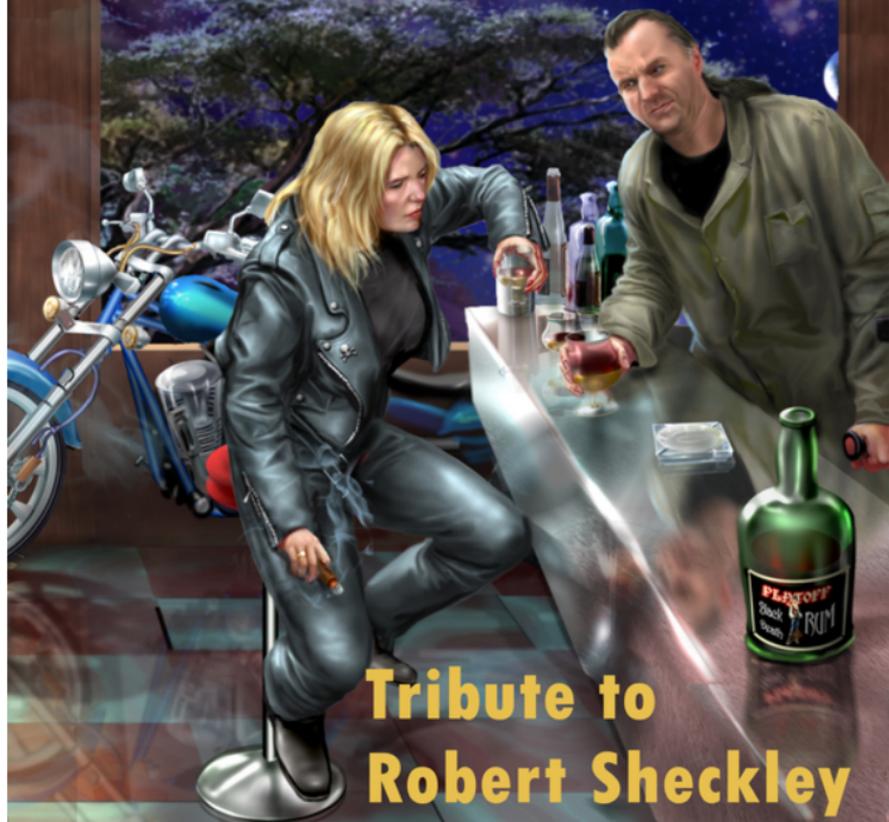


**Henry Lion
OLDIE**

**THE END
JUSTIFIES
THE MEANS**



**Tribute to
Robert Sheckley**

Henry Lion Oldie

The End Justifies the Means

Серия «Tribute», книга 1

Henry Lion Oldie
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Аннотация

"...Hesitating, Lena halted at the bottom of the stairs. If she didn't get herself into a mess bringing enrichment – it would mean that something awful happened to her: Lena Pearl became reasonable!

On the other hand, the fake investigator's diploma, the contract with Interstellar Mines, and the arrival on Clavine as a member of the expedition – all that was an outright venture from the beginning to the end. Good rates, long distance bonuses, and real chance to "open up a vein" allured a lot of people. The contract stipulated a considerable one-time premium or a share in the development of any unique deposits discovered by the investigator..."

Henry Lion Oldie

The End Justifies the Means

A tribute to Robert Sheckley

*“On Clavine, a mining planet of Class 4, the investigators set up their camps close to the landing site. The local authorities didn’t even try to deal with that.”
From the Report of Victor Caudieux, Toxicologist*

...Hesitating, Lena halted at the bottom of the stairs. If she didn't get herself into a mess bringing enrichment – it would mean that something awful happened to her: Lena Pearl became reasonable!

On the other hand, the fake investigator's diploma, the contract with Interstellar Mines, and the arrival on Clavine as a member of the expedition – all that was an outright venture from the beginning to the end. Good rates, long distance bonuses, and real chance to “open up a vein” allured a lot of people. The contract stipulated a considerable one-time premium or a share in the development of any unique deposits discovered by the investigator.

On her way there, Lena had to study thoroughly a brain-racking course on Applied Geology. She wasn't going to waste five years of her priceless youth at the university, but she still needed the knowledge required. Otherwise, how she would

operate the equipment or understand that she had come across a rhenium plug instead of common magnetite which was as widely spread here as salt water on the Old Earth.

What saved Lena – was a packet compression hypno-adaptor, which she got using five-finger discount at the exhibition of new technology. The model wasn't in serial production yet, being still tested for the side effects. Yet, Lena took the risk – she did it frequently; and she won – that, unfortunately, happened with her rarely. The hypnotic course classified as “Restricted” – also obtained not quite legally – was crammed thoroughly in her head, giving her the opportunity to get zealously down to business right along her arrival on Clavine.

Could you imagine that for two years she worked her ass **honestly**?! In the outskirts of the Galaxy! She had to live under a temporary dome for a year, and another year – in a prefabricated house, where hot water breakdowns took place constantly. As for entertainment, the colony had a bar with dancing in an old tin hangar, and a film collection of old junk such as Terminator-65. Each quarter, her account was replenished with the wage including rate, bonuses, and premium...

But damn it! She needed a killing, not those handouts!

A pawn champed to become a queen.

On Clavine, though, she met Victor, a toxicologist – who looked like a romantic macho, if such doormats and deadheads could happen to be machos. Five proposals, and in response three absolute rejections and two promises to think it over... Any idiot

would realize that it was high time to rob the Company money collector, become a millionaire, and then your beloved would fall to your feet at once!

Alas, Victor appeared to have lead in pants.

Two years of her life were wasted and went down the drain. The contract expired next week, and if she didn't undertake drastic measures...

Lena hesitated for a minute. Should she drop it all, get to the surface, and urgently make up a new and astonishing plan that could be executed within the remaining period of time? Or should she get to the end of the drift that was dug out by the boring machine at night, and collect samples?

Maybe she would be lucky finally?

The boring machine was droning diligently in the depths of the dig, as if encouraging the girl. A zealous thing was that metalware! Okay, one last attempt! Having disheveled her splendid platinum fringe with a habitual gesture, Lena put on her hard hat, and strode forward. Lighting a powerful lantern with a quark battery, she examined the walls attentively; alas, the fate gave her the finger once again.

At the end of the drift, there was a crack on the wall polished by ultrasound drills and fused by laser bores. The mine could collapse! They shouldn't set the camp and lay the mines so close to the landing site. Each time, when a space truck landed, her house jumped up in fear, as if it intended to go into the orbit itself.

Lena gave some light into the crack. A cave? Or just a small cavern in the rock? Pressing her face against the fracture, she was trying to see what was there in the depth. A cloud of golden pollen, disturbed by her breath, flew up into the air. The girl couldn't hold it, and sneezed deafeningly. In a moment, an idea came to her mind. A simple and obvious one, like all great ideas. How hadn't she thought of that before?

Irregular samples from faraway places, descriptions and maps! They were not sent to the Company headquarters yet. Interstellar Mines operated on Clavine, but it had no monopoly on the business. Their competitors – Space Ore ltd., for instance – would pay a pretty penny for somebody's secrets!

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