

## Long Live the Kejwa (1956)

A great deal happened to me, professionally, between the publication of "Yokel With Portfolio" in the autumn of 1955 and the appearance of this one seven months later. The most important development was the arrival in New York City, where I was living then, of one Randall Garrett.

Garrett, a charming, roguish fellow seven or eight years older than I was, came from Texas but had been living in the Midwest, working as a chemist and writing science fiction on the side, in the early 1950s. He was a natural storyteller and had a good grasp both of science and of the traditions of science fiction, and very quickly he sold a dozen stories or so to most of the major markets, including two excellent novelets ("The Waiting Game," 1951, and "The Hunting Lodge," 1954) to John W. Campbell's *Astounding*, one of the leading magazines of the field. But like too many science-fiction writers Garrett had an unfortunate weakness for the bottle, which led early in 1955 to the end of his marriage and the loss of his job; and then the friends in Illinois with whom he had taken refuge wearied of his wayward ways and suggested he move along. That spring he packed up his few possessions and a box of unfinished manuscripts and headed for New York to establish himself as a full-time science-fiction writer.

One of the few people he knew in New York was Harlan Ellison, who had come from the Midwest a year before Garrett with the same goal in mind. Harlan and I were close friends, and at my suggestion he had taken a room next door to me in the seedy Manhattan residence hotel where I was living during my college years, on West 114th Street, a couple of blocks from the Columbia campus. It was a place inhabited by a sprinkling of undergraduates, an assortment of aging graduate students, a few aspiring writers like Harlan and me, some very aged ladies living on pensions, and an odd collection of down-on-their-luck characters of no apparent profession. When he reached New York, Garrett phoned Ellison, who was still meeting only frustration in his attempts to break into print. Harlan told him about our hotel, and very suddenly we had him living down the hall from us. Almost immediately thereafter Garrett and I went into partnership as a sort of fiction factory.

He and I could scarcely have been more different in temperament. Randall was lazy, undisciplined, untidy, untrustworthy, and alcoholic. I was a ferociously hard worker, ambitious, orderly, boringly respectable and dignified, and, though I did (and do) have a fondness for the occasional alcoholic beverage, I was (and am) constitutionally unable to drink very much without getting sick. But we did have one big thing in common: we both were deeply versed in the tropes of science fiction and intended to earn our livings entirely by writing science fiction. We had the same agent, too. Furthermore, we had complementary sets of skills: Garrett's education had been scientific, mine literary. He was good at the technological side of s-f, and also was a skillful constructor of story plots. I, though still a beginning writer, was already showing superior stylistic abilities and the knack of creating interesting characters. I was tremendously productive, too, able to turn out a short story in a single sitting, several times a week. Garrett was a swift writer too, but only when he could stay sober long enough to get anything done. It occurred to him that if we became collaborators, my discipline and ambition would be strong enough to drive both of us to get a great deal of work done, and his more experienced hand as a writer would help me overcome the neophyte's flaws in my storytelling technique that had kept me from selling stories to any but the minor magazines. And so we set up in business together. (Harlan, having not yet reached a professional level of writing ability, remained on the outside, somewhat to his displeasure.)

Garrett was a man of grandiose ideas, and so he and I aimed for the top right away: we meant to sell a novel to Campbell's *Astounding*. As soon as my third year of college was over that June, he and I began plotting a three-part serial built around one of Campbell's favorite formulas, the superior Earthman who helps benighted alien beings improve their lot in life. Since Campbell was of Scottish ancestry, Garrett suggested that we make our hero a Scot, one Duncan MacLeod. I cheerfully agreed. We worked it all out in great detail, and then, to my surprise, Garrett told me that we were going downtown

to Campbell's office to pitch the idea in person.

I had never expected anything like that. I thought we would let our agent handle the marketing of the project. But Garrett, a supremely gregarious man, believed in personal contact with his editors; and so one summer morning he swept me off to Campbell's office, where I was introduced as a brilliant new talent with whom he would be collaborating thenceforth. We pitched our story; Randall did most of the talking, but I added a thoughtful bit of Ivy League eloquence every now and then. Campbell loved the idea. He had a few improvements to suggest, though—in fact, by lunchtime he had transformed our story beyond all recognition. Then he told us to go home and write, not a novel, but a series of novelets, first, and then a novel. I went back to West 114th Street in a daze.

Of course, I never thought anything was going to come out of this. Me, not even old enough to vote yet, selling a series of novelets to John W. Campbell? But we sat down and wrote the first in our series almost instantly, sticking the joint pseudonym "Robert Randall" on it, and Campbell bought it on the spot, reading it in his office before our eyes, in August, 1955. I was so stunned at the idea that I had sold something to *Astounding* that I couldn't sleep that night.

Garrett didn't want us to stop there. It was the personal touch that did it, he was convinced. Editors wanted to put faces behind the manuscripts. So we needed to visit all the other editors, too—Howard Browne of *Amazing*, Bob Lowndes of *Future*, Larry Shaw of the new magazine *Infinity*, etc. Later in August, Garrett and I attended the World Science Fiction Convention in Cleveland, where I met William L. Hamling, who had bought two stories from me that year and let me know now that he'd like me to send him some others. Garrett was right: in the small world that was science fiction in 1955, the personal touch did do it. On the strength of my collaborative sale to Campbell's *Astounding*, coming on top of my scattering of sales to a few lesser magazines, I had acquired enough professional plausibility to find the doors of the editorial offices opening for me, and Garrett's prodding had brought me inside.

Bob Lowndes, who had already bought a story from me the year before, seemed glad to meet me, and by way of our shared love of classical music struck up a friendship right away. He had high tastes in science fiction, and would buy many more stories from me, usually the ones I had tried and failed to sell to the better-paying magazines. Browne, about whom I will have more to say a little further on, also gave me a ready welcome. He ran a different sort of magazine, featuring simple action tales staff-written by a little stable of insiders—Milton Lesser, Paul W. Fairman, and a couple of others. It happened that in the summer of 1955 Browne had two vacancies in his stable, and he offered the jobs to Garrett and me the day we showed up in his office. So long as we brought him stories every month and maintained a reasonable level of competence he would buy everything we wrote, sight unseen.

That struck me as almost as improbable as my selling novelets to John Campbell. Here I was, a kid still in college who had sold less than a dozen stories, and a cagy old pro like Howard Browne was offering me what amounted to a job, with a guaranteed rate of pay, to keep his science-fiction magazine supplied with copy!

I didn't hesitate. I had a story called "Hole in the Air" that Scott Meredith had returned to me because he didn't think he could sell it to anyone. I handed the manuscript to Howard Browne on an August day and he bought it. The following week Garrett and I batted out a novelet, "Gambler's Planet," and he bought that too. We did another for him in September, "Catch a Thief," and I sold two stories to Bob Lowndes, too, and another novelet to Campbell, and then more to Browne, and so on. In the first five months of the Garrett partnership I made a phenomenal 26 story sales—some of them collaborations, but many of them solo stories, for with Randall's help I had acquired the momentum for a career of my own.

One thing I did, as I grew more confident of my relationship with Howard Browne, was to feed him some of the unsold stories that I had written in the pre-Garrett days, when I was simply sending them off to Scott Meredith and hoping that he would find a market for them somewhere. In June of 1955 I had written "Long Live the Kejwa," built around a classic theme that I had encountered in my anthropology class. Toward the end of the year, since it was still unsold, I asked Scott to send it over to Browne as part of my quota of stories for the month. It was published in the July, 1956 issue of *Amazing Stories*

under Howard's title, "Run of Luck," which was, perhaps, a better title than mine. But as I restore it to print here after five decades in limbo I prefer to use the original title for it.

That July 1956 *Amazing* provided another milestone for me in that dizzying year, because "Run of Luck" was one of three stories that I had in the issue. Its companions were "Stay Out of My Grave," another early unsold story that I had salvaged by selling to Browne, and "Catch a Thief," a Garrett collaboration published under the byline of "Gordon Aghill." Fifteen months earlier it was an awesome thing for me to get any story published, and now here they were showing up in threes in a single issue!

\* \* \*

Steve Crayden growled in anger as the dials on the control panel spun crazily around, telling him that the little cruiser was out of control.

He frowned and glanced at the screen. There was only one thing to do—crash-land the ship on the tiny planet looming up just ahead. It was the lousiest twist possible—after he had lied and cheated and killed to get off the prison planet of Kandoris, here he was being thrown right back into cold storage again. Maybe not behind bars, this time, but being marooned on a little bit of rock was just as much an imprisonment as anything.

He brought the stolen ship down as delicately as he could. It maintained a semblance of a landing orbit until a hundred meters above planetfall, and then swung into a dizzying tailspin and burrowed into the soft ground.

Crayden, jarred but unhurt, crawled out of the confused tangle of the control cabin and checked the dials. Air 68, Nitro, 21, Oxy. Water normal.

At that, he smiled for the first time since the ship had conked out; things looked different all of a sudden. This new place had possibilities, he saw now. And any place with possibilities beckoned to a born opportunist like Crayden.

He climbed out of the ship and smelled the warm air, and shook his head happily. I'll make the most of it, he told himself. If Fate wanted to kick him in the teeth again, that was O.K. He'd bull his way through it. If he was stuck here—and the way the ship looked, he was—then he'd have a good time of it.

He looked around. It was almost a perfect Earth-type planet, probably uninhabited, not listed on any of the charts in his stolen ship, and it was a nice cozy place for him to stay. Things could have been worse, Crayden thought. There'd be hunting and fishing, he hoped, and he'd build a small cabin near a waterfall. I'll make out, he said, as if in defiance of whatever Power had let him escape from one prison and then had thrown him immediately into another.

He had left so quickly that he hadn't taken anything from his prison-barracks on Kandoris. He returned to the ship, and a quick check revealed a thought-converter, somewhat jarred by the crash, and a rescue-beam radiator. No weapons were to be found.

That didn't stop him. I'll make a bow and arrow, he decided. I'll go real primitive. He tucked the damaged thought-converter under one arm, the rescue-beam radiator under another, and climbed out.

The patrol won't ever use that one again, he thought as he looked at the wrecked cruiser. Its nose was buried in ten feet of mud at the side of a lake, and the ship was bent almost in half. The tail jets were all but ruined.

I'm here for good, he decided. But it's going to be a picnic. It better be.

He turned to survey the little world.

The gravity was about the same as that of Kandoris, which meant Earth-normal. He found that out as soon as he took his first step. He had expected to go sailing twenty feet, but he moved only the Earth-type two or three feet at a stride. That meant unusual density, heavy mass, since the little planet's diameter couldn't have been much over 700 miles. He had landed on a freak world. He scanned it some more.

But it didn't look like a freak. It might have been a lost corner of Earth. The sky was just a shade off-blue, and the sun was a trifle reddish, but the soil was brown, the grass was green, and the air was

fresh, clean, and good to breathe. He was standing in a valley, by the side of a long, deep-looking blue lake. Small mountains, almost hills, hemmed in the valley, and heavy clusters of trees sprouted on the hills. A little stream wound down out of the nearest hill and trickled into the lake.

Crayden felt a warm glow. In a way, this was the best thing that could have happened. Instead of going back to the old con games, the shabby routines he'd lived on, he'd have a new, fresh life beginning. He grinned. It was a talent he had, making the most of what seemed like a rough break. It was the way to stay alive.

He started off to follow the stream. After walking a few steps, he stopped.

"I name this planet Crayden," he shouted. "I take possession of it in the name of Steve Crayden."

"Crayden," came back the faint echo from the hill.

The effect pleased him. "I hereby proclaim myself King Stephen of Crayden!"

The echo replied, "Of Crayden."

Thoroughly satisfied, the new king began to trudge along the side of the stream, carrying the damaged thought-converter under one arm, the rescue-beam radiator under the other.

He followed the stream several hundred meters up into the hills. Looking ahead, he noted what seemed to be a thin trail of smoke curling into the sky. Natives?

He stopped and watched the smoke. The first thought that came to him was to hang back cautiously, but then he shook his head and kept moving. This was his world, and he was going to keep the upper hand.

They saw him first, though, and before he was aware of anything, ten blue-skinned men had stepped out of the woods and were kneeling at his feet.

"Kejwa!" they shouted. "Kejwa, Kejwa!"

Crayden was too startled to react. He stood there frozen, staring down. They were all burly humanoids, perfectly manlike as far as he could tell, except for the bright blue skin. They were clad in loincloths and beads, and were obviously friendly. Crayden relaxed; King Stephen had found his subjects.

Gingerly he touched the nearest native with the tip of his toe. The alien sprang up instantly and faced him. The man was well over six feet tall, and powerfully built.

"Kejwa endrak jennisij Kejwa," the native jabbered, pointing to the smoke that indicated the village.

"Kejwa! Kejwa!" came the chorus from the ground.

"I wish I could understand you chaps," Crayden said. "Kejwa, eh? That's the best compliment I had since the warden said I looked like an honest man."

They were dancing around him, stamping on the ground and slapping their hands, and emitting cries of "Kejwa! Kejwa!" until the trees began to tremble from the noise. Other blue-skins began to appear from further upstream, naked children and women in loincloths. They gathered around Crayden, chanting that one word over and over, now softly, now at the top of their lungs.

Crayden grinned at them. This was working out better than he'd dare dream. Slowly, with all the dignity his new rank afforded, Crayden began to move upstream toward the village, clutching the useless thought-converter like a scepter in his outstretched right hand.

When they reached the village, a tall, wrinkled native wearing a great many beads and a flowing white beard stood in front of the community fire, watching Crayden's approach. The beard looked strange against the blueness of the old man's chest.

As Crayden drew near, the old one sank down on both knees. "Kejwa," he said slowly, in a very deep, solemn voice.

Crayden took the cue. He stepped forward and touched the old man on the left shoulder with the tip of his thought-converter. The oldster rose as if transfigured.

The villagers clustered around, keeping a respectful distance, and chattered away. He pointed to the thought-converter. "I'll have this fixed soon," he promised. "Then I'll be able to talk to you."

They continued to chatter. Every third word seemed to be "Kejwa." Crayden happily wondered whether it meant "king" or "god."

They installed him in a large hut, the best in the village. The old man took him there personally—Crayden decided he was either the chief or the high priest, or, most likely, both—and indicated a bed of thick grass in one corner. It was the only furniture.

"Thanks, pop," he said lightly. "Usually I expect better accommodations in my hotels, but I won't kick. See that the bellhop comes when I ring, will you? I hate having to wait."

The old man looked at him without a trace of comprehension or anything else but worship in his eyes.

"Kejwa emeredis calowa Kejwa," he said.

Crayden watched him depart, and sat for a while on the big stone at the entrance to his hut. From time to time little groups of children would approach timidly and stare at him and back away, and occasionally one of the blue-skinned women would come by. There hadn't been any women on Kandoris. Crayden rubbed his chin. Even a blue-skinned one would do right now, he thought. Yes, even she would be welcome.

He stared at the bare hut, with its low bed. The only other things in it were the thought-converter and the rescue-beam radiator. He hefted the compact rescue-beam radiator in his hand.

I'd better get rid of this, he thought. One of the natives might accidentally turn it on and call down the patrol.

He walked to the stream, held the radiator reflectively for a moment, and then pitched it into the water.

"Good riddance," he said. His last link with Kandoris and the worlds of the galaxy was gone. They couldn't find him unless he tipped them off by using the rescue-beam radiator, which would attract any patrol ship within a dozen light-years. And the radiator was under the flowing waters of the stream.

When he returned to his hut he looked at the remaining piece of equipment, the thought-converter. "I'll really be able to make this town jump once I can talk to them," he said. "Women, food, fancy furniture—I'll just have to ask for them, and they'll jump. They wouldn't want their Kejwa to be displeased."

The thought-converter didn't seem to be too badly damaged. A few delicate wires had come out of their sockets, that was all. He tried to put them back, but his fingers were too thick and clumsy, and he had to give up.

He realized he hadn't slept in almost three days. He put the converter in his prison shirt, wrapping it carefully to protect it from the moisture of the ground, and curled up on the bed of grass. It wasn't much better than lying on the ground, but he was too tired to notice.

For the next three days he did nothing but sit on the stone outside the hut and toy with the thought-converter while the natives brought him food three times a day. He didn't recognize any of the delicacies they brought—something which looked like a black apple and tasted like a red one, another something which looked like nothing he'd ever seen on Earth and tasted like a shot of bourbon filtered through a banana, and plenty of fresh, red meat, almost raw despite the perfunctory roasting they gave it.

Crayden felt his frame expanding, and, though he had no mirror, he knew the prison-planet pallor had left his face. This planet was agreeing with him, all right. Being Kejwa was a grand life. He'd never had it so good.

When he got tired of sitting around being worshipped, he decided to survey the area. He was curious about this world—his world—and he wanted to know all about it.

All the huts were something like his, only smaller, and the ones near the stream seemed to belong to the more important people of the tribe. The huts were arranged in a roughly semi-circular fashion, with the community fire at the entrance to the semicircle. All around was the thick forest—Nature's fortress.

Crayden wandered off toward the forest, hoping to see some of the native wild-life in action, but was surprised to find himself confronted by a little ring of blue-skins.

"Kejwa," they murmured, pointing to the forest. "Nek nek konna je Kejwa."

"My country, 'tis of thee," he replied gravely, and continued to move toward the forest.

They became more insistent. Two of the biggest stood in front of him and barred his way. "Nek nek konna je Kejwa," they repeated more loudly.

Obviously they didn't want him straying. So his powers were limited after all. He frowned. "If that's the way you want it, I'll give in. Never argue with the boys in blue, the saying goes." But he was angry all the same.

Every night they danced in front of his hut, and every day they let him sit there while they came by and bowed and mumbled "Kejwa." But Crayden was getting restless.

They treated him as a king, or as a god, and he took full advantage of the privilege the way he did everything else—but he was required to stay in the vicinity. The constant worship was starting to bore him, and the steady diet of rich food combined with lack of exercise had put a definite bulge around his stomach. He felt like a prize bull being groomed for the cattle show, and he didn't like it. He decided the quickest way to fix things was to repair the thought-converter and talk to them.

But he couldn't do it himself. The repairs involved nothing more complex than putting three wires back in place, but he couldn't fit his fingers through the opening to do it. He tried improvising tweezers out of two twigs, but that didn't do it. He needed someone with small fingers—a child, perhaps. Or a woman.

A woman. Here was where his Kejwahood was going to come in handy.

One night as the tribe was gathered outside his hut he raised the thought-converter high over his head as a sign for silence. "Hold everything!" he thundered. "As your Kejwa, I declare this morsel strikes my fancy."

He pointed at a girl whom he'd noticed before—she seemed to be about seventeen or eighteen by Earthly standards and she wore her loincloth with the dignity of a matron displaying a mink. Some large precious-looking stone was strung on a necklace that dangled down between her breasts.

She was the best of the lot. Crayden pointed to her, then to his hut—an unmistakable gesture.

The girl flashed a glance at the old man. He nodded benignly, stroked his great beard, and smiled as she stepped forward shyly and stood before Crayden.

"You'll do," he said approvingly. "A dish fit for a Kejwa." He waved dismissal to the tribespeople and took her inside the hut.

During the night he looked out the open entrance and saw a knot of tribespeople staring in with evident curiosity, but he didn't let that disturb him.

She seemed happy with the arrangement, and so did he. The blue skin didn't trouble him at all. He had come to think of himself as the white-skinned freak among the normal people. It had been three long years on Kandoris since Crayden had had a woman, but he hadn't forgotten anything. And this one knew

all the tricks.

The people began to bring him dead animals—strange-looking beasts, resembling Earthly ones but with differences—and left them at his door, as sacrifices. One morning there was a squirrel with horns, the next a fox with a prehensile tail.

Whenever he walked through the village, they followed him, always at a respectful distance, and soft cries of "Kejwa" drifted through the air. His woman—he named her Winnie, after a girl he'd known on Venus—was getting the same treatment. She had become someone important now that she belonged to the Kejwa.

He spent a full day trying to get her to fix the thought-converter. Her fingers were slim and tapering, and would fit into the opening easily. But it wasn't simple to convey what he wanted her to do. After hours of gesturing and indicating what he wanted, she still couldn't grasp it. Laboriously he went through it again. She looked up at him imploringly, and seemed ready to burst into tears.

"Look, Winnie. For the last time. Just pick up these little wires and put them in here." He showed her. "If you only understood English—"

He showed her again. She still did nothing. He slapped her left hand, and left her in a little whimpering heap in a corner of the hut. He strode angrily out and stalked around the village. He wasn't going to be stymied here, not when he got past every other hurdle so well.

When he returned, night had fallen, and she was waiting for him, holding the thought-converter. She had a bright little smile, and seemed to have forgotten all about the slap. He looked at the thought-converter. The wires were in place. The Crayden luck was holding true to form.

He kissed her, and she responded as he had taught her. After a while, he picked up the thought-converter and held it fondly.

"Kejwa," she said.

This was his chance to find out, he thought. He reached underneath and snapped on the converter.

Her lips formed the word "Kejwa" again.

But through the converter came a stream of unexpected concepts. "Placator of the gods . . . noble intervener . . .royal sacrifice."

"Sacrifice? What? When?"

She launched into a string of words, and the converter brought them over all too clearly.

"Tomorrow is the day you go to the gods, and I should be happy. But I'm sad. I'll miss you."

"You mean the Kejwa gets killed?" he asked desperately.

"Oh, no," the converter translated. "Not killed. You go to meet the gods, to intervene in our favor. One of us is chosen every year. This year you came to us from above and it was good."

"Where do the gods live?"

She pointed. "Down there. At the bottom of the lake. It is deep. We have never been able to reach the bottom."

Crayden's insides jangled. Royal sacrifice? Bottomless lake? So that was the catch?

The Crayden luck was just about being stretched to the breaking-point. For a second his old optimism asserted itself, and he told himself confidently that now that the converter worked he'd be able to talk the natives out of sacrificing him.

But the bleak truth was apparent, and for the first time in his life Crayden saw there was no opportunity he could cling to. Except—except—

He looked out the door of the hut. The night was black. He tiptoed out softly. "Keep quiet," he told her.

He crept through the sleeping village to the stream where he had so boldly disposed of the

rescue-beam radiator the other day. He hadn't needed it, then, but he did now. If he could find it, he could call the Patrol and get taken back to the prison planet, where he could start all over. He'd break out again, he was sure. For Steve Crayden, optimism was an incurable disease.

Grimly calling on whoever had been taking care of him up till then, he got down on his knees in the water and began to grope frantically for the rescue-beam radiator he'd thrown—who knew where?—somewhere in the stream.

He moved inch-by-inch over the stream's shallow bed, searching fruitlessly. He refused to give up. The cool waters of the stream washed the feverish sweat from him and left him chilled and shivering.

When the aliens came for him the next morning, he was a hundred yards upstream, blindly rooting up handfuls of mud, still confident he was going to find the rescue beam. It wasn't till the priest held him poised above the sparkling blue waters of the bottomless lake and started to release him, as a glad cry went up from the watchers—it wasn't until then that he came to the final realization that there were no angles left for him to play.

But he was still expecting a last-minute miracle as he hit the water. This time there wasn't any.

[Back](#) | [Next](#)  
[Framed](#)