

# Tara and the Gold Robbers

By Charles S. Strong



**I**N order to carry on their means of living in the Pirate Stronghold on one of the satellites of Venus, the men and women of Haneesh's band frequently visited nearby planets to collect tribute of gold and precious metals. Tara, Robin and Malo often went on journeys of this kind. One day Haneesh called the beautiful Tara into his quarters and said:

"We are having trouble with one of the black satellites. It is said that there are robbers who are stealing the tribute from the ships that are trying to bring it to us. I don't know whether this is true or not. Perhaps the colonists are merely trying to avoid payment. Look into it, will you?"

Tara accepted the task and immediately summoned Robin and Malo. The two men were more than enthusiastic about the expedition, for they had been inactive for quite a while. They climbed aboard their space ship, checked their weapons and fixed their course for the offending satellite.

Once or twice on the way across space the visiscreen buzzed to inform them of nearby vessels, but none of them made any attempt to interfere. Finally they arrived at Sixta, the satellite, and the chief of the village immediately met them.

Tara greeted him pleasantly, then said:

"We have come for the gold

tribute. Is it ready?"

"It is ready," replied the chief. "but you will never get back to Venus with it. We have tried to send it three times, and each time the gold robbers have captured the ship and stolen the gold."

"Don't worry about that," Tara declared. "I think we can trick these fellows. Once they have been defeated they will not be too anxious to hamper us in the future."

**T**HE chief issued his orders and the gold ore and gold-bearing sands were brought and loaded aboard. Tara indicated several bulkheaded rooms in the bottom of the hold of the space ship. The little space cars which served as life boats in case of accident to the big space craft were suspended beneath the holds.

When the storage space was properly loaded, Tara and her companions bade good by to the Sixta natives and headed their big rocket ship back into the spaceways. Tara and Robin sat beside Malo as he handled the craft and then the space-pilot said:

"I think we're in for trouble already."

He flicked a switch. The visiscreen lighted up, and on the horizon they were able to see three large ships looming up. Robin blasted off the signal guns as a warning. Tara left her place and checked on her sharp ray-sword. Malo's

bull-whip flipped as he checked its sinuous length. Then a sharp, clear voice came into the room and said:

"Flight is impossible. Our ships are much faster and much better armed than yours. Stand by to surrender your gold."

Tara laughed, then her deft fingers went to several valves and Robin shouted:

"What are you doing?"

"I've turned on the hydrators," the girl replied. "I'm turning water into the storage holds."

"That won't do us any good," Robin insisted. "It will make our cargo that much heavier. We'll lose speed, and then these robbers will surely overtake us."

"Don't worry about that," Tara declared. "Malo, you can take this ship all over the sky. We'll try to trick them."

**M**ALO followed his orders and put the space ship through all sorts of maneuvers. Robin and Tara found it necessary to hold on tightly to the metal handgrips, the ship really went through some erratic gymnastics. But all of their efforts were fruitless. The three robber ships closed in until finally they had the pirate craft in the center of a great triangle.

Warning shots came from the three ships. Tara looked in the visiscreen and finally saw the face of Gonda, the captain of the Gold Robbers.

"Ha," he said, "so it is Tara. This will make my victory that much sweeter. You can take a message back to Haneesh from Gonda. You may tell him that he is no longer supreme on the spaceways."

Malo snarled, then turned to Robin. "Perhaps we cannot prevent them from boarding us," he said. "But at least I can mark him with my lash so that he will not sneer at us again."

"I have a sweeter revenge," Tara declared. "Set up the secret force fields. I think we can show Gonda that we are too clever for him."

"But what will the secret force fields do?" Robin asked.

"They will prevent Gonda from destroying the ship. When he has come aboard and finds the ship abandoned he will try to destroy it. The ship will not come apart. Later we may be able to recover it."

Robin and Malo didn't know what was in Tara's mind, but they were willing to trust her ingenuity. A few moments later there was a jolting impact as one of the three robber ships attached space grapnels and several armed robbers came through the hatchways to take command of the ship. Gonda was in the lead.

"Greetings, Tara," he said. "You are wise to surrender. My men and I will be glad to have this craft of yours. I am going to set you and your fellows adrift in the space cars. Perhaps you will be able to get back to Haneesh with my message, or maybe you will be able to disappear in Space."

**R**OBIN and Malo were chafing for action but Tara said nothing that might be construed as an urge to fight. Instead she dropped down the escape hatch and into one of the little space cars. Robin and Malo followed and took their places. The de-magnetisers were released and amid the laughter of Gonda and his men the three life boats were set adrift.

Tara whirled her ship out into space. Robin and Malo followed. They kept in communication with each other through limited wave-length transmitters and receivers. They moved off into the distance until the four space ships were mere dots in the infinity between the planets.

Then the three small ships rendezvoused and set their receivers to the wave length of Gonda and his pirates. Tara chuckled when she heard the robber chieftain's wild roar.

"We've been tricked," he shouted. "There's nothing in those cargo holds except dirt

—wet dirt!"

Robin and Malo looked at the girl in the third space car. Then Robin adjusted his microphone and asked:

"Did those settlers trick us?"

"No," laughed Tara. "If you fellows will look down in the bottom of your space cars you'll find that you are seated on cushions of gold dust. When I turned the water into the cargo holds and Malo started running away from the robbers and performing his acrobatics, the holds became giant rocker sluice-boxes. All of the gold was washed out of the dirt and settled into the life cars which were suspended under the holds."

Robin and Malo chuckled now, too. Tara indeed knew the way to defeat her competitors. When other pirates heard how Gonda had been tricked by Tara, he would lose his claim to leadership.

This proved to be the case when Tara and her companions returned to their space ship, after the gold robbers had rocketed away to their hideout in the outer star belt.

