave him wide open. He really didn't know what he was doing, however, and had to back up again to avoid a quick flurry of short feints from Nick.

"Get him, Nick!" The man who owned the cutlass shook his fist at Steve.

"He got the better o' you, all right," said someone in the crowd, and they all laughed.

Steve's opponent was quick and confident. All Steve could do was block the strokes he could and slowly back away from the others. Sooner or later, he was likely to back into a tree or trip over a rock or log and fall.

"Stand to, fellow," said Nick, laughing. "How can we fight if you keep running away?"

"Aye," called another man. "He probably jumped overboard and swam for shore the same way!"

The buccaneers bellowed with laughter.

Vaguely, as Steve parried again, he heard the sounds of horses and the creaking of some vehicle on the road behind the crowd. He didn't dare turn to look, but a large, looming shadow blocked the moonlight in his peripheral vision. In front of him, Nick also refused to look away.

Voices sounded behind the crowd. Then, suddenly, the buccaneers gave enthusiastic greetings to someone. The crowd moved quickly away from Nick and Steve and Jane.

"It's Captain Morgan," called someone loudly. "Nicky! He's coming!"

The crowd parted and a tall, burly man strode through the opening.

"Good evening, men," he said heartily. "So, having a little fun, are you?"

Nick glanced at him quickly, then lowered his rapier, still watching Steve warily. "Evening, Captain."

Steve dropped the cutlass on the ground. He was grateful for the interruption and wanted to give Nick no excuse to resume the fight. Whatever happened next, he and Jane would have better luck trusting to chance than trusting his fencing.

"A personal row, I suppose." Captain Morgan looked back and forth between Nick and Steve. "I say, fellow, you're all wet. So is your friend."

Steve peered at him in the moonlight. He wore a broad-brimmed hat with plumes, a fancy ruffled shirt, and an unbuttoned coat. A sword and scabbard hung from a polished belt that had a pistol stuck through it. He spoke with a British accent that was different from the ones Steve had heard in Port Royal.

"Aye, Captain," said Steve. "We, uh, wound up in the water during the attack on a Spanish ship. My friend here lowered a dinghy and we rowed to shore."

"A Spanish ship, this close to the coast of Jamaica?" Captain Morgan looked at him doubtfully..

"We took two of them," said Steve, seeing that Captain Morgan was interested in this subject. "A sailor on one of them said that a storm broke up their convoy and blew them off course."

"Ah! Good fortune for you, then." Captain Morgan grinned broadly. "Glad to hear it. I would hear more of this, however." He took another look at Jane in the darkness.

"We can tell you much more," said Steve, eagerly. "The names of the ships and how we attacked them, all that."

"Excellent! I must introduce myself. I am Henry Morgan, a colonel by commission from Governor Modyford."

"Pleased to meet you," said Steve. He suddenly recognized Morgan's name vaguely from his meager history. "We are Steve and John."

"Are you returning to Port Royal?"

"Yeah—I mean, aye."

"You shall be my guests," said Captain Morgan. "I am a little late, but on my way to Port Royal this evening. Please join me in my carriage." He turned to one side, gesturing.

Steve grabbed Jane's arm and pulled her along. The buccaneers made way for them, saying nothing as they watched. Captain Morgan brought up the rear. The carriage loomed as little more than a large shadow, where a footman opened the door. Steve drew Jane forward to climb in first. He followed her and sat

next to her in the forward seat, facing backward. The seat was padded, but he could feel the hard shelf underneath the cushion. Captain Morgan climbed into the opposite seat. When the footman closed the door, Captain Morgan leaned out the window.

"In the next few days, men," he called. "On the docks as we arranged, eh?" Enthusiastic agreement from the crowd answered him. Captain Morgan waved and the driver took the coach forward. Steve finally relaxed slightly for the first time since the buccaneers had confronted them.

"I am coming from my plantation in Rio Minho Valley," said Captain Morgan. He smiled in the faint moonlight coming in through the windows of the carriage.

"I hate to see buccaneers fighting each other when I am about to assemble new crews for my ships. We must fight the Spanish together."

"Sounds good to me," said Steve.

"I see you are both chilly," said Captain Morgan. "I shall buy a round of rum at my favorite tavern. It will warm you both."

"We're looking forward to it," said Steve.

"As am I." Captain Morgan nodded to Jane. "John, I shall see that you are especially comfortable."

Jane nodded, looking at Steve. If Steve understood Captain Morgan, he was not fooled by her appearance. Yet he seemed to respect her masquerade.

As the carriage swayed and creaked down the road, pulled by a team of lively horses, Steve tried to remember what he could about Henry Morgan. All he could recall was that Morgan had been a buccaneer captain. According to what Rita had told the team in the beginning, the commission from Governor Modyford meant that legally, right now, he was a privateer. Steve saw that he was wealthy, and that he was a big, barrel-chested, confident man, but he was surprised to see that he was also soft-spoken and considerate.

"From where to do you hail?" Captain Morgan asked.

"From California," said Steve, with a slight grin. "John, here, is from up the mainland coast."

"California." Captain Morgan eyed Steve closely. "That would be a Spanish possession on the far ocean, if I remember my maps rightly. You look a bit Spanish, in fact. Yet you speak English comfortably, albeit with an odd accent."

"We are buccaneers," Steve said firmly.

"Aye, that you are. Any man has a fair chance with me. Jamaica has buccaneers from every land. So tell me about your recent voyage."

Steve decided that as long as he avoided mentioning the future or robots, telling Morgan their story was not likely to change history. During the ride into Port Royal, he told Morgan about the Cadiz and the Sidonia. He briefly mentioned the Hungry Hawk and the Old Laughing Lady; Morgan recognized the names and knew their captains.

"I told them I'd be gathering a fleet," he said grimly. "I am not pleased that they went adventuring so close to my own call for crews. Good men and ships might have been wasted. Well, I suppose the temptation was too great to pass up. Still, I will want them with me. I hope they will be ready."

Steve was sure that asking Questions about Morgan's plans was not wise.

The town gate was closed when the carriage arrived. Steve noticed, however, that the driver only had to shout Captain Morgan's name to the sentries in order to have it opened. The carriage drove into the town and down to the waterfront.

Steve looked out the window at the taverns and shops. By now, some were familiar. However, the carriage drew up at a tavern that he had not noticed before. It was a small storefront, no different from many others.

"This is not the wildest tavern in town," said Captain Morgan. "I would say it is not the best, either, but it's a favorite of mine. You will join me for that rum, eh?"

"Of course," said Steve.

Jane smiled and shrugged.

The footman opened the door for them. At Captain Morgan's gesture, Steve slipped out first and waited for Jane. Then they followed their host into the tavern.

It was a small, cozy establishment lighted with torches on the walls and candles on the rough wooden tables. The tavernkeeper greeted Captain Morgan familiarly, as did several of the buccaneers drinking at the tables. Captain Morgan took a big, round table in the middle of the room. He ordered three tankards of rum, with an amused smile at Jane. She was still not speaking, to masquerade as "John," but Captain Morgan seemed to consider it merely a mild joke.

The rum was served with a bottle and a plate of tropical fruit. Captain Morgan raised a tankard to Steve and Jane. They clanked theirs against his.

"To good sailing," said Captain Morgan, before taking a long drink.

"To good sailing," Steve repeated.

Jane muttered the same quietly, smiling shyly.

"I say," said Captain Morgan, studying Steve again in the light. "You have a trace of Moor in you, do you?"

Steve laughed and decided to explain his ancestry to Captain Morgan the best he could. "I live in Spanish California, but my family originated in, uh, Cathay. You've heard of it?"

"Ah! Yes, I've heard tales of distant Cathay, on the far side of the world. Never been there. May hap I'll go someday." He took a drink of his rum.

"What's it like?"

"Uh—I don't know."

"Eh?"

"I was born in, uh, the New World."

"Ah! I see, of course. But I still don't understand how your English is so good if you grew up in New Spain."

Jane suppressed a smile, and hid behind her tankard.

"Well..." Steve tried to think of an answer. "Captain, I suppose we have more English speakers in California than you realize."

"Hm! Well, it could be. I wouldn't know." Morgan gestured to the plate of fruit and waited until Jane had taken a banana and Steve had picked up a bunch of grapes. "What I do know is that Spain has plenty of rich pickings in this sea, and all the way down the Atlantic Coast."

"The Spanish Main," said Steve, repeating a phrase he remembered.

"Aye, so it is. And someday I'll cross all of it." Captain Morgan peeled a banana for himself. "It's full of sweet little towns just waiting for a man of vision to take, just one of these days." He took a bite of the banana.

"Really?" Steve spoke casually, aware that Captain Morgan was in a mood to talk shop with them. He also realized that he was very hungry, and saw that Jane was reaching for an apple.

"Spain has the richest cities in the Americas," said Captain Morgan. "And the strongest."

"The strongest?" Steve took another banana.

"Aye! Oh, any city can be taken, all right. But it takes thought and planning and men of stout heart." Captain Morgan glanced at both of them and sat up.

"By the stars, I forgot my manners! You two have had no supper, I wager."

"Well...you'd win your wager." Steve grinned. "But we welcome your hospitality as it is."

"Nonsense!" Captain Morgan waved to the tavernkeeper. "Two beefsteaks for my friends here! Potatoes, too!" He smiled and spread his arms. "No guests of mine go hungry."

"We are in your debt," said Steve.

When the grilled steaks and boiled potatoes arrived on wooden platters, Steve and Jane ate eagerly. Steve found his steak rather tough, but he was too hungry to care much. Jane did not complain, either. The tavernkeeper brought sea salt, black pepper, and some sort of red peppers to spice up the meal. Around them, the tavern remained nearly empty.

"May hap you heard about my voyage to Cuba last year," said Captain Morgan, before taking another swig of rum.

"Hm?" Steve made a noncommittal noise, glad that his mouth was full. He didn't want to insult the Captain by saying he had not heard of it, but he also didn't want to be caught pretending to have heard of something he hadn't.

"The attack on Puerto Principe," said Captain Morgan, relaxing in his chair.

"It's in Cuba, to the north of us here in Jamaica."

Steve nodded, glancing at Jane. She shrugged slightly, indicating that she knew nothing about the subject either. Captain Morgan did not seem concerned.

"You see, mates, we knew that the Spanish had it mind to take Jamaica back from us—after all, we took it from them not so many years back. But I convinced Governor Modyford not to sit and wait like ducks in a pond. The way to disrupt your enemy's plans is to take the war to him."

Steve nodded acknowledgment.

"The governor commissioned me a colonel for the voyage," Captain Morgan continued with casual pride. "It required twelve ships—first to take enough men to capture the place, then to bring all the booty home!" He laughed and drank more of his rum.

"A great voyage," said Steve, between mouthfuls. That was a safe comment to make.

"Our good King Charles appreciated the share of booty that the governor and I sent him, as well." Captain Morgan paused to pour more rum into all the tankards. He seemed surprised to find that the other two were still nearly full, but he said nothing about it.

Steve took a taste of his rum to be polite. He didn't like it, but he decided not to complain. Jane was hardly touching hers either.

"I've been lying low this past year," said Captain Morgan. "My raids on Spanish possessions could upset the king if they complicate his politics back home."

"That makes sense," said Steve.

"Ha!" Captain Morgan slapped one hand down on the table, jolting it. "What does he know of the Spanish Main?"

"Not much, I suppose," said Steve mildly.

"Of course not. How would he? But my surprise raids against Spanish towns are preventing the Spanish in America from coordinating an attack on us British. They'd like nothing better than to drive us out of the Caribbean completely!" Steve knew, of course, that the Spanish never succeeded in doing that; even his history was good enough on that point. He knew that Hunter would not approve of his telling Morgan anything like that, though.

Captain Morgan leaned toward Steve, looking him in the eye. "You've no love for the Spanish, I take it?"

"Uh-no, not especially. Not me." Steve was caught off guard by the buccaneer's sudden intensity.

"And the two of you missed my voyage to Cuba last year, I take it?"

"Yeah, we missed it," said Steve.

"And yet the two of you are experienced buccaneers who can claim a share of this day's bounty when your ships come back into port?"

"Well—yes," said Steve.

"Well, then! I have need of your kind. I have many ships to fill and not enough men to fill them. You'll join me, then, when I put out the call."

Steve glanced at Jane, who was still leaving all the talking to him.

"Eh, mates?" Captain Morgan looked back and forth between them, grinning. "Of course," Steve said quickly. He had to keep their masquerade going. "When will it be? You told the others you are gathering crews right away." "Aye, that's why I came into town this evening." "Where do we sail this time?" "Ah, mate, that's not to be discussed just yet." Captain Morgan grinned and slapped him on the back. "Not just with you, mind, but I'm not telling anyone. Not until we are well away at sea, where there is no chance that a word will slip. I would not have anyone on this island tempted by money to sell our destination in some Spanish port." Before long, Steve and Jane had both finished eating. Captain Morgan drank the rest of the rum and tossed a few coins to the tavernkeeper. Then he sighed and looked out the open doorway at the moonlit sky. "Well, my friends," said Captain Morgan. "I rose early today and I shall rise early tomorrow. I must be off to my rooms here in town. I have nine ships preparing to sail even now. You will come when the call goes out for men to sail on them?" "Aye, aye, Captain," said Steve. "Good!" Captain Morgan stood up. "I bid you both good evening then." He strode out, his boots pounding on the wooden floor of the tavern. After he was gone, Jane leaned close to Steve. "That was interesting," she whispered. "And we got a free dinner." "Not to mention avoiding that sword fight," said Steve. "I figured I had to accept his invitation to join his crew. When the time comes, he'll be too busy to notice us in the crowd. I just didn't want to risk making him mad." "Good idea. Can we find the same inn where we stayed the first night?" "Yeah. Let's go. We want to be back on the docks in the morning when Hunter comes in with the ships."

Hunter spent the night sitting on the deck of the Sidonia. As dawn came up over the edge of the water, the other buccaneers began to rise from their sleep around the ship. No one bothered him all morning. Near midday, he saw Port Royal ahead of them. The Old Laughing Lady had reached port first. The other ships, the Cadiz and the Hungry Hawk, were coming in just behind the Sidonia.

Though puzzled and uncertain, Hunter had not decided to shut himself down completely. He still was under a First Law imperative to protect his human companions if he could and to return them to their own time even if he was not capable of apprehending MC 2. When the Sidonia anchored in the bay, he joined the line of buccaneers who were receiving a share of the loot from the ship. Each one took his share before being lowered in a longboat to be rowed to shore.

Hunter's share was two handfuls of evenly mixed gold and silver coin. When he stared at the coins in some surprise, a good-natured buccaneer handed him a scarf to bundle them up. Without a word, Hunter tied his bundle firmly to his sword belt and climbed into the next longboat.

As the other buccaneers ran cheering and whooping for the taverns with their booty, Hunter walked along the docks, unsure of himself. He was nearly in robotic shock and very tentative about making any decision. Without Jane's earlier reminders that his human team still needed him, he might have shut down completely. As it was, he was having trouble focusing on his goals and choosing decisive action.

"Lack of focus is only one step away from complete incompetence," Hunter said to himself. Putting his concerns into words helped him narrow his attention. "I must concentrate in order to remain functional. Prioritize my goals. What is most urgent? First, reconstruct the team. That requires locating and communicating with Steve, Jane, and Rita." He activated his internal

communicator. "R. Hunter calling Steve, Jane, and Rita. I am on the waterfront again and will await you here."

Hunter was concerned about facing Steve and Jane again. He expected that whatever he had done on board ship to cause Jane to hit him was no longer relevant. Still, he would not enjoy learning that he had done something extremely serious or, worst of all, violated one of the Laws without realizing it.

He began repeating the message at sixty-second intervals, and looked back at the ships now anchored in the bay. None were out of the range of his communicator. Since radio would not be developed for another couple of centuries, he did not have to worry about jamming, codes, regulations, or identification problems. Yet ~ heard no response.

Hunter remained standing where he was, on the waterfront in the morning sunlight. More buccaneers ran past him, shouting and singing. He discontinued his message, suddenly concerned that the buccaneers near Steve and Jane might overhear the sound, chastising himself for forgetting that possibility. That was another sign that his efficiency was dropping. In addition, he was growing more anxious as minutes passed without a response. He should never have left Steve and Jane.

"Hey, mate! Come on!" A heavy hand pounded Hunter on the back, startling him. Hunter turned in surprise to look. The buccaneer was almost as big as he was.

"Yes? Where are you going?"

"To the taverns, mate!" He had not actually stopped, but turned to face Hunter as he backpedaled. "Come on, fellow! I'm Ned. I know you're one of us—I saw you on board both those Spanish pigeons. So what's your name, eh?"

"Hunter."

"Come on, then."

Hunter recalled Jane's admonition to maintain his masquerade as a buccaneer. That, too, gave him some direction. He followed Ned and the other buccaneers, who were scattering to the different taverns, cheering and whooping.

In the tavern, Hunter carefully imitated some of the other buccaneers. He smiled the way they smiled, bought the same bottle and tankard of rum, and sat with Ned and his cronies at a big, round table. This behavior required very little of his attention, however, and the rowdiness of his new companions did not alter his mood in the slightest.

Hunter observed that the buccaneers' behavior gradually changed as they consumed greater amounts of rum. He accessed his data on that substance and studied the effects of drunkenness on humans. In some ways he found drunkenness to be a very close parallel to his own failing efficiency. On the other hand, while the pirates became more drunk with each round, his condition did not change.

The tavern was full of loud, raucous buccaneers; at some tables, they were singing. Then two familiar faces caught Hunter's attention. Roland was entering the tavern with MC 2. Instantly, Hunter focused his attention on both of them. Many of his doubts about his ability were forgotten as he considered the new situation.

Deliberately, Hunter reviewed his data. Roland and MC 2 must have returned to Port Royal on the Hungry Hawk. Rita, however, should be with them.

Hunter remained where he was, observing Roland with MC 2. They stood at the bar; Roland led the way through the crowd and MC 2 stayed close to him. Hunter altered his aural sensitivity to prioritize Roland's voice pattern.

"Two tankards of rum," Roland called to the tavernkeeper. "Pay the man out of your share, Shorty."

MC 2 paid for the rum.

"Hey, Roland," said a bearded buccaneer at the bar. "Why don't you pay for your own drink?"

"What do you care?" Roland grinned broadly. Then he punched the other man in

the stomach suddenly, without any warning.

The other man doubled up.

Hunter felt a contradiction churning inside his system, as the First Law told him to prevent any further violence and his own judgment told him to let the locals of this time conduct their affairs without his interference.

The man who had been punched lunged for Roland's throat. 'Roland stepped back in the same moment and MC 2 slipped in front of him. As the bearded buccaneer came forward, MC 2 picked him up under his arms and lifted him into the air.

"Hey! Hey, you! This ain't your fight!" The bearded man kicked and swung his fists helplessly in the air.

The crowd roared with laughter.

"He's a funny fellow," said Roland, laughing. "He doesn't say much, but he hates having anyone try to hurt me."

"Put me down!"

"Not yet," Roland ordered.

"Does he do everything you tell him?" The first man squirmed but could not get free.

"Nay," said Roland. "I told him to hit a Spaniard for me and he wouldn't do it. But he'll do most anything I say. Put him down, Shorty."

MC 2 gently set the buccaneer back on his feet. The bearded man turned and shoved his way through the crowd. MC 2 stood quietly.

Hunter decided to make his presence known to MC 2. He could not allow Roland to control MC 2, even if Roland did not know why MC 2 would obey his instructions. Hunter transmitted an internal message to him.

"I am R. Hunter, a humanoid robot from your time," said Hunter.

"Acknowledge."

MC 2 did not respond.

"I have followed you from Mojave Center, under a Second Law instruction to bring you back to our time. I am in the room observing you, so your masquerade is no longer effective. The First Law requires that you cooperate with me because your very presence at human size in this time threatens to alter history and harm the humans of the future. You must acknowledge this First Law problem."

MC 2 did not react outwardly, but he radioed back. "Your First Law imperative is not fully convincing to me. Until I am fully persuaded that your assessment of my presence is correct, I am not bound by your opinion."

"Tell me where the woman named Rita is. The First Law clearly governs her welfare."

"I do not know."

"Where did you last see her?"

"She was present at the attack on the ship Sidonia. I know nothing of her whereabouts since that time."

Hunter's worry about Rita deepened.

Suddenly a roar of shouts came from the doorway. The bearded buccaneer was back, charging into the tavern at the head of a mob of other drunken buccaneers. Most of them leaped at random on their brethren drinking in the tavern, but their bearded leader ran straight for Roland, followed by a knot of bellowing comrades.

Roland just had time to fling his tankard at the bearded buccaneer, who dodged it; it banged against the head of a man behind him. Then MC 2 again blocked the way to Roland, but this time the sheer weight of the mob knocked him down. As MC 2 hit the floor, many of the men stumbled over him. They went down in a heap.

Roland, who was clearly no coward, leaped into the fray himself.

Allover the tavern, onlookers were either joining in or roaring with approval, cheering on one friend or another. Hunter, suddenly moving with more decisiveness and urgency than he had felt since Jane had clubbed him, jumped

up and ran toward the fight. Hunter now had his best chance ever to grab MC 2.
18

Hunter did not speak as he took the shoulders of various buccaneers and flung them aside. Most of what he heard everyone yelling was either insult or encouragement, neither of which seemed desirable to him. He worked his way through most of the crowd, but people kept jumping on him and hitting him. None of the punches did any damage, but the necessity to avoid harming any humans delayed him. He could only push them out of the way, and they kept coming right back.

After several moments, Hunter realized that he was not making much progress. Ahead of him, MC 2 was struggling with four drunken humans in what appeared to be a stalemate. Roland, on the other hand, was taking a beating.

Hunter radioed to MC 2. "I am going to take Roland out the front door. Since he is the cause of this fight, it may solve the problem. Under the First Law, to stop all the harm the humans are doing to each other, you must help me." "Agreed," MC 2 radioed back. "I will distract as many of the humans as I can simultaneously."

With a new focus, Hunter changed direction. He shoved aside a couple of buccaneers, then lifted a fairly short fellow and gently but firmly handed him to a surprised larger man, who collapsed under the sudden weight. When he reached Roland, he did not join the fight around him. Instead, Hunter grabbed Roland around the waist and lifted him up, away from the bearded man and his companions.

"Whoa! Ahoy! What's this?" Roland demanded in surprise, kicking and flailing in the air.

"I am helping you," said Hunter. He shifted his grip and raised Roland high over his head. Then he began a long, difficult walk through the brawling crowd.

MC 2, now free of the specific chore of protecting Roland, got in the way of the buccaneers who were still going after Roland. Maneuvering became easier for both robots because most of the buccaneers seemed to think Hunter was fighting with Roland, and shouted encouragement to Hunter to fling Roland across the room.

Hunter worked his way to the door patiently, still holding Roland high. Finally, turning sideways, he burst outside into the tropical sunlight and quickly strode away from the tavern. He did not hesitate, but walked quickly to the corner of the block and hurried up an alley. By that time, his hearing told him that none of the humans were following them.

"I am in an alley," Hunter radioed to MC 2. "Out the door and to the right. Home in on my signal and join me." Then he spoke aloud to Roland. "Are you harmed?" Hunter carefully bent down and set Roland on his feet.

"Not to speak of. Thanks, mate." Roland looked at him curiously. "I don't think I know you. Why the rescue, then? Not that I mind, you understand."

"I want to know where the woman named Rita Chavez is."

"Rita? I don't believe I know anyone—"

"Lying to me is not wise. You went on board the Hungry Hawk with her. Where is she?"

"Uh—well, I do owe you a favor. Sure, I know her a little. But I lost track of her during the fight on shipboard. I haven't seen her since then."

Hunter was watching Roland's face carefully and listening to the tone of his voice as he spoke. From his data about human behavior, he concluded that Roland was telling the truth. He nodded his acceptance.

"Uh, look, mate—thanks for the lift, so to speak, but I think a few of those blokes may still be under full sail back there. I ought to make myself scarce for a bit."

"Yes, I agree."

"All right, then. So long!" Roland jogged away from Hunter, up the alley. Hunter then realized that MC 2 should have already joined him. He walked back down to the main thoroughfare. "MC 2, respond. Are you in trouble?" On the waterfront, he looked around in all directions. MC 2 was not in sight. The sounds of struggle from the tavern had ended; some buccaneers were singing again.

"MC 2, respond."

When Hunter received no answer, he hurried back to the doorway of the tavern. One of two possibilities had occurred; either MC 2 had been damaged and trapped in the tavern, or he had run away. In the doorway, Hunter's enhanced sight and hearing told him instantly that MC 2 was no longer inside. Hunter stopped where he was. He realized that he had misjudged the power his First Law interpretation had over MC 2. Apparently MC 2 had decided that once Roland was safely outside in Hunter's care, the First Law imperative on MC 2 was no longer in effect. So MC 2 had taken the opportunity to flee from Hunter under the Third Law while Hunter was in the alley with Roland.

If MC 2 had passed the mouth of the alley where Hunter had been, Hunter would have heard him. That meant MC 2 had gone in the opposite direction when he had first left the tavern; on the waterfront, there were only two possible directions from this doorway. Hunter walked quickly after MC 2, running through the new situation in his mind.

"I know that he is nearby," Hunter said to himself. "I know he is aware of my presence. Roland knows that MC 2 will follow his orders, short of harming humans, though he apparently has no idea why; Roland does not seem to know that I must do the same."

With MC 2 so close, Hunter felt a resurgence of his efficiency. A residual effect of his earlier malaise might have accounted for his misjudgment about MC 2's response to the First Law imperative concerning Roland. Still, he knew what to do next.

First he sent out his radio signal to Steve, Jane, and Rita again. Maybe he could finally get an explanation of why Jane had clubbed him over the head. Then he began a systematic search of the waterfront and the side streets leading inland. He turned up his hearing and vision and began to move at a light run.

Before Wayne took one of the longboats from the Old Laughing Lady back to the docks, he checked on Rita. He found her well, though cautious with him. She reported that Captain Tomann had not tried her door. Wayne was convinced that he would not bother Rita as long as he believed she was worth a ransom. Then Wayne had to wait for the longboat to be rowed back since he had missed the first wave of departures.

Finally on the waterfront again by midmorning, Wayne looked around for Hunter. He could hear the singing and shouting of celebration from the nearest taverns. Other buccaneers were wandering up and down the waterfront laughing and talking, or shopping at the small booths. Wayne wanted to find Hunter to talk business, but of course Hunter could find him more easily than he could find Hunter.

"Well," Wayne muttered aloud to himself. "Might as well enjoy it a little." He decided to have breakfast. His pockets were heavy now with coins he had received as his share of the loot from the brief voyage.

Wayne went to a booth right across from the docks. He would be in plain sight there if Hunter came walking along the waterfront. Wayne bought a couple of rolls, a small smoked fish, and some fresh, cool water. Then he sat down on a nearby rock to eat.

Just as Wayne was finishing his first roll, someone slipped quietly behind him and sat down on another rock.

"Good morning to you," Roland said softly, glancing around. "Fine day, isn't

it?"

"What—Roland! Come around beside me." Wayne was startled, but tried to cover it. Wayne decided to stay calm and find out what Roland wanted.

"No, sorry. I had a spot of trouble a while back. I'll just keep my head down and sit behind you."

"Oh. Something serious?"

"Nay!" Roland laughed lightly. "Not at all, mate. Too much rum early in the morning and a bit of celebration was all. I doubt anyone's carrying a grudge, but I'll watch out for myself a little longer."

"Here." Wayne handed him a roll, phrasing his next question carefully. "Have you learned anything about the people I paid you to find?"

"That little guy you're looking for," said Roland, taking a bite out of the roll. "He's real strong for his size and basically does what people tell him?"

"That's right. So you've seen him?"

"Aye." Roland nodded. "But he got away from me again. He's here on the waterfront, though, or at least he was not very long ago."

"Good work. If you can grab him again, will you bring him to me? I'm staying out on the Old Laughing Lady."

"Ah! You're on the crew with the wild man, eh?" Roland grinned. "Don't make Tomann mad, now. I'd hate to lose you as a source of employment, even with my share of booty from the last voyage."

"We're getting along just fine."

"You know..." Roland trailed off, looking at Wayne. "That is, could there be another one of these blokes?"

"Another one? Of the same stature?"

"No, no! Just the opposite. I got myself into a brawl, see, and the little fellow stopped someone from hitting me. Then a minute later this gigantic man rose up from a table and charged into the group."

"Gigantic, you say. Maybe about, oh, six and a half feet tall? Brawny?"

"You got it, mate. He picked me up like I was a little shaver and carried me out of the tavern over his head."

"Blond hair, square jaw, clean-shaven-good looking man?"

"Well, no. Maybe I have the wrong fellow. This one has brown hair and a beard, and a narrow face."

"Did he say anything?"

"Well—yes. He asked me about Rita."

"Rita!"

"That's right."

"It must be Hunter," said Wayne. "The same, uh, man but in disguise. What did you tell him?"

"I told him I couldn't help him."

"Very good. All right, I tell you what. For now, forget about looking for Rita and distracting her."

"As you please. Is there anything you would like me to do—that is, anything worth a bit of coin?"

"Yes." Wayne leaned to one side to stick his hand in his pocket. He pulled out some more coins. "Take this. Stay on the lookout for MC 2 and bring him to Tomann's ship if you can."

Roland took the coins. "He's important to you, all right; I can see that. But what's it all about?"

"Sorry," said Wayne. "I can't explain it. But it's very important—more important than you can imagine. I have to get my hands on him."

Roland glanced around quickly and drew away. "I'll remember that."

Steve and Jane had spent the previous night at the same inn as before. It had seemed odd without Hunter, but the night passed without incident. They ate breakfast on the waterfront while they watched the ships sailing into port.

When the longboats began rowing the crews to shore, Steve had found a spot at one end of the docks where they could look down the length of the waterfront. They were searching for Hunter most of all, but Roland, Rita, or MC 2 would do for a start.

At one point, Steve had pointed to a very tall, brawny figure standing uncertainly on the docks after climbing out of a longboat. "Hey, there's Hunter."

"No, wait," Jane had said. "See the beard? And the brown hair? I think that's the guy who was coming after you when you were sword fighting. He's the one I clubbed with a belaying pin. And he might remember me."

They had continued to watch the waterfront until most of the buccaneers were in the taverns, drinking and singing. Then, having nothing better to do, they had begun to walk around again, hoping either to see or be seen by someone they wanted to find.

By midday, they had not seen any of the people or robots they sought, but the buccaneers began wandering out of the taverns again, looking for more excitement. Many were at the booths, crowding the waterfront and making any search more difficult.

"Look," said Jane. "A lot of people seem to be heading for that one tavern up ahead."

"Isn't that where Morgan bought us dinner last night?"

"I think you're right. It looks different in the daytime. Do you think he's back there?"

"One way to find out," said Steve. "Maybe he's signing up those crews he mentioned."

"Watch out for that guy named Nick," said Jane. "He might want to finish that fight with you."

Steve and Jane worked their way through the crowds to the tavern. The doorway was jammed with onlookers, but Steve stopped to peer through a window. Inside, Captain Morgan was seated at the same big, round table he had taken the previous night. A number of other buccaneers were sitting with him, talking.

"What is it?" Jane asked, coming up next to Steve.

"I'm sure he's planning that voyage. But I don't see anyone we're looking for."

"I guess we might as well keep going."

"Yeah."

They turned away from the window and walked on up the waterfront.

Late in the day, Wayne sat down at a small outdoor booth for a tankard of ale. It was on one of the side streets leading away from the waterfront. Shortly after Roland had left him, he had seen Steve and Jane walking around, obviously looking for someone, and he had spent the afternoon avoiding them as well as searching for MC 2.

"Good day, friend," Roland said quietly behind him.

Startled, Wayne turned and found Roland at the head of a small group of buccaneers. Roland was smirking; the others had suspicious, wary expressions. As Wayne looked at them, the group formed a semicircle around him, trapping him against the booth.

"Good day, Roland," said Wayne cautiously.

"Your friend is well," said Roland. "My mates found him for me, after I put out the word."

"Well! That's great. You had a real advantage over me, knowing so many people."

"Aye, that I did. And we have your short friend in a place of our own."

"Let's go see him," Wayne said with forced cheer, sliding off his stool.

Roland moved sideways to block his way. "Not just yet. You have my pay?"

"I will pay on delivery," said Wayne.

"Indeed, you will," said Roland. "We will accept his weight in evenly mixed gold and silver coin in exchange for him."

"What?" Wayne stared at him. "I don't have anything like that much."

"Get it" Roland turned away.

"That's crazy." Wayne started to reach for Roland's arm.

In response to the motion, five of the nearest buccaneers all tensed. Two reached for their swords and another drew a pistol from his sash. Wayne froze, his heart pounding.

Roland glanced back over his shoulder and laughed. Then, shaking his head, he walked away without deigning to turn. His companions followed him, first walking backward to watch Wayne before finally turning and hurrying away.

Wayne let out a quivering breath and relaxed. At least he had a lead on MC 2's whereabouts. Roland probably had him imprisoned on the Hungry Hawk. However, Wayne saw no reasonable way that he could acquire the ransom the buccaneers wanted.

He remained where he was for a few minutes longer, then started walking in the opposite direction from the one Roland had taken. As he thought over his new problem, he saw two possibilities. He could either try to team up with Hunter and almost certainly lose MC 2 to him permanently, or he could enlist Captain Tomann's help.

Captain Tomann was his first choice, but of course he was still on board his ship. Wayne would have to visit the taverns and find some crew members who would row him back out to the Old Laughing Lady as soon as he could arrange it. He headed down the waterfront one more time.

Steve and Jane sat on a couple of empty, discarded kegs at the shore end of a pier as the sun turned red in the west. They had spent the entire day searching for a familiar face from their own time and had not seen one. Their task had become more difficult as the day wore on, because of the increasing activity up and down the entire waterfront.

All day, buccaneers had brought supplies out of warehouses. Rope, pitch, and canvas were easy to identify as they were stacked on every pier. Steve knew from his one previous voyage that food, fresh water, gunpowder, and cannon shot had to be in the barrels men rolled down the street and in the crates he saw loaded onto wagons. Even so late in the day, the men doing the work jammed the waterfront, shouting and cursing as they worked. Other buccaneers filled their longboats with supplies and rowed them out to their ships, then returned for another load.

"I count the nine ships Captain Morgan told us about," said Steve. "I think that's a very big voyage for a town this size. And I think he may have ordered them to be ready to sail by dawn."

"Why didn't they plan ahead? They could have loaded the ships in advance."

"Remember how important secrecy was to him? He probably wants to get under way before word starts to spread to other ports."

"Say, is that -no, never mind." Jane shook her head. "I thought I saw Hunter, but it's a false alarm."

"Where?"

"It's that guy I hit over the head."

"Him again? We've been avoiding him all day. He might not even remember you."

Steve looked at the figure moving through the crowd, towering head and shoulders over the people around him. "There aren't many guys that big, are there?"

Suddenly Jane gasped. "Steve, look."

"Where?"

"At that guy. He just came through the crowd into an open space. You can see all of him."

"What about him?"

"I think it is Hunter."

"How can he be Hunter?"

"Ignore his face for a minute. Look at the rest of him—his build, the way he moves, his walk." She shook her head. "Steve, in the excitement of the fight on board ship, I forgot—he can change his appearance."

"He can?"

"Yes, that's one of his more sophisticated abilities."

"You mean he can actually alter the shape of his face like that?"

"Yes, that's what I mean. Within limits; he can alter his body shape as well. And I clubbed him! Come on!" She jumped up and ran.

19

"Hunter! Hunter!" Jane ran toward him, shouting and waving.

Caught by surprise, Steve got up and followed her. Up ahead, the tall buccaneer had instantly turned at the sound of Jane's voice. Then he waved back and moved to meet her.

"Hunter! So it is you." Jane smiled with relief as she caught up to him.

"Yes, of course," said Hunter stiffly, in a flat monotone. "I have tried to reach you both through the communicators I gave you."

"We lost them," said Steve. "We'll tell you about it later."

"I have an urgent question to ask Jane," said Hunter. "What did I do wrong?"

"What do you mean?"

"Why did you strike me?"

"On shipboard, you mean?" Jane's eyes widened in surprise. "Hunter, I didn't recognize you!"

Hunter's hesitation was barely perceptible to Steve, but that meant it was very long by robotic standards.

"I made a careless mistake," said Hunter. "I altered my appearance so that I would not alert Wayne Nystrom or Rita that I was nearby on board ship."

"And then you forgot?" Jane looked at him skeptically. "Robots don't just forget. What happened?"

"My efficiency had dropped below normal even before that moment," said Hunter. His voice was no longer a monotone, though he still spoke in a tentative, stilted fashion. "When the fighting began, I was focused tightly on sorting out which First Law imperatives to pursue, such as protecting you, and which ones I had to ignore, such as allowing buccaneers to fight each other so that I would not alter the course of history."

"You came up to help me fight that Spaniard," Steve said suddenly. "I thought you were coming after me."

"So did I," said Jane. "That's why I clobbered you."

"I have no excuse," said Hunter. "If my efficiency had been at a normal level, I would have remembered at all times that humans recognize each other primarily by appearance."

"Don't you?" Steve asked.

"Not necessarily. I can make a positive identification by voice pattern as well. Other traits, such as footsteps and heartbeat, can be equally definitive in some cases."

"I made the same kind of mistake," said Jane. "If I had seen you just walking down the street the first time, I might have guessed it was you, just like I did a few minutes ago. But in the excitement of the fighting, I got careless too." She studied him for a moment. "So you thought I was punishing you for something you did?"

"Not punishing me," said Hunter. "I thought I was making a serious mistake that you had to prevent, one so urgent that you did not have time to discuss it. I nearly shut myself down because of it."

"Your misinterpretation was a minor mistake," Jane said quickly. "No harm has

been done. Don't let it raise your doubts about your adequacy for this mission again."

"Understood," said Hunter. "But I think I will change my appearance back to the way it was."

Steve glanced at the crowd of men working around them, even though the sun had begun to sink below the horizon. "Better duck out of sight first. otherwise; these guys are going to see you and think it's witchcraft or something."

"Let's all move over to a side street," said Jane quickly. "Come on."

As soon as they left the waterfront, the streets were much less crowded.

Hunter simply turned toward a tree trunk and bent low to hide his face from any passersby. He remained motionless for less than a minute. When he turned around again, he had returned to his original appearance.

"Wow," said Steve.

"Have you made any progress on our search?" Hunter asked. His voice was almost normal now.

"Not really," said Steve. "I went overboard during the fight on board ship. Jane lowered a boat and jumped in the water too." He grinned at her.

"We lost our communicators in the water," said Jane. "But we rowed back to shore safely. We'll tell you about Captain Morgan later."

"I communicated briefly with MC 2, but he got away," said Hunter. "He and Roland are in the area again, however."

"I have this feeling that maybe Rita and Roland are just hiding out somewhere," said Steve. "Suppose they really fell for each other. They could stay out of sight for a long time."

"That is not the impression I got," said Hunter. "I spoke to him too."

"We need to brief each other," said Steve. "And I'm hungry. Let's do it over dinner."

"I'm all for that," said Jane.

Hunter was deeply relieved to learn that he had not made a mistake serious enough to force Jane to hit him. He did note that in the maze of First Law questions which arose on board the ship, he had failed to communicate his new appearance to his team; that was clearly a serious failure. Since Jane had shared the responsibility for the confusion, however, he was able to allay some of his doubts.

Steve found a small tavern out by the end of the waterfront where they had built the Jamaica Jane. It was nearly deserted. Hunter, Steve, and Jane sat at a corner table and recounted their actions since they had split up, completing the stories as they set aside their dishes at the end of the meal.

"And so," Hunter finished, "I have continued to radio MC 2 occasionally, but he has not responded again. He clearly has decided that my interpretation of the First Law imperative regarding the future is too uncertain to override his Third Law imperative to keep himself away from us."

"Have you radioed any details about the application of chaos theory to history?" Jane asked. "Maybe he would have to take the argument more seriously if it was developed."

"Yes, I tried that this afternoon from time to time," said Hunter. "I suspect he shut off his receiver again as soon as he fled, to avoid that kind of argument."

"This place is still empty," said Steve, looking around the tavern. "When we first came in, I thought we had just beaten the dinner rush. But no one's coming in at all."

"I guess the loading is still going on," said Jane. "But's it's dark now."

Steve nodded. "I can see men carrying torches pass by from time to time. And there is some moonlight."

"I suppose we need a new plan of action," said Jane. "Maybe we can discuss what to do tonight, get some rest, and put it into practice tomorrow."

"Sure," said Steve, with forced cheer. "Well—at least we don't have to worry about being run down by a dinosaur stampede."

Jane laughed.

Hunter suddenly received a call on his internal receiver.

"Rita calling Hunter. Are you there?" Her voice was low and hurried.

"Hunter here," he radioed back. "Where are you?"

"I'm a prisoner on a ship called the Old Laughing Lady. I need help. Wayne Nystrom has this Captain Tomann guy working with him. They're keeping me here."

"I saw the ship in the harbor today. You are in Port Royal. We are not far."

"But we're leaving."

"You are?"

"Wayne just told me we're about to set sail. I'm in one of the officer's quarters."

"Are you in danger of immediate harm?"

"Uh—no, except for being taken out of port. I would have called earlier today, but I was sure they would take me ashore again."

"I want to remain in radio contact with you. How often are you alone?"

"Well, I was alone most of today, but we were anchored. I don't know what will happen now."

"All right. As you know, I cannot risk exposing Captain Tomann or other buccaneers to radio. Please contact me every hour if you can. I will not call you. We will follow you, however, if we can."

"Hunter?"

"Yes."

"I...apologize. I made a big mistake."

"Accepted. Hunter out."

"What is it, Hunter?" Jane was looking closely at him. "For a minute there, I thought you were freezing up or something."

"Rita just contacted me by radio," said Hunter, rising from his chair. "She is Wayne Nystrom's prisoner on board the Old Laughing Lady—and the fleet is setting sail."

"Wow!" Steve leaped up. "We have to join them somehow."

"Come." Hunter walked briskly out of the tavern, leaving payment for dinner on the bar without breaking stride. Steve and Jane hurried after him.

Outside, Hunter crossed the wide thoroughfare to walk down one of the long piers. Now, for the first time that day, all the docks were empty of barrels and crates, enabling him to see clearly in all directions. On each side, the surf broke with a steady, rhythmic crashing. In the harbor, many of the ships showed small, yellowish lights on deck and sometimes in the windows of the officers' quarters astern.

"Can we sign on the Old Laughing Lady, too?" Jane wondered. "Or would that be a mistake?"

"Maybe we can try," said Hunter. He looked out across the harbor, enhancing his vision to make the most of the pale moonlight. Many of the ships were of the same type and design, but no two were exactly alike, especially in their rigging. By accessing his memory of the Old Laughing Lady, Hunter was able to pick it out now in the distance. "It is a long way out into the harbor. By the time we find a longboat to reach it, I expect it will have set sail."

"Where's the Hungry Hawk?" Steve asked. "Maybe we can sign on with Captain Quinn. I bet he's going, too."

"We have the same problem with him," said Hunter. "Captain Quinn also anchored well away from shore. We may have to build another version of the Jamaica Jane to follow them."

"Oh, no," said Steve. "I hope not." He looked around frantically, and pointed to another ship, showing some lights nearby. "That ship hasn't weighed anchor yet. And it's a lot closer to the docks. I can even spot some of the guys on

board—you see them, when they walk within the range of lamps on the deck?"

"Maybe it's not part of the fleet," said Jane.

"It is riding low in the water," said Hunter. "It was probably loaded today for the voyage, like so many others."

"Steve," Jane said anxiously. "I think that's Captain Morgan." She pointed.

"Look next to that lamp right by the rail, in the big plumed hat."

"Yes!" Steve took a deep breath and shouted. "Captain Morgan! Captain Morgan!"

Hunter watched the man in the plumed hat. He showed no sign of hearing Steve.

"The breaking of the surf is drowning you out. I could shout loud enough for him to hear, but it would be humanly impossible and someone might notice."

Steve turned to look up and down the waterfront. "There!" He pointed and ran back down the length of the dock.

Hunter jogged after him, trying to figure out what Steve had seen. Jane ran with him. At the end of the pier, Steve turned to his left and kept running.

"You there! You guys!" Steve was yelling and waving as he ran.

Hunter saw a couple of buccaneers sitting on the near end of another pier, leaning against a discarded pile of rotted canvas as they drank out of tankards. A dinghy tied to the pier swayed gently on the waves near them. The two buccaneers looked up over their tankards in surprise at Steve.

"Is that your boat?" Steve demanded, slowing down.

"Who wants to know?" One buccaneer, sporting a large, gold hoop earring, grinned at him with broken teeth, then took another drink.

"I'll buy it from you." Steve pulled up in front of them, breathing hard.

"He wants to buy it from us," said the other buccaneer mockingly, closing one eye to look at Steve. He tugged thoughtfully on a thin, scraggly beard.

Hunter slowed down as he came up behind Steve. Jane stopped with him. The two buccaneers glanced at them cautiously.

"How much do you want for the dinghy?" Steve asked.

"A handful of gold coin," said the man with broken teeth belligerently. "If you want it so bad."

"We'll give you one gold coin for it," said Steve. "And it's not worth that much."

"Nay, nothing doing," said the buccaneer. "Prices went up all over town when that Spanish treasure came into port this morning. And you sound awful anxious."

"Aren't you missing your ship?" Steve jerked a thumb toward the harbor.

"You're being left behind too."

"Maybe we don't care. Or maybe we just don't plan to go to sea tonight."

"All right. Two gold pieces. You can buy a lot of rum for that."

"I got this feeling that your ship is about to weigh anchor too. Maybe you three are the ones in a hurry, eh?"

Steve glanced out toward Captain Morgan's ship. Then he turned to Hunter. "He has a point. What do you think?"

Hunter untied the scarf holding his share of loot and poured a modest handful of coins into his palm. Then he walked over to the buccaneer who had done most of the talking and looked down at him. The buccaneer's eyes widened as he looked up at Hunter's immense body towering over him.

"Is this enough?" Hunter spoke in a cold, firm, authoritative voice as he dropped the coins into the buccaneer's tankard, where they splashed into his rum.

"Aye," said the buccaneer hoarsely, his throat suddenly gone dry.

"Hurry," Hunter said to Steve and Jane, moving quickly toward the dinghy. He untied the line and held it as they carefully climbed down and sat in the stem. Then he joined them in the boat and pushed off, hard. As the dinghy angled away from the dock, Hunter took the center seat facing the stem and grabbed two oars. He positioned them carefully and then began to row.

"Say! Look at the fellow on the oars," said the bearded buccaneer behind them,

in surprise. "He can really move that boat."

"Aw, so what?" His friend snickered. "We did all right, for a boat that wasn't ours anyhow."

"Do you want us to take an oar?" Steve asked. "Jane and I could each take an oar. I see another set of oarlocks behind you."

"No," said Hunter. "I can maintain our desired speed and direction more consistently this way." He looked around to see if Captain Morgan's ship had moved. It was not yet under way.

Hunter concentrated on the flexibility of the oars as he stroked. He was strong enough to row harder, but risked snapping off the oars if he did so, No one spoke.

The dinghy moved through the waves steadily, with agonizing slowness. At least the waves were moderate and the wind was low. Facing him in the stern, Steve and Jane looked into the distance ahead anxiously. At last, Hunter could hear the creaking of the sailing ship growing closer.

"Captain Morgan! Ahoy!" Steve shouted. "Ahoy the ship!"

"Ahoy the boat! Who's there?" The voice was gruff and suspicious.

Hunter turned to look up. He adjusted his rowing to maintain the position of the dinghy. If they got too close to the hull of the ship, they would have trouble seeing the men who were up on deck.

"Steve and—and John, from last night," called Steve. "Where's Captain Morgan?"

"Not so fast," said the buccaneer. He disappeared from sight. A moment later he reappeared. "The Captain says all right." He threw a long rope ladder down the side of the hull.

Steve laughed with relief.

"I guess we made it," said Jane.

Hunter maneuvered the dinghy against the hull and held its position. Steve started up the rope first, then Jane. Hunter remained in the boat until they had both climbed all the way over the rail. Meanwhile, the buccaneers above cranked down a couple of lines on a winch for Hunter to tie to the dinghy. After he had secured the lines, he ascended the rope ladder. By the time he was climbing over the rail, the buccaneers had already begun raising the dinghy.

"Always glad to have experienced buccaneers along," Captain Morgan was saying to Steve and Jane. "And this is your friend. You are?..."

"I am Hunter, Captain."

"Well met, Hunter, All right." Captain Morgan turned and glanced around.

"We're almost ready. You three give a hand where you see the need." He hurried away, calling to someone across the deck.

Some buccaneers were carrying crates of food below. Others were belaying kegs on deck with rope. Hunter saw a couple of men lifting a rolled sail and quickly joined them. Steve and Jane hurried to his side. Soon they were just part of the crew, working to get the ship under way.

20

Wayne had returned to the Old Laughing Lady before sundown. He had not yet told Captain Tomann that Roland was holding MC 2 hostage. The Captain had been busy all evening directing preparations for the upcoming voyage, so Wayne had easily avoided him. In the moonlight, Wayne stood on deck watching the Hungry Hawk a short distance away. He was sure that Roland had MC 2 on board there.

"A fine night for sailing, eh?" Captain Tomann came up next to him.

"Huh? Oh—it sure is, Captain. When do we leave?"

"We follow Captain Morgan out of port. The lookout is watching his ship."

"So, where are we going this time?"

"I wish I knew! That crafty old Morgan won't even tell his own crew, let alone the other captains."

"And you're following him anyway?"

"Aye, he's always done well by us. I'm trusting him to raid some fat sleepy Spanish town—like his raid on Puerto Principe in Cuba last year."

Wayne nodded.

"So what about our valuable friend? Did you get any leads on him in town?"

"No," said Wayne. "That is, not for sure. But I wonder if he is on one of the other ships on this voyage."

"Ah! Now that would be a boon. May hap we can grab him somewhere along the way, eh?" Captain Tomann laughed raucously and pounded him on the back before walking away.

Wayne was not sure why he had said what he had. He would probably need Captain Tomann's help to get MC 2, but he wanted to be cautious. Roland had betrayed his trust and he was certain that Captain Tomann was not above doing so as well.

Rita posed another problem. Wayne's earlier plan of trading Rita to Hunter for MC 2 was on hold for the moment—but if Hunter managed to get MC 2 before Wayne did, then it would still work. He saw that Captain Tomann was occupied elsewhere and quietly went below to see Rita.

Her quarters were still bolted on the outside. Wayne unbolted the door and knocked politely.

"Who is it?" Rita demanded.

"Wayne."

She unbolted the door from her side and opened it. She folded her arms. "How long are you going to hold onto me?"

"Well—I don't know. But I should come in."

She moved back and he closed the door. Then she walked all the way to the rear of the chamber, facing one of the small open windows. Through it, he could see the waterfront in the distance.

"Exactly what do you want, anyway?" She turned back to him again. "You really don't care about me one way or another, do you?"

"No, not really."

"Then what am I doing here?"

"Look, I don't want to hurt you or anyone else. I just want my robot back."

"Your robot—MC 2."

"That's right."

"I know you invented the Governor robots, but that doesn't make him yours."

"I think that's my business"

"I repeat, what do you want with me?"

"I'm not exactly sure. But I can't have you interfering with me. So for now, you'll have to stay here."

"Well, then, why are we still in port? I thought you said earlier that we were sailing soon."

"We're ready. Apparently we have to wait for a Captain Morgan to lead us out of port."

Her eyebrows went up. "Captain Henry Morgan?"

"I don't know his first name. I guess so."

"I knew he was here somewhere, of course," said Rita. "Well...let's see."

Summer, 1668. Of course—it's his famous raid on Portobelo."

"Where?"

"No, no." She shook her head. "Our destination is a secret. I can't let it get out. If it does, and the raid is foiled somehow, then we'll change history."

"I guess I don't have to know. I don't want to change history either."

"What did you come to see me about?"

Wayne paused. "I don't know. Maybe I wanted to make sure you were okay."

"To make sure your prisoner couldn't escape, you mean?" She turned away, looking out the window again.

"Well...like I said, I don't want to hurt you. I just want my robot back."

Captain Morgan's ship led the fleet of nine from the harbor. Steve stood by the rail with Jane and Hunter, watching the lights of Port Royal shrink in the distance and the lamps of the other ships follow them. When the fleet was safely out to sea and sailing south, most of Captain Morgan's crew went to sleep, leaving only the customary skeleton crew on night watch.

"Hunter," said Steve. "Can you pick out the Hungry Hawk?"

Hunter looked across the moonlit water at the other ships. "Yes, I see it."

"Is there any way you could sneak over there tonight and bring Rita back?"

"It is not impossible for me to swim that distance," said Hunter. "The Hungry Hawk is one of the ships closest to us. However, the risk and difficulty are too high. I will wait until we are anchored, preferably closer."

Steve nodded. "I guess I knew that. I just wanted to make sure."

"I also have to feel that you two are safe," said Hunter. "After what happened the last time we separated, I do not want to leave you unless I feel we can reunite without difficulty, especially now that the communicators are gone."

"What will you do if Rita is not fully cooperative when you find her?"

"She radioed me for help," said Hunter. "I believe she wants to rejoin us."

"I hope you're right," said Jane. "But I'm asking you as a roboticist. Can you bring her back against her will?"

"Normally, I could not," said Hunter. "She would give me instructions that I would have to obey. However, in the current circumstances, I can interpret the potential harm she may cause to our future as a First Law imperative."

"What if she puts up a real fight?" Steve asked. "And makes enough noise to bring trouble?"

"You mean, if she alerts her captors?"

"That's right."

"In that event, I would have to judge whether or not an even more immediate First Law imperative exists. This contingency is too complex to predict."

"In other words, you'll have to improvise."

"Yes."

"I wonder how long it will be before we anchor." Steve looked up at the stars.

"We're still going south, maybe a little to the southwest. I wonder where we're going."

"I do not have enough detailed history to know," said Hunter. "The data I stored from the city library focused on Jamaica and did not include this voyage. I hired Rita to provide this kind of historical data, which I could not foresee needing. I made a poor choice."

"She failed to keep to her agreement," said Jane. "That's her responsibility, not yours."

Steve gazed out at the other ships again. They were a silent, peaceful sight on a calm, warm night. For now he could see nothing to do but wait.

As before, Hunter remained awake next to Steve and Jane as they stretched out for the night.

At dawn, Steve rose to find that the ships were still sailing in a good wind. On the captain's orders, some of the buccaneers broke open crates and barrels of bread, cheese, rum, and fresh water and passed them out. Steve and Jane took their shares and moved away from the crowd, as usual.

"Ah! Good morning to you, Steve and John." Captain Morgan came up to them.

"Where's Hunter?"

Steve grinned and pointed upward. "He's up in the crow's nest. He volunteered to take a turn up there."

"Really?" Captain Morgan craned his neck to look. "Aye, I see him. I hope it's strong enough to hold him. He's a very big fellow."

"And his eyesight is surprisingly good." Steve grinned and took a bite out of his hunk of cheese.

"I don't expect he'll have much to see for a couple of days," said Captain Morgan. "But we must have someone up there, just in case."

"So," Steve said casually, looking at the other ships in the fleet. "Where are we headed, Captain?"

Captain Morgan laughed. "Not yet, my friend. Not yet. In a couple of days, granted fair weather, I shall call all the captains together in council. Then I will reveal our destination, but not before."

"I see the Hungry Hawk over there," said Steve, pointing to it with his tankard of drinking water. "We'd like to greet Captain Quinn again, if we get the chance. He sailed on that last voyage of ours."

"The time will come." Captain Morgan shrugged and moved on, calling to someone else.

"Why did you say that?" Jane asked.

"I wanted to remind him that we're buccaneers—that we belong."

"I wouldn't let him know we're interested in the Hungry Hawk." Jane paused to munch on a piece of bread. "We don't want him to know that we have our own agenda."

"You're right." Steve smiled, and nudged her playfully with his elbow. "You're learning more all the time."

"About what?"

"How to improvise."

Alone in her chamber, Rita paced anxiously. She wondered if Hunter and his team were anywhere nearby. For the first time, she was considering that she might really get herself killed in the seventeenth century. At the windows, she looked out at some of the other ships in the fleet.

So far, Captain Tomann had left her alone. She liked Roland and supposed that he was with the fleet somewhere. Maybe he would save her if he learned she was locked up.

Rita decided it was time to call Hunter again—if he was still in range of her communicator. First she went to the door and listened for footsteps. She might make excuses about talking to herself if someone heard her voice, but she would not be able to explain if they heard Hunter's. Then, just to make sure, she moved back to the rear of the room.

"Hunter. Rita calling."

"Hunter here. Are you well, Rita?"

"Yes—but where are you? Are you close?"

"Steve, Jane, and I are on board Captain Morgan's flagship. I will have to wait until we anchor before I can attempt taking you off the Old Laughing Lady, under present circumstances. However, if an emergency arises earlier, call me."

"We won't anchor for days," said Rita.

"How long will this leg of the voyage take?"

"I don't remember exactly. Let me think. At top speed in perfect wind, three or four days. Realistically, I would guess a week at the soonest; maybe longer—if the wind is a big problem, much longer. When we do anchor, it will only be for a short time. We'll stop first off the coast of Costa Rica."

"You know where we're going then. What will happen at Costa Rica?"

"Not very much. Captain Morgan will send longboat crews to shore for fresh water and any food they can find. He'll be meeting with his captains to give them our true destination. We're going to attack a city in Panama called Portobelo, near the modern city of Colon."

"Thank you, Rita. We will help you as soon as we can. Hunter out."

Rita sighed, wishing that he could help her right away. Still, knowing the team was nearby was reassuring. She gazed out the window again, watching the other ships.

Hunter passed the information he had learned from Rita to Steve and Jane as soon as he could. As Rita had predicted, the ships sailed for over a week.

Jane avoided the buccaneers, still worried that they would discover she was a woman. Hunter and Steve usually found chores the three of them could do by themselves. Anyone who began to work on a job was allowed to continue, as the assignments on the pirate ship were haphazard. They kept to themselves and the rest of the crew mostly left them alone. Even under the influence of their nightly rum, none of the buccaneers wanted trouble with someone who could lift, carry, and climb the way Hunter could.

On the eighth day out of port, the lookout shouted that land was visible to the south. As the buccaneers ran to the side to look, Hunter used the map in his stored data and correlated it with the duration, speed, and direction of their voyage. This confirmed to him that they had arrived off the shore of Costa Rica.

"The captains will meet after we anchor," Hunter said quietly to Steve and Jane. "But longboats will be sent ashore for supplies. It will be a good time for me to attempt reaching the Old Laughing Lady from here and I will feel more secure under the First Law if you two remain safely on board ship. So we should avoid being assigned to the longboats."

"We won't be close enough to drop anchor for most of the day," said Steve.

"But when the time comes, let's go below. I doubt anyone will care, but if anyone comes down, we'll look busy. We'll move crates around in the hold or something."

"Good."

At midafternoon, the fleet finally drew near enough to drop anchor offshore. Hunter glanced at Captain Morgan, who was eyeing the jungle-covered coast through a spyglass. Then Hunter turned to Steve and Jane.

"It is time, I think. Into the hold, quickly."

No one else was below. The three of them sat quietly on crates in the hot, dank air while the buccaneers on deck shouted and cheered. They were all anxious to get a break from the routine by rowing to land.

Hunter could tell what was happening by the sounds he heard. First the longboats were released from every ship on long lines, each one dropping into the sea with a splash. Then the buccaneers climbed down rope ladders, shouting to each other to hurry. Soon he could hear the oars splashing into the water as the longboats pulled away. For several minutes, he heard only the footsteps of the skeleton crew that remained on board.

"Captain Morgan is probably going to summon the captains to join him here now for his conference."

"How can he summon them?" Jane asked.

"With flags," said Steve. "But, look—the longboats are gone, so we can go up on deck again."

"All right," said Hunter. "But I cannot risk swimming to the Old Laughing Lady while the other captains are being rowed to this ship. I shall have to wait until they have arrived."

"That's right," said Steve. "We'll go up and wait."

No one on deck took any special notice of them when they emerged from the hold. The buccaneers who were still on board were standing by the rail, gazing at the shore. Captain Morgan stood with them, talking and pointing.

Hunter turned toward the other eight ships. Several longboats were already coming toward Morgan's ship first, on their way to the shore. That told Hunter the signaling had been completed already.

He moved to the seaward side of the ship and occupied his time by checking the firmness of belayed ropes and the tightness of knots. Steve and Jane did the same. Until the longboats left, they would simply pass the time quietly.

21

As Hunter pretended to work, he kept count of the other ship captains who came on board. When all eight had arrived, Captain Morgan took them below to his

quarters. Their longboats then headed across the gentle blue waves toward the shore.

"Time for me to go," he said quietly to Steve.

Steve looked around the deck. "No one is watching. But just in case they turn around, let's see... Jane, stand next to me and help me pull on this rope."

Jane and Steve pulled on a loose rope dangling from a pulley in the rigging above. All the rope did was slide through the pulley, but Hunter used their bodies as a screen as he moved to the rail. As silently as possible, he climbed over it and started down the side of the ship. His hearing told him that none of the buccaneers had noticed his departure.

Using tiny irregularities in the wood on the side of the ship as handholds and footholds, Hunter worked his way down the side just as he had climbed up the side of the Cadiz. Hunter worked his way to the waterline and slipped into the sea without a splash. The Old Laughing Lady was roughly fifty meters away, with some variation as the ships drifted on the radius of their anchor lines. In the moderate waves, a good human swimmer could make it easily. For Hunter, it would take virtually no effort at all.

Hunter swam the distance half a meter under the surface of the water. If anyone happened to look in his direction, he would be no more than a shadow of the sort that a large fish or a shark might make. At the same time, he was close enough to the surface for the tropical sunlight to beat down on him as he swam, replenishing his energy through the microscopic solar collectors on his skin where his clothing left it exposed. He arrived at the waterline of the Old Laughing Lady with only a little less energy than he had possessed when he had started his swim.

When he broke the surface of the water, he heard no sound of human activity on the ship. Cautiously, he began to climb up the hull. He hesitated at the rail, looking and listening again. Some buccaneers were dozing on the deck. A few others were gazing toward the shore. None noticed him.

Moving slowly and silently, Hunter moved up on deck, always behind crates, kegs, or rolled sails in order to stay hidden.

"Rita, Hunter calling," he radioed.

"Hunter!" She radioed back. "Is that you?"

"Yes. I am on deck, staying out of sight of crew members. Where are you?"

"I'm in one of the officer's quarters."

Hunter worked his way below, still alert for buccaneers, but encountered none. In the narrow hall, he saw that only one door was bolted from the outside. He unlocked it and heard another bolt move inside the door.

Rita opened it, smiling with relief. "Hunter, I can't tell you how embarrassed I am. I had no idea I was going to cause this much trouble. When I left, I just wanted to get a feel for the times and experience some of this history."

Hunter nodded noncommittally. "We should get away from here promptly."

"Hunter, I'm trying to apologize."

"I accept your apology," Hunter said blandly. "Please help the tam from this point."

"Of course—"

"Come on." Hunter was not angry at her in the human sense, but he was not sure how much he could trust her. At the very least, her judgment was flawed. For now, he simply wanted to reunite his entire team.

Hunter carefully led Rita up on deck, to the side of the ship that was away from the shore. Hunter could see a few buccaneers on some of the other ships walking around on deck, but none was paying any attention to the Old Laughing Lady. The buccaneers on the Lady were still either napping or watching the shore. Over their heads, signal flags snapped in the breeze, creating enough sound to camouflage Hunter's voice.

"Can you swim fifty meters?" Hunter whispered.

"Yes. But my clothes will weigh me down and I can't discard anything. I'll

need them all when I get to the other ship. So I won't be able to keep up with you."

"I will stay right with you, of course," said Hunter. "If you tire, I will carry you back."

"I see a little dinghy still on board here," said Rita. "We could row."

"We must avoid notice if possible," Hunter. "We will swim."

"What about, uh, sharks?"

"I saw none. Do you trust my judgment regarding the First Law of Robotics?"

"Yes."

"Then we should swim."

"All right."

Steve sat on a crate next to Jane, who was sitting on a keg. While they had been waiting, they had stacked up some empty crates to block the buccaneers' view of the rail where Hunter would come aboard, placing them near a rope ladder attached to the side with belaying pins. Then they watched Hunter swim toward them on his back while holding Rita in the lifeguard's across-chest carry. Some of the buccaneers on board were napping in the shade of the sails; others were still watching the shoreline from the opposite rail. None were looking toward Hunter; nor were they concerned with Steve and Jane.

When Hunter and Rita reached the ship, Steve quietly let down the rope ladder. He moved it hand over hand, making sure that the slight thumping of the ladder against the side of the ship attracted no attention. Rita came up first, breathing hard from exertion, and gave him a self-conscious smile. He nodded coolly and held up a hand for her to wait.

Jane looked around to see if anyone was watching. Then she motioned for Rita to come over the rail. Steve helped her.

"Squat down out of sight for a moment and get your breath back," said Steve. Rita ducked down by the pile of crates.

Hunter climbed over the rail, slowly and silently, and joined them. He kept his voice low. "Did anyone miss me?"

"No," said Jane. "They're all too busy waiting to see if their friends come back with fresh water and good food."

"The sun and wind will dry our clothes quickly," said Hunter. "Rita, we will keep you close to us and hidden from the others as much as possible."

Rita nodded.

"Someone is going to notice her sooner or later," said Steve. "We should say that she came back from shore on the wrong longboat. I don't think anybody will care. These buccaneers just want everyone to take a turn at the chores and to divide the loot fairly after a raid."

"That is reasonable," said Hunter. "Rita, what do you think of that?"

"It sounds plausible. But they better not see me till these clinging clothes dry out and get baggy again."

The ship captains came up on deck, holding rolled maps in their hands. They were talking and laughing among themselves. Steve stood up to watch. The napping buccaneers woke up, and those at the rail also turned.

"Gather 'round, mates," called Captain Morgan, waving to everyone. "We're off for Portobelo in Panama, the richest city in New Spain!"

The buccaneers looked at each other in surprise and cheered, but Steve felt they were less than truly enthusiastic. Captain Morgan began telling them all about the wealth to be found there. Steve knelt next to Rita.

"What's wrong with everybody? Why aren't they more excited about all the booty in Portobelo?"

"The trouble is, Portobelo is also the most strongly fortified and defended city in the Americas right now," said Rita.

"Really? What's it like?"

"It's situated on a river, a short distance inland from the river mouth. Every

man in the fleet has probably heard about it."

"Strongly fortified? In what way?"

"The harbor to Portobelo is guarded by three forts, one on each side of the entrance and one on a cliff overlooking the city. Any ships that sail within range of their cannons to attack will get smashed to pieces long before they can land;"

"Quiet," said Jane. "They're coming this way."

"Have a look, mates," called Captain Morgan, striding across the deck to the shoreward side of the ship. His captains and the buccaneers followed him.

"Look down the coast to the south from here. Portobelo lies less than two days' sail from here. When the men return from foraging this evening, we'll have a fine supper. Then we'll sail!"

Another chorus of cheers rose up, no stronger than before. Captain Morgan dismissed the captains, who boarded their longboats again to return to their ships. Then he saw Steve, Jane, and Hunter watching him. Rita had slipped around to the other side of the crates.

"So, Hunter," said Captain Morgan with a challenging grin. "Are you as fainthearted as my other men?"

"I have every confidence in you," said Hunter.

"Ah! That's what I like to hear. Steve, what about you, then? What do you say?"

"I say that you know more about this than any other man afloat," Steve said carefully. "But Portobelo will be tough to crack, won't it?"

"Not so tough, mate. Well, I've told my captains what we'll do, so it's no secret now. We're going to sail down to a creek I know of about twenty miles south of Portobelo. We'll anchor our ships there, and sneak up on Portobelo inland."

Steve glanced at Rita around the corner of the crates, out of Captain Morgan's sight. She gave him a slight nod. He turned back to Captain Morgan.

"Inland, huh?" Steve said.

"Aye, mate. We'll visit their back door." Captain Morgan winked and strolled away.

Rita moved again, to remain out of his sight.

"Rita," Hunter said quietly. "Do you know where MC 2 is now? Is he with the fleet at all?"

"I don't know for sure," said Rita. "But Wayne said I was a hostage. I asked him what he wanted with me and he said he would trade me to you in exchange for MC 2 and a promise not to interfere with him. He kept saying he didn't want to hurt me. He only wanted his robot back." She hesitated. "You know, when he and Captain Tomann first locked me up, Wayne was very forceful—he seemed to know what he was doing. The last time he talked to me, I got the feeling he wasn't too sure anymore."

Steve looked at Hunter. "So Wayne doesn't have MC 2 yet. But MC 2 could be anywhere."

"Maybe Roland has him again," said Hunter. "Roland knows that MC 2 will follow his instructions. Maybe they are together on a ship in the fleet."

"Rita, how well does this voyage go?" Steve asked. "Does Morgan do okay?"

"Yes, he does very well."

"I am continuing to radio MC 2 occasionally," said Hunter. "No response, of course, or I would have told you about it. Still, we should turn our attention to the Hungry Hawk again."

"Do you want to swim over there and look for him?" Steve asked.

"No. The captains will be back on their ships soon. So will the foraging crews and I do not want to be caught sneaking around over there while you three are still on board here. We could all row there, but we might not find MC 2 on the ship after all. Then we would still have to answer to the buccaneers for our presence if they found us there."

"They wouldn't take kindly to that," said Rita. "Treachery is common among buccaneers and they aren't too patient when they believe they've found it." "I understand," said Hunter. "For now, I will have to wait. I believe that my next opportunity will arrive when we anchor south of Portobelo."

The foraging crews brought back as many birds and bananas as they could carry on the longboats, along with the kegs refilled with fresh water. On land, it would not have been a remarkable meal, but after a week on shipboard, the buccaneers considered it a welcome change. As the sun went down, they roasted the birds on deck. Captain Morgan broke out some carefully measured rations of the rum that had been kept in reserve. They ate and drank and sang, preparing themselves for the fight that would be coming soon.

Hunter, Steve, and Jane kept Rita away from the buccaneers at first. As twilight fell, and the buccaneers drank more, the team brought Rita closer to them. They shared quietly in the meal and none of the buccaneers took any special notice of Rita.

Hunter observed that Captain Morgan drank little himself and had served rum rations that were quite modest. The reason became clear later that night, when the captain used signal lanterns to order the fleet to sail on the night tide. The crew was in condition to respond, and Hunter saw the lights of the other ships follow them.

The voyage remained uneventful until the fleet anchored once again, two days later. They stopped off a jungle-covered coast that was little different from that of Costa Rica. As before, Hunter compared his internal map with the direction and speed of the ship and confirmed that they were off the coast of Panama.

The sun blazed low in the west. Captain Morgan gave orders to row supplies and crew members ashore in the longboats. Some buccaneers on every ship eagerly began lowering the boats. Others ran to fetch crates of weapons or kegs of gunpowder and shot.

"Hunter," said Steve, quietly. "What shall we do?"

"I am radioing MC 2 again, but he is still not answering. I am not sure what to do. Rita, what will happen next?"

"Unloading all the ships will take several hours. Then Captain Morgan will leave a substantial rear guard camped on shore to protect the ships from any unforeseen threat. He will take the majority of the buccaneers north up the coast, to the mouth of a river. Portobelo is a short distance upstream on the river."

"Our best move will depend on MC 2," said Hunter. "If he remains on the Hungry Hawk, then we will have to go there. If he goes ashore, then we should too. Or maybe he is not with the fleet at all."

"The Hungry Hawk is lowering its longboat," said Jane, pointing. "Hunter, can you make out any individuals on deck over there?"

Hunter looked, magnifying his vision. Most of the crew was on deck, and two of the small figures by the rail were familiar. "Yes! I can see both Roland and MC 2. They are preparing to go ashore. We will do so too."

"Let's get to work, then," said Steve. "I think our best chance to get MC 2 is coming up."

The team joined the buccaneers who were loading supplies into longboats. As each longboat was filled, a buccaneer would sit down with each oar and begin rowing away. By then, longboats from all the anchored ships were heading for land.

Hunter and his team eventually took their turn joining buccaneers in the crew of a longboat. Hunter sat in the stern, with Rita next to him and Steve and Jane behind them. The waves were moderate, and the wind helped carry them as they rowed.

While Hunter drew on his oar, he kept an eye on Roland and MC 2 in the

distance. He had not yet seen Wayne leave the Old Laughing Lady. Wayne, of course, might remain on board during the entire raid on Portobelo. Soon Roland and MC 2 were also rowing toward shore as part of a longboat crew. Hunter saw that they would not arrive for several minutes after his own boat. Other buccaneers had already landed, beaching their boats and unloading them again.

When Hunter felt the bottom of the boat scrape the sand, he and the others jumped out into the surf to lighten the load. The buccaneers in the front took the bowline and pulled; Hunter and his team pushed the stern until the longboat ran aground again, this time in the breaking surf. As the water splashed all around them, they began to unload the crates and kegs.

When the longboat was empty, the crew pulled it completely out of the water and tied it securely to a tree with the others. Most of the buccaneers had broken into the kegs and were taking shares of gunpowder and shot for themselves. Hunter drew his team aside, unnoticed.

"Rita, I want your opinion about buccaneer values," said Hunter.

"What do you mean?"

"Suppose that all four of us were to jump on MC 2, so that I can trigger our immediate return to our own time. Would the buccaneers join the brawl? If so, I would not be able to return us without the danger of taking some of the buccaneers, too. I cannot risk that."

"I can't tell," said Rita. "They're just too unpredictable. No ship captains have come ashore yet, so they aren't here to give orders. And they've known Roland longer than they've known any of us."

"Then we cannot risk rushing MC 2," said Hunter.

"Hasn't MC 2 seen you already?" Steve asked. "Won't he just take off into the jungle when he lands?"

"I do not believe he has that choice," said Hunter. "I am certain that Roland has once again taken over control of MC 2 under Second Law instructions. Since those override the Third Law imperative for MC 2 to save himself, he has to obey Roland rather than flee from us."

"Wait a minute," said Jane. "What if Roland hasn't told him he can't run away?"

"If he runs, I can catch him," said Hunter. "It may be best for us if he does. In that event, you three should follow us as best you can. I do not expect a problem with your safety if you do not participate in assaulting Roland; in any event, I will be very close. Rita, turn on your lapel pin now so that I can hear whatever takes place around you. I will return if the First Law requires it."

"All right," said Steve. "Suppose you chase MC 2 into the trees and catch him. Then we have to catch up before the others do?"

"Yes. If we can accomplish this, then I will take all of us back to our time before the buccaneers come within the range of the belt device."

"Roland just saw us all," said Rita, switching on her pin. "He looked over this way."

Hunter turned to look. Roland and MC 2 were now helping push their longboat through the surf to beach it. They were landing about twenty yards down the shore, on the other end of the growing line of longboats.

"We cannot surprise him now," said Hunter. "Maybe I can distract Roland," said Rita. "With your permission, Hunter."

"Come on, Hunter," said Steve. "Let's go confront them."

Steve plunged first through the crowd of buccaneers who were preparing their weapons for the attack on Portobelo. A few of them glanced up, but paid no real attention to him as he passed. He didn't know exactly what he was going

to do, but he had worked with Hunter long enough to know that Hunter preferred to operate with a fixed plan, and they didn't have one. Steve didn't want to miss the chance to get MC 2 somehow.

Steve stopped on the edge of the water just in front of the longboat that was being pulled up. He stood with his hands on his hips, striking as belligerent a pose as he could. Roland looked up at him.

"Stay close," Roland said to MC 2. He left the longboat, followed by MC 2, and waded toward Steve. The rest of the crew stopped struggling with the longboat to watch.

"Steve, what are you doing?" Jane whispered, coming up behind him.

"I'm not sure." Steve spoke without taking his eyes off Roland. "Just tell Hunter to focus on MC 2."

"I heard you," Hunter said quietly, on Steve's left. "You are not in danger?"

"You'll be close, if I am," said Steve. "Just get MC 2, will you? First things first."

"And what do you gentlemen want?" Roland demanded. He waded out of the surf and stopped a short distance from Steve. Behind him, the rest of the longboat crew remained in the water, watching warily. "Something from me, may hap?" Steve couldn't think of anything to say.

"Roland," said Rita, stepping forward. "We've been friends. Let's talk about this."

Hunter walked slowly around Roland, toward MC 2, who was still standing in the breaking surf.

"This is between us and your friend, there," Steve said finally. "We aren't concerned with you."

"I happen to like Shorty, here," said Roland, with a mocking grin. "He's quite a friend. Very loyal and uncommonly strong for his size. Funny—he just loves doing whatever I tell him. Now what's your business with him?"

Steve watched as Hunter suddenly leaped into the surf toward MC 2 and took hold of his arm. Roland saw the move belatedly and jumped away, toward Rita. Before Steve could react, Roland slipped an arm around her throat and whipped a dagger out of his sash with his other hand.

"None of you make a move!" Roland backed to one side, so that he could see Hunter as well as Steve.

"Stand back, Hunter." Steve drew his sword. "The First Law says you can't risk making him mad."

Hunter hesitated, studying Roland carefully.

In the same moment, however, the other buccaneers from Roland's longboat shouted and ran forward, drawing their swords or daggers. Hunter released MC 2, but both flung themselves at the buccaneers; they clearly had to save Steve and Rita from immediate harm, ignoring all other considerations.

"Roland!" Rita struggled to get free. "How can you do this to me?"

"Face me, coward," Steve yelled. "Stop hiding behind her!" As he had hoped, Roland flung Rita aside, dropped his dagger, and drew his rapier. Behind Roland, Hunter and MC 2 had managed to trip or wrestle the buccaneers into the crashing surf, delaying them all without harming any of them. They had their hands full, however; Steve could not expect any help from them.

"Hah! Avast, then!" Roland sneered angrily, twirling his blade toward Steve. The buccaneers from the other longboats had stopped their preparations to watch, but did not interfere.

Fighting down panic, Steve raised his own blade. He blocked a couple of feints from Roland, backing up with each stroke. Roland was quick and fluid.

"Stand and fight, yourself." Roland laughed, feinting and slashing the air playfully.

Steve parried and backed up again. He was nowhere near Roland's equal at fencing.

"Jane—now!" Rita yelled suddenly. She and Jane ran toward Roland from behind

and simply tackled him. All three hit the soft ground. Steve leaped forward and snatched away Roland's sword with his free hand. Then, as Rita and Jane sat on his back, Steve placed the point of his sword against Roland's nose. "Don't move. Hunter! Can you get back here?" Hunter rose from the water, holding a buccaneer in each hand by the waistbands of their knee breeches. He tossed them both down onto the rest of the crowd of buccaneers in the water, where they all rolled and tumbled in the breakers. Then he pulled out MC 2 by one arm. "Coming, Steve!" He strode out of the surf, pulling MC 2 after him. "Let him up," Steve said to Rita and Jane. They got up quickly. Roland glared at Steve, not moving. Hunter ran up to them with MC 2. "Into the forest, out of their sight," Hunter said on the run, passing them. "Get up and back away," Steve said to Roland, walking backward. "Don't follow us."

Roland hesitated, watching Hunter, clearly more afraid of Hunter than of Steve. The buccaneers who had been thrown into the surf by Hunter were stumbling out to collapse on the ground, sputtering and coughing. They had little fight left in them after being rolled in the breakers repeatedly. Hunter rushed MC 2 into the dense tropical forest, glancing back over his shoulder to make sure that Steve was still in control of the situation. When Rita and Jane had run after Hunter, Steve finally turned and ran too. The trees and brush were so heavy that, in a few moments, the buccaneers were no longer in sight.

"Remain with us," Jane said to MC 2, between hard breaths. "Make no attempt to interfere with our plans or escape from us. Acknowledge."

"Acknowledged," said MC 2.

"We have to hurry," said Steve.

"Jane, Steve, Rita," said Hunter. "Please drop anything you have that you acquired in this time." He untied his sash and let it fall with the cutlass it held.

"What about the communicators we lost in the sea?" Steve asked, tossing aside the two swords in his hands. "We certainly can't retrieve them. Are they going to be a problem?"

"Anything can be," said Hunter. "However, they are unlikely to cause a problem. They lie off the coast of Jamaica and the salt and water pressure have probably destroyed them already. If they ever wash ashore, they will be nonfunctional debris."

Steve nodded.

"I hear the others coming through the brush now," said Hunter. "Roland has regained his courage. Is everyone ready?"

Steve gave him a quick nod. Jane and Rita had discarded their sashes and daggers. Hunter triggered the device that would return them to their own time.

Steve instantly found himself sitting in the same dark, confined sphere from which they had left, huddled against Hunter and Jane. They were back in Room F-12 of the Bohung Institute in Mojave Center. Hunter opened the unit and helped each of them climb out.

MC 2 got out and stood motionless next to Hunter, waiting for further instructions.

Ishihara was still standing in the room. "Welcome back, Hunter. You were successful, I see."

Yes. Dr. Nystrom is not here?"

"No."

"You were instructed to stop him."

"He has not come here during the two minutes since you left," said Ishihara.

"Really?" Steve looked at Hunter. "Maybe he's timing his return for quite a while later."

"He may have guessed I would have someone waiting here now," said Hunter. "But this could be a problem."

"Let's get MC 2 safely joined up with MC 1 in your office," said Steve. "Then we can worry about Wayne Nystrom."

"Good idea," said Hunter.

"We'll change out of our period costumes first," said Jane.

As before, they changed clothes in turn in the other room. Hunter called for a Security detail to drive them to MC Governor's office. The trip was uneventful. Hunter closed the office door behind them and then turned to MC 2.

"You know MC 1 of course," said Hunter.

"Of course."

"Jane, please give them Second Law instructions to control them."

"You will both do as Hunter says," said Jane.

"Acknowledged," said MC 2.

"Stand with MC 1."

MC 2 did so.

"Well, that's two of them," said Steve. "Now what?"

"I'd like to say something," said Rita.

"Go ahead," said Hunter.

"I apologize for running off and fouling up everything. I wanted to see the sights and I didn't think I would cause any trouble. But I romanticized my history—as a historian, I should never have done that. I was so excited about being back in that time and place that I...forgot myself. And I fell for Roland, I must admit. But in the end, he reminded me: he was just another cutthroat buccaneer, the product of a nasty, violent life. I guess my history has really come alive. Books can't really do that. I thought they could, but they can't." She sighed, then shrugged helplessly.

"You still helped," said Jane.

"That is true," said Hunter. "And we were ultimately successful."

"You and Jane saved me from Roland's sword," said Steve. "Don't forget about that. Thanks—to both of you."

"Well—you're welcome." Rita smiled awkwardly. "I think my role here is finished, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Hunter. "Thank you. Your fee will be paid in full."

"Now, wait—I'm not sure I deserve it."

"I will arrange it," said Hunter. "If you and Jane had not saved Steve, we might all be back there even now."

"Well—thanks. Goodbye." Rita slipped out, closing the door behind her.

"Hunter," said Jane. "Have you accessed the news again, like you did after our first mission? What happened to the nuclear explosion in Jamaica that occurred shortly before we left?"

"I have been monitoring the news," said Hunter. "No mention has been made of any such event."

"Ha! We did it!" Steve grinned.

"We have a new problem, however," Hunter said soberly.

"What is it?" Jane looked at him in alarm. "Another one?"

"In the fifteen minutes since we returned, I have picked up preliminary reports of a nuclear explosion in Germany."

"Oh, no," said Jane.

"I have the coordinates that were used by all the component robots still at large," said Hunter. "However, I feel we should take the German mission next. Explosions at other sites have not occurred yet."

"Is this one in Germany more important?" Steve asked skeptically.

"All such explosions are very important, of course," said Hunter. "However, the trouble may spread very quickly from this one. It has taken place in western Germany, just east of the Rhine, in a heavily populated area with advanced industry. Over the past centuries, a great deal of international

animosity developed there, much of it leading to war. Right now, a few news analysts are concerned that terrorists may be attempting to disrupt world peace."

"And because of the destruction, the First Law is pressuring you to handle this one now," said Jane.

"Yes," said Hunter. "As before, however, I must search for a historian familiar with the culture we will visit. In the meantime, I suggest that you two have a good dinner and a good night's sleep."

"Good idea," said Jane. "Back in 1668, it was evening. That's why I'm ready for dinner."

"Me, too," said Steve. "But drop the suspense, Hunter, and tell us—where do we go next? And when?"

"A place called Teutoburger Forest," said Hunter. "In A.D. 9, during the golden age of the Roman Empire."